

VET provision financial incentives for qualifications in demand

POLICY DEVELOPMENT**REGULATION/LEGISLATION** **BULGARIA**

Timeline

2018 Approved/Agreed **2019 Implementation** **2020 Implementation**
2022 Implementation **2023 Implementation** **2024 Implementation**

ID number 28051

Description

The latest amendments in the Pre-school and School Education Act (into force since January 2018) envisage financial stimulus for schools which provide VET training for qualifications needed in the labour market. The enrolment plans for VET schools for 2018/19 and 2019/20 is intentionally focused to provide more places for learners in these specialties.

All learners enrolled in programmes for the acquisition of VET qualifications in specialties with labour market shortage and State-protected specialties may apply for monthly scholarships. They may receive scholarships during the whole duration of their studies. Where they are in the dual system they have to choose if their scholarship application will be arranged for their study in a certain specialty from the list of State-protected or specialties with labour market shortages, or as dual VET learners. Schools that offer training in State-protected specialties may have classes with at least nine students and receive State financial support for operational expenses during the whole period of study. The same applies for schools with specialties with labour market shortages but for classes with at least 12 students enrolled (for comparison, composition of classes in the rest of specialties requires at least 25 students to be enrolled). Through these incentives, enrolment in specialties not very attractive for learners but needed by the labour market is encouraged. Most of these specialties are technical and vary from first to third level of VET qualifications.

All lists of specialties with labour market shortages and State-protected specialties applicable for the school years 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 are adopted by Ministerial Council Decisions and are published at the education ministry and the National Agency for VET (NAVET) websites.

2018 Approved/Agreed

In July 2018, a Decree for the adoption of a list of protected professions was published in the State gazette, with the criteria for their determination and the terms and conditions for additional funding and maintenance of classes for acquiring qualification in protected specialties at risk of labour shortage. The list was further updated in December 2018. For the 2018/19 academic year, the list included 29 State-protected VET qualifications and 54 with expected shortages of specialists. For all these specialties, additional funding for the schools was introduced for the academic year 2018/19.

2019 Implementation

Decree No 20 of 1 February 2019 of the Council of Ministers amended the Decree No 328 of 21 December 2017 on the rules and requirements for scholarships for students in the dual system and for the learners which study VET specialties protected by the State and VET specialties with labour market shortage. The latest decree guaranteed the sustainability of dual training by ensuring State budget support for learners in the first stage of secondary education (from grade 8 to 10). According to the labour code, learners above the age of 16 (grades 11 and 12) in the dual system conclude a labour contract with the employer where their practical training is provided. They receive payment for social and health insurance by the State budget and remuneration from the employer. Since February 2019, learners in these specialties received additional individual scholarships.

2020 Implementation

With the last amendments to the Pre-school and School Education Act (coming into force as of January 2020), the travel expenses of students in dual education and in specialties with labour market shortage were also covered.

The enrolment plans of VET schools for 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 were focused on providing more places for learners in specialties in qualifications needed by the labour market.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, the implementation of *Support for the dual training system* project, implemented by education ministry, continued. The project aims to increase the relevance of VET with the labour market and provides opportunities to increase the qualifications of the future workforce in professions key to the country's economy. The project provides employers with the opportunity to hire qualified personnel with the required vocational/technical skills and experience acquired through training in real work environment. In 2022, more than 10 000 students from VIII to XII classes were enrolled in dual VET. In 2022, the training of mentors and the support for employers to engage more actively in dual training partnerships, continued.

2023 Implementation

In October 2023, the project *Support for the dual training system* project was completed. Within the framework of the project, 11 500 students from 180 schools were included in dual VET in partnership with over 690 employers in the country. In 2023, the draft *Law on amendment and supplement to the vocational education and training (VET) Act (VETA)* was prepared with the aim to modernise relations between VET stakeholders. The draft Law contained provisions for the possibility for training in an electronic environment, improvements to the mechanism for validating knowledge and skills, and changes in the legal requirements for the professional experience of mentors in dual VET. Additionally, it expanded the scope of the required professional qualifications (from profession/specialty to a broader professional field) of trainers. This provides greater opportunities for employers, including small and medium-sized enterprises, to designate an employee responsible for the practical training of students within the respective enterprise. The draft Law also established the possibility for a vocational teacher to take over the functions/duties of the trainer in work-based learning. This approach is expected to encourage smaller schools to participate in dual VET, allowing for greater flexibility in determining education staff matters. The most significant change of the draft law was the provision that makes social and health insurance for students participating in work-based learning (dual VET) mandatory and funded entirely by the state budget.

2024 Implementation

In March 2024, the *Law on amendment and supplement to the vocational education*

and training Act was adopted and consequently *Ordinance No. 1 on the conditions and procedures for conducting work-based learning (dual VET)* was updated too. The main amendments and additions to the Ordinance had to do:

- (a) with the improvement of career guidance services, by organising and implementing career orientation campaigns for students in grades V to VII and their parents, aimed at familiarising them with the dual VET system as well as assisting them in choosing a profession and be aware of career development opportunities;
- (b) Providing opportunities for students in the first stage of secondary education enrolled in dual VET to familiarise themselves with the activities of partner employers and visit the employer's enterprise;
- (c) conducting production practice training in cooperation with the partner employer in a real work environment.

In 2024 a new activity for dual VET was approved and will start in 2025. The education ministry decided to expand dual education to universities. The initiative aims to strengthen the connection between education and the labour market in Bulgaria under the programme *Education 2021-27*. It supports vocational high schools, municipalities, and NGOs in partnership with employers to enhance the dual VET system. The activity focusses on improving students' skills and competences through practical training, developing educational content aligned with labour market needs, and providing training for teachers and mentors. It is expected to enhance career guidance services and to increase participation in dual VET. By fostering cooperation with employers and introducing flexible learning models, the activity is expected to create a more effective, inclusive, and adaptable VET system.

Bodies responsible

- Council of Ministers

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices

Entities providing VET

VET providers (all kinds)

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

Financial and non-financial incentives to learners, providers and companies

Lifelong guidance

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[The legal text on the NAVET website, amendment of an article](#)

[Decision of the Council of Ministers No.352/ 31 December 2018](#)

Related policy developments

2024 Implementation

Incentives for offering apprenticeships to adults

The 2015 Employment Promotion Act (EPA) provides employers with financial incentives for offering apprenticeship places to unemployed people directed to them by the public employment service. Incentives include financial support for training, mentors, social and health insurance.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET

2024 Implementation

Forecast model to align admission plans with labour market needs

The VET Directorate of the education ministry developed at the end of 2017 a (pilot) forecast model, in cooperation with the nationally representative employers' organisations, to inform admission plans in line with labour market needs.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

2024 Implementation

Amendments to the VET Act

The VET Act of 1999 was amended in August 2016 (entered into force in August 2017), confirming that apprenticeships should offer the possibility to acquire professional qualifications through practical training, organised in cooperation with enterprises.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Implementation

Developing dual VET

Piloting started in the 2015/16 school year for seven professions in five secondary VET schools in different regions of the country. In 2016/17, 12 professions and 17 schools in total were involved in the experiment. Dual VET(DVET) is supported by the municipalities and the social partners.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 Implementation

Legal framework for the implementation of dual VET

An Ordinance that regulates dual vocational education and training (DVET) came into force at the beginning of September 2015.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET CVET

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