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THE QTEL.NET PROJECT – OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMOROVING THE QUALITY OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN TOURISM

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Abstract: The present paper makes a brief review of the EU financed project QTEL.NET, which is aimed mainly at improving the quality of the vocational education and training in tourism. The main objectives, participants (partners), stages of the Project are being regarded. It has been especially marked out the role and the participation of the Bulgarian Tourist Chamber, as one of the partnering organization within the QTEL.NET Project. This role and participation can be seen namely in presenting the good practices in vocational education and training in tourism, the defining of the so-called key success factors and etc.
Key words: Quality, Vocational Education and Training, Good Practices, Bulgarian Tourist Chambers

The EU financed Project "QTEL.NET: Matching Supply & Demands - Network for Sectoral Approach to Qualifications in Tourism at European Level" is an aimed effort to implement the Union's policy for improving the quality in the centers for vocational education and training (VET) in Europe. A part of this policy is also the existing Common Framework for Quality Assurance (CQAF) for the VET centers in Europe. The QTEL.NET Project addresses the issue of the quality of VET systems and practices as a strategic priority and its role of a major contribution to the progress towards the transformation, modernisation and adaptation of the European Education and Training systems[1], by exploring the issue of matching between training demand and training provision as one of the fundamental necessities for the successful functioning of the VET systems.

The objectives of the Project can be summarized in three main directions:

First, by improving the matching between training/qualification demands and vocational training provision, it is aimed to reduce the delay between the techno-economical changes in the separate sectors of economy (in this case the sector of Tourism in particular) and the way in which the VET systems respond to theses changes.

Second, as this issue is considerably poorly discussed and described in regard to the ways the VET systems function in the various EU member countries, the QTEIL.NET Project strives for carrying out a wider and active dialogue, within the EU, between the policy-making bodies at a national level, the social partners and the organizations, which provide vocational education and training.

Third, considering the importance of the above issue, the Project is aimed at analyzing the existing policies and practices in the project partnering countries in the sector of tourism, at distilling from these very same policies and practices the success factors, and at proposing models for further networking and collaboration, based on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) as a methodology for

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[1] QTEL.NET Project documentation: Appendix I, Detailed Project Description, p.1, A.1.

assessment and review, and as a measurement tool for setting reference indicators.

It is of a significant importance to point out that one of the tangible results from the Project will be the development of a Practical Kit / Reference Book for improving the match between qualification demands and training provision on both system level and level of the providers of vocational education and training.

The QTEL.NET Project's network includes 7 partners from 5 European countries (Bulgaria, Austria, Greece, Italy and UK) with representation of various actors in VET policies and practices:

- National authorities involved in quality assurance and development of qualifications (qualification requirements): National Agency for Vocational Education and Training – NAVET (Bulgaria), Scottish Qualification Administration – SQA (UK - Scotland);

- Social partners: Bulgarian Tourist Chamber – BTC (Bulgaria);

- Training providers: Unified Vocational Training Centre of the Prefecture of Cycladic Islands – KEK (Greece), Znanie Association (Bulgaria), consulting company COFIMP (Italy)

- Research and development institute: abif (Austria)

National survey: overview of the mechanisms existing in the partnering countries to enable the matching between qualification demands and training provision in the sector of tourism

Good practices

Country:	Republic of Bulgaria	
Name of the partner:	Bulgarian Tourist Chamber	
Title:[1]	Partnering carrying-out of vocational training by a consortium of employers' branch organizations	
Sub-sector:[2]	Tourism agencies, hotels, restaurants, animation	
Institutions involved:	Name of the institution:	Type:[3]
Centers for vocational training	Institute for Industrial Relations and Management "OKOM", "Agency for professional development" Ltd., Agency for business consultations	Training institutions
Sectoral organizations	Bulgarian Tourist Chamber	NGO

Description: The partnering practice combines the actions of the training institutions and of the leading tourism branch organizations. It is aimed at overcoming the main disadvantage of the training – its isolation from business. The practice includes the whole process starting from the defining of the most highly demanded tourism professions in a particular region and ending to the employment of the students, who have successfully passed though the required training on these very same professions.

On the first stage of activity, the most relevant tourism professions in the different regions of the country are being defined. This is performed on the basis of the sophisticated awareness and knowledge of the needs for personnel within the country by the branch organization regarded as a representative of the employers in tourism.

On the second stage, a professional selection of the candidates for training is carried out on the grounds that they are preliminary acquainted with the profile of the professions, with the training contents and the methods of training, as well as with the perspectives and opportunities for finding of professional realization and employment. The candidates' decisions, here, are being expressed in a form of motivation letter. The meaning of this motivation preparation is to allow the candidates to make the utmost possible informed choice in order to decrease later the number of the dropping out students.

On the third stage, a professional selection of the candidates for training is carried out through an interview that checks the personal qualities, the general outlook and contact abilities, the basic language and computer literacy qualifications in regard with the requirements of the profession in concern. In line with this and in cooperation with the employers' organization, the training institution updates the training plans and programs.

On the fourth stage, the vocational training is provided, and the branch organization organizes and manages the practical training. In this regard, there is an intention that the production practicum to be performed within the tourism firms, which search for employees for the regarded profession. This creates an opportunity for the employers to become familiar in advance with

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[1] Short title of the good practice, not more than 3 lines
[2] i.e. hotels, restaurants, tourist animation, etc. – if available
[3] i.e. Employer, Training institution (initial or continuous training), social partner, etc. Pls add as many rows as needed.

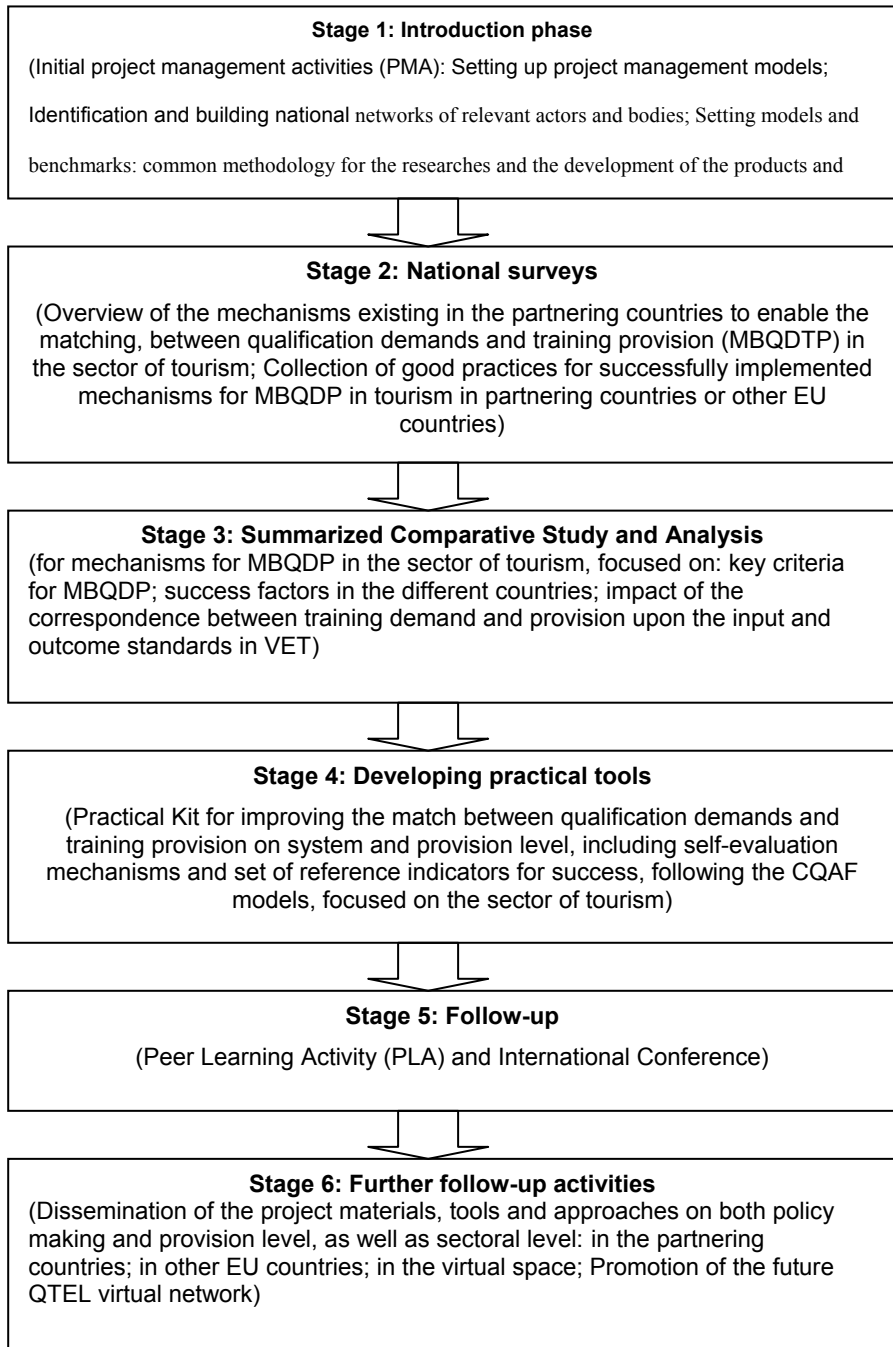## Chart 1. Example of a good practice provided by BTC

Stage 1: Introduction phase

(Initial project management activities (PMA): Setting up project management models;

Identification and building national networks of relevant actors and bodies; Setting models and

benchmarks: common methodology for the researches and the development of the products and

Stage 2: National surveys

(Overview of the mechanisms existing in the partnering countries to enable the matching, between qualification demands and training provision (MBQDTP) in the sector of tourism; Collection of good practices for successfully implemented mechanisms for MBQDP in tourism in partnering countries or other EU countries)

Stage 3: Summarized Comparative Study and Analysis
(for mechanisms for MBQDP in the sector of tourism, focused on: key criteria for MBQDP; success factors in the different countries; impact of the correspondence between training demand and provision upon the input and outcome standards in VET)

Stage 4: Developing practical tools

(Practical Kit for improving the match between qualification demands and training provision on system and provision level, including self-evaluation mechanisms and set of reference indicators for success, following the CQAF models, focused on the sector of tourism)

Stage 5: Follow-up

(Peer Learning Activity (PLA) and International Conference)

Stage 6: Further follow-up activities
(Dissemination of the project materials, tools and approaches on both policy making and provision level, as well as sectoral level: in the partnering countries; in other EU countries; in the virtual space; Promotion of the future QTEL virtual network)

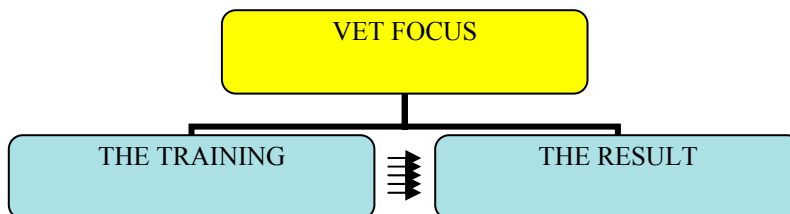**Chart 2. Stages of the QTEL.NET**

In addition, three external high-qualified experts will be involved under subcontract to support key phases of the Project.

The Bulgarian Tourist Chamber, as a representative of the social partners, and more precisely of the branch business organizations in the field of tourism,

participates in every single stage of the Project (Chart 2). The Chamber's role was especially active in the preparing and presenting of the so-called "good practices" in the field of vocational education and training in Bulgaria (Chart 1).

The Bulgarian Tourist Chamber also took part in the working meeting under the

Project. The first of these meeting was held in Sofia, Bulgaria within the period February 23-24, 2007. Many of the activities envisaged under Stage 1 of the Project were carried out during this meeting, as well as some further activities and priorities

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│         VET FOCUS           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│   THE TRAINING   │ ⇛ │   THE RESULT     │
└──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
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Author: Ralitza Valcheva, BTC

Chart. 3 Change in the VET focus (BTC Internal report for participation in the second working meeting under the QTEL.NET Project, the island of Syros, Greece, June 1-2, 2007, p.3. ()

During the second working meeting, held within the period June 1-2, 2007 on the island of Syros, Greece, a review of the good practices collected by the partners under the project was carried out. There were also defined the above-mentioned key success factors. The representatives of the Bulgarian Tourist Chamber took part in the working groups created for these activities. A leading theme in discussions held was the necessity to change the focus in the VET in tourism form the training itself to the results of this very same training (Chart 3).

The Bulgarian Tourist Chamber actively participates in the last two stages of the QTEL.NET Project. Experts from the Chamber are to work also on the scheduled Practical Kit /Reference Book for Practical Kit for improving the match between qualification demands and VET provision. and http://www.qtelnet.info.

The BTC will also take part in the International Conference under the Project which shall be held in Glasgow, Scotland, UK in November 2007.

There are expectations that after the closing of the Project, all the partners will make use of the shared experience in the vocational education and training in tourism. And furthermore, the QTEL.NET Project will contribute to the continuous improvement of the educational and training standards and the quality of the human resources for the needs of the tourism industry in the European union.

The persons interested in the Project can learn more for it on the web site of the Bulgarian Tourist Chamber - www.btch.org, or on the following web addresses: http://www.qtelnet.eu

REFERENCES:

1.) BTC Internal report for participation in the second working meeting under the QTEL.NET Project, the island of Syros, Greece, June 1-2, 2007;

2.) QTEL.NET Project documentation: Appendix I, Detailed Project Description, http://www.qtelnet.eu/public.php;

3.) QTEL.NET Project - WORK PLAN, http://www.qtelnet.eu/public.php;

4.) Fundamentals of A 'Common Quality Assurance Framework' (CQAF) for VET in Europe, http://www.qtelnet.eu/public.php.