

SUPPORT MEASURES TO EMPLOYERS FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING

Ilze Buligina¹, Dr.admin.; **Biruta Sloka**², Dr.oec. professor; **Inara Kantane**³, Dr.admin.
researcher, assistant prof., **Anastasija Vilcina**⁴, Dr.oec., professor

¹ University of Latvia; J.Vitols Latvian Academy of Music, ² University of Latvia, ³ University of Latvia; University College of Economics and Culture, ⁴ Latvia University of Agriculture

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to investigate the significance of support measures for employers in the implementation of work-based learning - from the perspective of employers and sector experts as well as from the perspective of public administrators responsible for the implementation of work-based learning in the vocational education and training system in Latvia. The opinions of both target groups were identified and compared. Methods applied in the current paper: analysis of scientific publications, survey of entrepreneurs, sectors experts and public administrators. For the analysis of the surveys data - descriptive statistical analysis, cross tabulations, Mann-Whitney U test as well as multivariate statistical analysis method - factor analysis were applied. In the survey, questionnaire for most of the questions the evaluation the scale 1 - 10 was applied to evaluate the attitude of the respondents, where 1 - not significant, 10 - very significant.

The obtained results indicate that all the proposed support measures received relatively equal and high evaluation from the employers/ experts testifying the topicality of the issue and the high level of needs and support expectations from the employers. The evaluations by public administrators and entrepreneurs/experts were fairly similar, and they fall into two major groups - practical/ material support and pedagogical/ information support. Contrary to the researchers' expectations - the least scores were attributed to the significance of the information measures and campaigns. The conclusion is that a broad spectrum of equally important support measures are needed in implementing work-based learning, however, underestimating the role of information measures on both parts - employers and public administrators - may hinder a successful implementation of the introduction of work-based learning at system level in Latvia.

Key words: employers, support measures, work-based learning.

JEL code: J24; J44; M53; I28.

Introduction

In Latvia, work-based learning is a high level priority in the development of vocational education and training (VET). Preparing respective legal framework is a major challenge for the involved parties, especially given the various interests of the key stakeholders. The public administrators responsible for effective running of the VET system are concerned with ensuring optimal education and training conditions in the training of competitive labour force for the national economy. The employers are interested to obtain a well trained labour force at a reasonable cost and with minimal administrative burdens. It is a challenge to make the interests of these two involved parties meet and to develop optimal legal framework that satisfies these two involved parties. The present paper is based on the results of a study performed in 2014 and 2015 among public administrators and employers/sector experts

concerning the feasibility of introducing work-based learning approaches in the VET system of Latvia. The aim of the study was to identify the similarities and differences in opinions of public administrators on the one hand, and the employers and sector experts on the other hand - in relation to various aspects of implementing work-based learning. The focus in the present paper is on the role of particular centralised measures for implementing this innovative approach in the VET system of Latvia.

Methods applied in the current paper: analysis of scientific publications, survey of entrepreneurs/ sectors experts and public administrators. For the analysis of the surveys data - descriptive statistical analysis, cross tabulations, Mann-Whitney U test as well as multivariate statistical analysis method - factor analysis. In the survey questionnaire in order to evaluate the attitude of the respondents, the

scale 1 - 10 was applied where 1 - not significant, 10 - very significant.

It was being anticipated that the opinion of these two major target groups will be basically different, given their inherently different perspectives and interests. However, the research showed that both, the public administrators and the employers/ sector experts are of fairly similar opinion concerning the needed support measures to the entrepreneurs. These similar levels of awareness, among other things, may testify to the existing good co-operation among social partners in Latvia concerning the implementation of VET as well as to the capacity of the public administration to anticipate the actual needs of the entrepreneurs when initiating new policy approaches in VET.

Being aware that work-based learning in the VET system of Latvia should be introduced in compliance with the specific socio-economic situation and the education and training tradition in Latvia, it is important to take into consideration the research results on this issue in relation to the acquired experience in other countries. Academic research on this problem presents a wealth of material and conclusions. At the same time, also policy discussion at European level indicates that work-based learning is being seen as a potential solution in the training of a competitive labour force in Europe. The EU prepared policy document *Riga Conclusions* (Riga Conclusions, 2015) as a mid-term policy document for the development of VET in Europe Union States work-based learning as one of the five key priorities – to be implemented in each EU Member State in compliance with the national VET system (tradition) and policy priorities. The EU Member States are being encouraged to promote work-based learning in all its forms, by involving social partners, companies, chambers and VET providers as well as by stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship. Therefore, studying the feasibility for introducing the work-based learning from the perspective of various

stakeholders is of particular importance and value for better policy making and sound decisions by the public administration.

Results of academic discussion

In recent academic research, an increasing amount of studies is being dedicated to the analysis of work – based learning – an approach in vocational education and training having produced good results in such countries as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and others. Issues on the potential transfer of this model to other countries are being discussed in academic research as well (Wieland, 2015). However, there are several types of vocational education systems (Greinert, W. D., 2004) and it is not possible to transfer directly one country system to another country. Learning as apprentices has different approaches and traditions depending on the country (Fuller and Unwin, 2003). Learning on profession and developing skills in vocational education during the practical placements are also being addressed by academic research (Pang, 2015), including also informal learning in workplace (Eraut, 2004). Many arrangements have to be addressed by legislators, public administrators, educators and employers to develop successful collaborative teaching and learning in the workplace (Tanggaard, 2005). Pedagogical beliefs and experience in work-based learning and analysis as well as implications for teachers' belief orientations are taken into account and stressed by British scientists (Abukari, 2014). In work-based learning provision, it is important to take into account employee perceptions of their workplaces as learning environments (Coetzer, 2007). Issues on organization of practical placements, including requirements for teachers in different countries vary (Bathmaker and Avis, 2005), also the organization and guidance of learning at work differs (Billett, 1999) as well as organizational approaches and the conditions for apprentices' learning activities at work (Messmann and Mulder, 2015). Analysis of

practical placement problems are in the focus (Billett, 2000), stressing the most complicated problem of workplace arrangement issues for practical placement (Billett, 2001). Organisation aspects and discipline in work-based learning are important aspects analysed by several researchers (Gibbs and Costley, 2006). In academic publications the need to take into account socio – economic conditions and cultural background for successful arrangement of work-based learning are stressed (Blåka and Filstad, 2007). Personal identity and organisational culture influences real realisation of work-based learning (Ahlgren, et al., 2010). Supervision of work-based learning has also a great importance for successful arrangements of work-based learning (Collin and Valleala, 2005) as well as the issue for finding the right balance and crossing boundaries between school and work during apprenticeships (Akkerman and Bakker, 2012). Issues of pedagogy of work-based learning and perceptions of work-based learning in foundation degrees are in the scope of academic research interest (Burke, et al 2009) and the major and fundamental questions: learning to work and learning to learn (McCormack, et al., 2010).

The analysis of the academic research on work-based learning allows conclude that the chosen approaches should be considered in a systemic way – in compliance with the overall conditions in the country in question.

Empirical research results

In the present paper the analysis has been performed on the following questions:

- 1) entrepreneurs' and sector experts evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning (WBL) in Latvia;
- 2) public administrators' evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of WBL in Latvia.

Furthermore, the authors have compared the arithmetic means of the obtained results as well as have analysed the entrepreneurs' and sector experts answers from the gender perspective. In addition the authors applied factor analysis to obtain a more thorough analysis.

Concerning the entrepreneurs' and sector experts evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of WBL in Latvia - the entrepreneurs and sectors experts evaluated activities for a successful introduction of WBL in Latvia fairly high – average evaluations (mean, mode and median) were around 9 points (in evaluation scale 1 - 10), the evaluations were quite homogeneous (standard deviation). The entrepreneurs and sectors experts evaluated with the highest scores the following activities: "*support to the enterprise during the organisation of the work placement*" and "*tax reduction for enterprises involved in work-based learning*". The main statistical indicators of entrepreneur and sectors expert evaluations on activities for a successful introduction of work-based learning in Latvia are reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

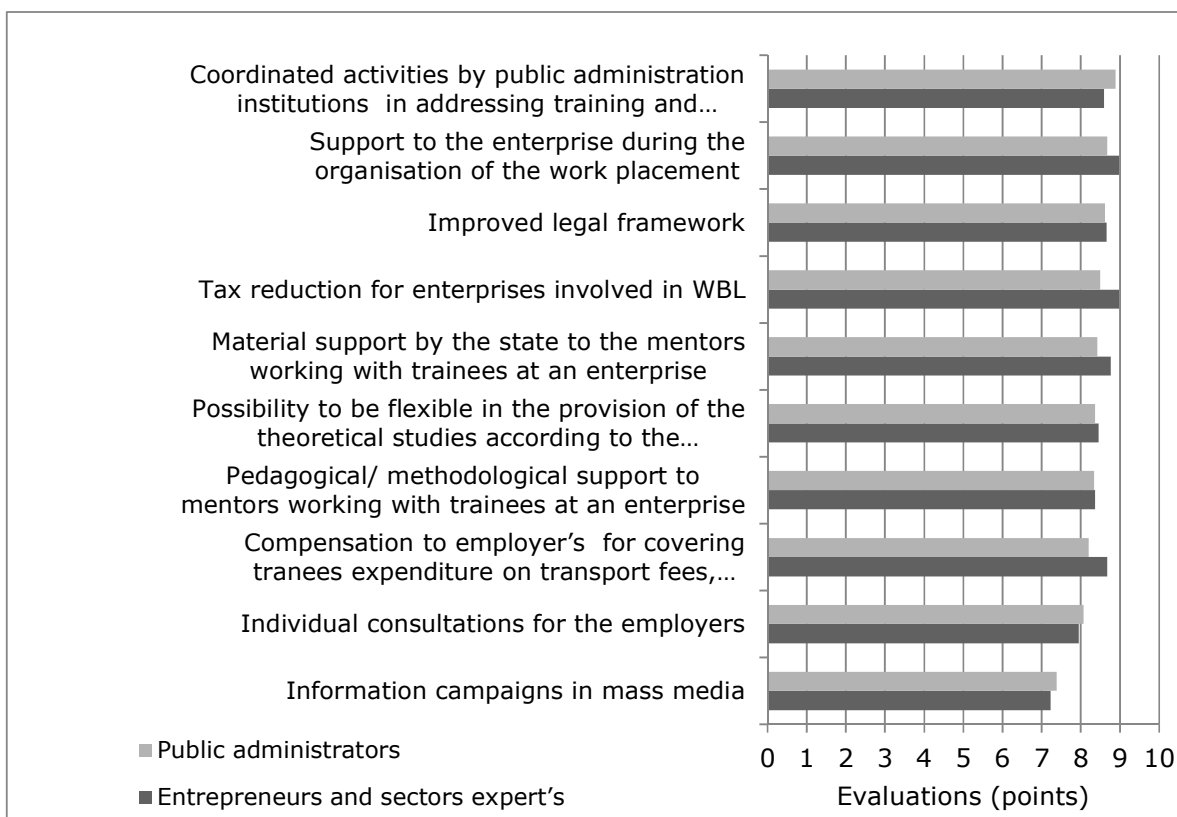
Statistical indicators of entrepreneurs' and sector experts evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning (WBL) in Latvia

Activities	Arithmetic mean	Standard error of mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Support to the enterprise during the organisation of the work placement	8.98	0.106	9	10	1.530	9	1	10
Possibility to be flexible in the provision of the theoretical studies according to the employers needs	8.45	0.111	9	10	1.597	9	1	10
Individual consultations for the employers	7.94	0.133	8	10	1.918	7	3	10
Information campaigns in mass media	7.23	0.155	8	8	2.226	9	1	10
Material support by the state to the mentors working with trainees at an enterprise	8.76	0.114	9	10	1.633	9	1	10
Tax reduction for enterprises involved in work-based learning	8.97	0.130	10	10	1.864	9	1	10
Improved legal framework	8.66	0.116	9	10	1.667	8	2	10
Pedagogical/ methodological support to mentors working with trainees at an enterprise	8.37	0.133	9	10	1.915	8	2	10
Compensation to employer's for covering trainees expenditure on transport fees, specialised clothing etc.	8.67	0.134	9	10	1.930	9	1	10
Coordinated activities by public administration institutions in addressing training and employment issues	8.60	0.130	9	10	1.857	9	1	10

Source: author's calculations based on entrepreneurs and sectors experts survey conducted by Ilze Buligina in 2014, 2015 (n=249), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant

Concerning the public administrators' evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of WBL in Latvia – also the public administrators evaluated activities for a successful introduction of WBL in Latvia fairly high. The highest evaluations public administrators gave for analysed statements "coordinated activities by public administration institutions in addressing training and employment issues", and analysed statement "support to the enterprise during the organisation of the work placement".

The empirical data analysis showed that entrepreneurs and sectors experts slightly higher evaluated material support activities, public administrators – non-material support activities but all centralised activities for a successful introduction of work-based learning in Latvia have received relatively high evaluations both by entrepreneurs and sectors experts and by public administrators. The arithmetic means of public administrators and entrepreneurs and sectors expert evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia are reflected in Figure 1.



Source: author's calculations based on public administrators and entrepreneurs and sectors expert's surveys conducted by Ilze Buligina in 2014, 2015 (n=132) (n=249), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant

Fig. 1. Arithmetic means of public administrators and entrepreneurs and sectors expert's evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia

The main statistical indicators of female and male evaluations on centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia indicated that the results do not differ significantly by gender. Bigger differences for male and female evaluations were for evaluated statement "Information campaigns in mass media" and "Individual consultations for the employers" where evaluations by female respondents were bigger than for male respondents, but male respondents had bigger differences in their evaluations (indicated by indicators of variability).

For identifying the key factors – what centralised activities entrepreneurs and sectors experts consider as relevant for a successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia, and determining the mutual statistical relations of these factors by factor analysis. As a result of the factor analysis the initial ten factors, through

three iterations (by using the Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalisation) are grouped in two complex factors (Table 2).

The interpretation of the identified complex factors with regard to the indicators with which the initial indicators have relatively high burdens:

- 1) **complex factor F1:** material and practical support. The factor has relatively high burdens on the following indicators: tax reduction for enterprises involved in work based learning, material support by the state to the mentors working with trainees at an enterprise, compensation to employers for covering trainees expenditure on transport fees, specialised clothing; support to the enterprise during the organisation of the work placement;
- 2) **complex factor F2:** information and pedagogic support. The factor has relatively

high burdens on the following indicators:
information campaigns in mass media,
pedagogical/methodological support to
mentors working with trainees at an
enterprise, individual consultations for the
employers, improved legal framework,

coordinated activities by public administration
institutions in addressing training and
employment issues, possibility to be flexible in
the provision of the theoretical studies
according to the employer's needs.

Table 2

**Entrepreneurs and sectors experts evaluations on centralised activities for a
successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia
(Complex factor matrix after rotation)**

Initial factors	Complex factors	
	F1	F2
Tax reduction for enterprises involved in work based learning	0.827	0.160
Material support by the state to the mentors working with trainees at an enterprise	0.785	0.202
Compensation to employer's for covering trainees expenditure on transport fees, specialised clothing etc.	0.771	0.150
Support to the enterprise during the organisation of the work placement	0.605	0.196
Information campaigns in mass media	-0.218	0.774
Pedagogical/methodological support to mentors working with trainees at an enterprise	0.271	0.681
Individual consultations for the employers	0.315	0.654
Improved legal framework	0.418	0.618
Coordinated activities by public administration institutions in addressing training and employment issues	0.251	0.612
Possibility to be flexible in the provision of the theoretical studies according to the employers needs	0.197	0.602
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

Source: author's calculations based on entrepreneurs and sectors expert's survey conducted by Ilze Buligina in 2014, 2015 (n=249), evaluation scale 1 – 10, where 1 – not significant; 10 – very significant

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

- 1) In Latvia work-based learning is a high level priority in the development of vocational education and training. This requires addressing the interests of the key involved parties.
- 2) Work-based learning is a common high-level EU VET priority. However, in each particular country it can be implemented by taking into consideration the specific socio-economic and education traditions of the country in question.
- 3) Well-considered centralised support measures are of major importance for a

- successful involvement of entrepreneurs in the implementation of work-based learning.
- 4) The empirical research showed that entrepreneurs and sectors experts slightly higher evaluated material support activities, the public administrators – non-material support activities but all centralised activities for a successful introduction of work based learning in Latvia have received relatively high evaluations both by entrepreneurs and sectors experts and by public administrators.
- 5) The opinions of public administrators and employers concerning the studied questions being fairly equal allow conclude that in Latvia

there is an equal level of awareness among these key stakeholders in relation to the key challenges and needed support measures to entrepreneurs.

6) The results of the study also testify to the capacity of the public administration to anticipate the actual needs of the entrepreneurs when initiating new policy approaches in VET.

7) The similar levels of awareness of the key stakeholders, among other things, may testify to the existing good co-operation among social partners in Latvia concerning the implementation of VET as well as to the capacity of the public administration to anticipate the actual needs of the entrepreneurs when initiating new policy approaches in VET.

Bibliography

1. Abukari, A. (2014). Pedagogical Beliefs in Work-Based Learning: an Analysis and Implications of Teachers Belief Orientations, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, Volume 19, Issue 4, pp. 481- 497.
2. Ahlgren, L., Lyn Tett, L. (2010). *Work-Based Learning, Identity and Organisational Culture*. Studies in Continuing Education, Volume 32, Issue 1, pp. 17-27.
3. Akkerman, S.F., Bakker, A. (2012). *Crossing Boundaries between School and Work during Apprenticeships*. Vocations and Learning, Volume 5, Issue 2, pp. 153-173.
4. Bathmaker, A.-M., Avis, J. (2005). *Becoming a Lecturer in Further Education in England: The Construction of Professional Identity and the Role of Communities of Practice*. Journal of Education for Teaching, Volume 31, Issue 1, pp. 47-62.
5. Billett, S. (1999). *Guided Learning at Work*. Understanding Learning at Work, Boud D., Garrick J., (eds), London: Routledge. pp. 151-164.
6. Billett, S. (2000). *Guided Learning at Work*. Journal of Workplace Learning, Volume 12, Issue 7, pp. 272-285.
7. Billett, S. (2001). *Learning through Work: Workplace Affordances and Individual Engagement*. Journal of Workplace Learning, Volume 13, Issue 5, pp. 209-214.
8. Blåka, G., Filstad, C. (2007). *How does a Newcomer Construct Identity? A Socio-Cultural Approach to Workplace Learning*. International Journal of Lifelong Education, Volume 26, Issue 1, pp. 59-73.
9. Burke, L., Marks -Maran, D.J. Ooms, A., Webb, M., Cooper, D. (2009). *Towards a Pedagogy of work based learning: perceptions of work based learning in foundation degrees*. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Volume 61, Issue 1, pp. 15-33.
10. Coetzer, A. (2007). *Employee Perceptions of their Workplaces as Learning Environments*. Journal of Workplace Learning, Volume 19, Issue 7, pp. 417-434.
11. Eraut, M. (2004). Informal Learning in the Workplace, Studies in Continuing Education, Volume 26, Issue 2, pp. 247-273.
12. Fuller, A., Unwin, L. (2003). *Learning as Apprentices in the Contemporary UK Workplace: Creating and Managing Expansive and Restrictive Participation*. Journal of Education and Work, Volume 16, Issue 4, pp. 407-426.
13. Gibbs, P., Costley, C. (2006). *Work Based Learning; Discipline, Field or Discursive Space or What?*, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, Volume 11, Issue 3, pp. 341-350.
14. Greinert, W.-D. (2004). European Vocational Training 'Systems' – The Theoretical Context of their Historical Development. European Journal of Vocational Training, Volume 32, pp. 18-25.
15. McCormack, R., Pancini, G., Tout, D. (2010). *Learningful Work: Learning to Work and Learning to Learn*. International Journal of Training Research, Volume 8, Issue 1, pp. 40-52.
16. Messmann, G., Mulder, R.H. (2015). *Conditions for Apprentices' Learning Activities at Work*. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Volume 67, Issue 4, pp. 578-596.
17. Pang, P. (2015). *Learning to Work during Work Placement: Negotiating Access to Work and Participation through 'Origination' and Establishing a 'Legitimate Presence'*. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Volume 67, Issue 4, pp. 543-557.
18. Tanggaard, L. (2005). *Collaborative Teaching and Learning in the Workplace*. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, Volume 57, Issue 1, pp. 109-122.
19. The Riga Conclusions (2015) endorsed by ministers from the European Union (EU) Member States, candidate countries, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein as the new medium-term deliverables for vocational education and training 22.06.2015 in Riga, Latvia – during the Latvian Presidency in the Council of the European Union. Retrieved: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/2015-riga-conclusions_en.pdf Access: 14.12.2015
20. Wieland, C. (2015). *Germany's Dual Vocational-Training System: Possibilities for and Limitations to Transferability*. Local Economy, Volume 30, Issue 5, pp. 577-583.