If, for a moment, we put aside the world economic crisis whose consequences no one can predict since, as economists say, the world has never met such a challenge, and if we then have a look to the future - what can we expect? It is easy to make predictions: technological changes, globalisation, ageing population, evolution of the society - the world and the skills people need to keep their places in the labour market will be changing even faster. The question is whether we are sure of our ability to predict future needs and to respond to them by training people in developing the necessary skills?

One of the conclusions presented in a recent European Commission publication ‘New Skills for New Jobs’ is that in the next decade Europe will have the opportunity to see the creation of new jobs in service sectors. According to estimates, by the year 2020 almost three quarters of jobs in the European Union will be in services. High qualifications will be needed for many occupations, but also there will be the occupations based on core skills.

Secondary or higher education will be most frequently required for the jobs of the future, whereas the skills, such as problem solving and team work, linguistic or mathematical competences will be increasingly valued. Of course, all the information should be treated with caution; nevertheless, the forecast gives interesting and significant insights into what Europe will need in the future. For Serbia heading towards the European Union the information provided should be a useful guide.

But, back to the economic crisis all of us are, as things are now, going through. Difficult times ask for resourceful, capable and creative people. The school cannot provide jobs to younger generations, but it can and must prepare them for what they will be facing one day. It has to give them more than knowledge. It has to develop their creativity, to sharpen their skills, to encourage them to use all their talents. The responsibility of each teacher is almost terrifying. At the same time, nothing can be compared to the moment when another generation is off to life.
NEW SKILLS FOR NEW MARKETS

After more than three years of living in Serbia, Trevor Cook, Team Leader of the VET Reform Programme, says that he still does not understand why the changes haven’t been carried out more promptly since it would be good for all. However, he is satisfied with what has been done, especially with the role that the pilot schools have taken on themselves within the reform process.

Vocational Education is an enormous undertaking in Serbia, with more than 300 schools and almost a quarter of million students enrolled. Given these numbers, it is inevitable that change takes time, not just to implement, but also to prepare for - says Mr Cook at the beginning of the interview - On the other hand, five years is a long enough period for us to reasonably expect that some substantial reform would now be underway.

I am pleased to note that the majority of VET schools in Serbia, more than 200 of them, have now been directly involved in VET Reform. Most of these schools have received support in the form of equipment and training, but perhaps more importantly a nucleus of schools has proven itself as a leader of the reform process, with significant support to curriculum development and implementation not just for their own schools but for the entire system. The main tenets of reform, that VET should be meet clearly identified needs in a flexible and quality assured manner, are gradually being met. Furthermore, these changes are directly supportive of Serbia’s moves towards the EU accession.

If our goal is faster EU accession and if everyone in their own sector has to work on the fulfillment of this goal, what can be expected in education sector and how long will it take?

Here we must be careful! Accession itself, whilst an important milestone for Serbia, is simply one further step towards socio-economic cohesion and long-term development. As new member states have found, once the honeymoon is over the marriage still has to be worked on!

This danger, that of taking a short-term, quick-fix approach is fortunately less likely to be found in the education sector than in many others. Change in education doesn’t take place overnight, and once initiated tends to be sustainable. Furthermore, EU-wide initiatives, declarations and agreements relating to education tend to be generally relevant and applicable to all. Indeed, such initiatives as outcomes-based, modularised curricula, supported by rigorous quality assurance mechanisms are adopted by many countries outside of the EU too.

The broad adoption of such approaches means that we can draw on the experiences of many other countries in our own reform activities. This in turn draws attention to one major hurdle that still has to be addressed - that of establishing the required national and systemic mechanisms. Regardless of the enthusiasm and successes of individual schools, without effective and transparent mechanisms for Quality Assurance (including accreditation, certification and recognition of qualifications), the work in this sector cannot be considered complete. Whilst the conceptualisation of such mechanisms (including, for example, the National Qualifications Framework) has been in progress for years, we should not be satisfied until all major system-wide provisions of Serbia’s Strategy for VET Reform are fully implemented.

The issue of the National Qualifications Framework is always mentioned as extremely important. Why is it so important and how much has been done so far?

The concept of a National Qualifications Framework, whereby all education provision within a country can be articulated in such a way as to allow clear identification of levels of provision, entry/exit and progression pathways, as well as nationally recognised quality assurance mechanisms, has been adopted throughout the EU, as well as by accession/candidate states and many others word-wide. The purpose of a NQF is not to standardise education, for each country has its own particular requirements, priorities, values and traditions. However, a NQF provides a mechanism for clear description and identification of educational provision, allowing qualifications to be clearly understood not just within countries but also between them.

There are things which require a lot of time and investments in order to change. What changes could schools introduce immediately with no significant investments, and yet to achieve good results?

Whilst the EU has provided many millions of euro worth of equipment to schools, it is clear that changes in the skills and attitudes of people within the system result in the greatest and most dramatic results. Although training itself can also require expenditure, there are now many resources available at little or no cost. The thousands of school staff trained by the programme are a resource which should be exploited. Schools could quite easily make internal audits of the expertise that they already have, and then match this against the training requirements of their other staff. It would then be a simple process to arrange internal training within a school, by its staff, for its staff. The materials for training have been widely distributed, and are also available from our website. Of course, many of our schools already cascade such training in a systematic to their colleagues. Nevertheless, as staff come and go, and as the school population changes, there is always more work to do!

This mutual recognition of qualifications is essential if the EU is to have unrestricted and unimpeded mobility of labour. Without such clear descriptive frameworks, such EU-wide initiatives as
Europass would be impossible.
This critical issue, whilst supported by the CARDS projects, can only be implemented by the state and its institutions. Now is the time for concrete action.

Our reform is still at the beginning and last December in Brussels the study 'New Skills for New Jobs' was presented - the analysis of the knowledge (skills) Europeans will need in the future and recommendations on how to develop skills in order to anticipate the needs of the labour market and to respond to them properly. What is the shortest route towards the achievement and how much time will Serbia need to reach it?

Again, much of the groundwork has already been done. The VET Reform Strategy, if whole-heartedly implemented, would allow the most rapid achievement of this. In terms of time, as with all such issues, it is a question of priorities. Should the state wish to address this as a matter of urgency, and be prepared to devote the required resources to it, a great deal of progress could be achieved in a short time. On the other hand, progress to date has been rather slow, and if maintained will result in yet further delays to this important matter.

Indeed, the importance of labour market development becomes greater day-by-day, as can be seen by the predicted impact of the global economic crisis. Far from slowing down, the state should recognise that development in this area becomes more and more important, the worse the crisis becomes. Competition, both Europe-wide and globally, will become ferocious in the near future, and Serbia needs to be well-prepared!

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**Adult Education - Chance for Socio-Economic Development of Serbia Conference**

**ACTION PLANS ADOPTED**

'Better late than never' - many commented on the final and long-expected adoption of the Action Plans for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Development of VET and the Strategy for the Development of Adult Education. After almost two years, on March 16, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted both Action Plans important for further development of education in Serbia. The public was informed about this at the conference Adult Education - Chance for Socio-Economic Development of Serbia organised by the Ministry of Education and the Adult Education Society in the Palace of Serbia on March 17.

The data presented at the very beginning - that today in Serbia there are three million people with only elementary or even incomplete elementary education, that two million people older than 15 do not have adequate work and life skills thus having significant difficulties in finding or keeping the job - testify that this Conference should have been organised a long time ago and that it has to be the first in a series of conferences. The unemployment rate is the highest among those who completed secondary and elementary education.

When opening the conference, the Minister of Education, Žarko Obadović, PhD, emphasised that Serbia needs a Law on Adult Education which would enable a variety of educational needs of the population to become an integral part of the entire system of education and announced the possibility that this Law could possibly be on the agenda of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in October this year.

While acclaiming the adoption of the Action Plan and emphasising that this is the first time that the Government has adopted the Strategy for Adult Education and the Action Plan for the implementation of strategic activities, Miomir Despotović PhD, one of the authors of both documents noted that it took more than five years for the definition, adoption and budgeting of the document that defines the two activities. 'Is this what we wanted?' Mr. Despotović asked at the end, pointing to perhaps the biggest problem that our society is facing - the speed of the developed activities and adopted laws. More on the Strategies and Action Plans for their implementation follows in the next newsletter. Both documents are available on the website www.vetserbia.edu.rs.
COMPULSORY PROFESSIONAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

At the end of December 2006 the Ministry of Education included the teacher training courses delivered within the VET Reform Programme in the list of compulsory professional teacher development programmes for the period from 2004/05 school year to 2007/08 school year. During that time first 110 Change Agent Teachers (CATs) and then further 44 CATs and 77 VET school directors were trained by the Programme. Cascading training courses were then organised for over 2000 teachers in the pilot schools.

"The school has finally started keeping pace with life, the school is no longer a boring place you are obliged to go to, in addition to the fact that we acquire important knowledge and skills, lessons have become interesting and creative" - these are some of the opinions we heard from the students attending lessons based on new curricula implemented by well-trained teachers.

It is therefore absolutely clear that the effort of all those engaged in the VET Reform Programme and the CATs in the pilot schools to train teachers was not fruitless. Why do we say the effort, and not the smooth process accepted with enthusiasm?

However, we didn’t give up. The CATs were intensively trained for almost two years and they passed all their knowledge by training their colleagues in the schools. Soon the number of the teachers who expressed interest and readiness to modernise the teaching process exceeded 1000 in 22 schools. The view that professional development of teachers must be directed towards training for different teaching roles, autonomy with responsibility and making individual development plans that will enable teachers to advance in their careers became very strongly held. It became clear that it was a long-term, continuous process that, besides formal experience (initial education, seminars, mentoring, workshops, professional meetings/gatherings) also included informal experience (professional literature, Internet, TV shows about educational issues) and self-evaluation (which enables the teacher to critically and creatively examine and change his/her own educational practice) and examination of educational practice. The results became visible. The school and teaching within the school fulfill their cultural, developmental and socializing roles in a better way.

Going further back, it was clear that what was missing was professional development of teachers who were not ready to accept changes and to put in personal efforts and work on modernisation of the teaching process, often without having the belief in the advantages of new forms of work, and all under the excuse of poorly equipped schools. It was easier this way, since in the traditional school the main obligation of the teacher was to coax students into memorising facts, to insist on accurate reproduction of the contents and interpretation through already tested ways of thinking. On the other hand, what requires more efforts comes from the modern approach to the social role of the teacher where the teacher assumes many new and different roles. The main function of the teacher is no longer purely to provide (students with) information, but the teacher is now the agent between students and knowledge that nowadays comes from various sources. The teacher takes up the role of a consultant and organiser of students’ work and their self-education by helping them to acquire learning techniques and skills.

In the teaching process the teacher manages the process of students’ learning by guiding their thinking and encouraging active participation in the process of knowledge and skills acquisition.

It is therefore absolutely clear that training teachers for successful and high-quality accomplishment of their tasks in modern teaching is neither easy nor simple. The pre-condition is enthusiasm and desire, teachers willing to broaden their didactical, pedagogical and psychological knowledge and support of all those who know perfectly well that there is no better future without high-quality education.

Jasminka Ćekić-Marković
HRD Expert
Additional Support to VET Reform Programme
THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK (EQF)

**What is EQF and what are its benefits?**
The EQF is a common European reference system which will link different countries’ national qualifications systems and frameworks together. In practice, it will function as a translation device making qualifications more readable. This will help learners and workers wishing to move between countries or change jobs or move between educational institutions at home.

**Who is the EQF for?**
The primary users of the EQF will be bodies in charge of national and/or sectoral qualification systems and frameworks. Once they have related their respective systems to the EQF, the EQF will help individuals, employers and education and training providers compare individual qualifications from different countries and education and training systems.

**What levels and what types of education does the EQF cover?**
As an instrument for the promotion of lifelong learning, the EQF encompasses general and adult education, vocational education and training as well as higher education. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from those achieved at the end of compulsory education to those awarded at the highest level of academic and professional or vocational education and training. Each level should in principle be attainable by way of a variety of education and career paths.

**Why does the EQF use learning outcomes?**
The EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes (defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences). The EQF shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. Shifting the focus to learning outcomes

- supports a better match between the needs of the labour market (for knowledge, skills and competence) and education and training provision
- facilitates the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems

- facilitates the validation of non-formal and informal learning

It also recognises that Europe’s education systems are so diverse that comparisons based on inputs, say length of study, are impracticable.

**Does the EQF award qualifications?**
No, the EQF describes levels of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes. The awarding of qualifications will remain a matter for national qualifications bodies.

**What do countries have to do? What are the deadlines for implementation?**
It’s a voluntary framework, so there are no formal legal obligations on the countries. 2010 is the recommended target date for countries to relate their qualifications systems to the EQF, 2012 for them to ensure that individual qualification certificates bear a reference to the appropriate EQF level.

**What is the relationship with “Europass”?**
“Europass” introduced a portfolio of documents to be used by individuals to describe their qualifications and competences. “Europass” does not, however, compare levels of qualifications. In the future, all relevant “Europass” documents, in particular the “Europass” diploma supplement and the “Europass” certificate supplement, should contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level.

**What is the relationship with the Bologna process in higher education?**
The EQF is fully compatible with the qualifications framework for Higher Education developed under the Bologna Process. Specifically, the EQF descriptors at levels 5-8 refer to the higher education descriptors agreed under the Bologna Process. However, the formulation of the EQF level descriptors differs from the Bologna level descriptors developed specifically for higher education needs because, as a lifelong learning framework the EQF also encompasses vocational education and training (VET) and work contexts, including at the highest levels.

* Taken from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture
Accredited adult training programmes

The Ministry of Education has accredited 40 adult training programmes that can be delivered by the secondary vocational schools consisting of the Regional Training Centres (RTC) independently or in cooperation with other vocational schools. Any of the five existing RTCs in Belgrade, Nis, Zrenjanin, Bor and Kragujevac can be the training provider of each of the accredited programmes.

This is a good opportunity for other secondary vocational schools to become involved, together with the Centres, in delivery of adult training programmes in their own towns. This type of cooperation in training delivery can considerably mitigate the problem of unemployment at the local level since distant training venues have been up to now one of the main obstacles to adult training. Additional transport or accommodation expenses have often been one of the main reasons due to which the participants had to give up training programmes.

All interested schools can find the list of 40 accredited training programmes in the “Educational Gazette” published on February 17, 2009, or get it by e-mail provided they send their request to the VET Reform Programme address: info@vetsrbija.edu.rs. Additional information and advice for participating in training programme delivery are available to all interested parties in the VET Reform Programme.

Europa Diary

During February 2009 free copies of the Europa Diary that students will be using till the end of their education were handed out to 80557 pre-final year students in 569 secondary schools in Serbia. For years the Europa Diary has been used as a teaching aid in the schools in 27 EU Member States. Designed as a teaching aid, the Europa Diary is a synonym for making endeavours to provide young people across Europe, and now in Serbia as well, with important information on their role and opportunities they, as citizens of Europe, have. In an interesting and accessible way the Diary gives information to secondary school students about European integrations, travelling, additional (continuous) education, studies and work in Europe and career planning, environmentally friendly behaviour (environmental responsibility), new technologies, struggle against violence and addiction diseases. Since teachers play an important role in all these activities, there is also a Teacher’s Guide with suggested activities and lesson preparations.

Serbia is the first non-EU country in which the Europa Diary has been prepared for secondary school students. This EU project is funded by the European Integration Fund managed by the Delegation of the European Commission to the Republic of Serbia. Generation Europa, the publisher of the Diary, will award the students who fill out the on-line questionnaires. The main prize will be a trip to Brussels for 10 students and one teacher. Students can find the on-line questionnaire on: http://www.generation-europe.org/page.asp?lgid=29&menuID=13

Additional Support to VET Reform Programme is funded by the European Union

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