VET Development in Russia in the Context of Life

Long Learning

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1.1 VET and Life-long Learning

The concept of life-long learning is currently gaining official recognition and popularity in the Russian Federation. It is set forth as a goal of the development of the education system in the National Doctrine of Education in the Russian Federation, the RF Government Programme of the Social and Economic Development of the Russian Federation for the Medium-Term Period and the Concept of Modernisation of Education.

At the same time the term life-long learning is only entering the rhetoric of both educators and policy-makers and is often confused with the term “continuing education/training” which in many aspects is understood as life-long learning. Continuing VET in the sense it is understood in most EU countries, is not yet in place. The closest to it is supplementary education and training (a system of upskilling, or in-service education and training).

Life-long-learning is taking shape in the format of different models initiated on the regional and municipal levels.

New forms and formats of educational institutions have emerged to address the education needs of different sectors of the population. For example:

- a new model of evening schools for secondary school drop-outs;
- open schools (integrated multi-profile multi-level educational institution of general and vocational education with a strong social support function) to cater for problem groups, offering students opportunities to design individual learning trajectories;

Also the remit of VET schools is expanding and adult education is developed.

1.1.1 Major recent developments in the VET sector cover:

1. Decentralization of VET governance, to better address the regional and local needs of the economy and the population and activation of the role of NGOs in VET governance. Major NGOs promoting VET: the Council of Education Administrators of the RF Regions (affiliated to the Ministry of Education), the Federal Council for Secondary VET, the Initial VET Council, the Union of Principals of Secondary VET Institutions, the Council of Principals of Teacher-training
Schools and Colleges, 76 regional Councils of Principals and 18 sector-based associations of SVET schools.

2. Re-orientation of VET towards the needs of the labour market and activation of social partnership mechanisms.

Content of VET is updated to meet the needs of regional and local labour markets, and occupations of training are adjusted to the economic restructuring. New VET standards have been developed (IVET standards for 237 integrated occupations of training, and 55 standards in new occupations; SVET basic level standards for 250 occupations and 170 standards for the advance level).

Social partnership in the sphere of VET is not institutionalized on the federal and regional level and is developing mainly on the level of VET schools. International projects, like Delphi 1 and 2, and «VET Reform in the North-West of Russia», TACIS IBPP project “Social dialogue in VET” and a few others have contributed to developing social partnership models and mechanisms.

For the most part, educational institutions interpret social partnership narrowly, as links with enterprises and employment agencies. Only few have established social dialogue with trade unions and professional associations of employers. There is a pronounced lack of experience of social partnership, reluctance of employers to interact with VET (partially because of a lack of incentives for enterprises to invest in VET), lack of recognition of VET as a stakeholder of regional economic development.

3. Optimization of the network of VET schools

Restructuring of the network mostly involves SVET institutions, and is carried out by integrating educational institutions of the same profile, integration of SVET institutions with higher educational institutions, transformation of IVET vocational lyceums into SVET institutions. 239 departments at higher educational institutions are implementing SVET programmes. The central tendency is to set up multi-profile multi-level VET centres that will take up about 40% of the total amount of VET schools.

4. Promotion of continuing VET and adult education, and a growing role of VET schools in this process. This new remit of VET schools is conditioned by the following reasons:

- the aging of the population that will require extended training (upskilling and re-training) opportunities for older workers;
1.1.2 Supplementary education and training

In-service training, skills upgrading and training of the unemployed form the segment of supplementary training within the system of formal adult education. Parallel to this sector there has emerged a sector of informal adult education, aimed at providing opportunities for the population to address their personal education needs, both for career and personal development.

2. Supplementary education (in-service training and skills upgrading)

Contractual upskilling and re-training of the work force at VET schools in part makes up for the collapsed system of supplementary education that used to address the needs of upskilling and in-service training of the personnel at enterprises. Over the past five years the upskilling of executives and specialists shrank by one third, and that of workers – by over a half (e.g. while
the number of workers involved in various forms of vocational training dropped amounted to from 15 million people in 1989, it dropped to a little over 6 million in 2002).

As a result the labour market is full of workers with inadequate qualifications, which severely undermines their employability.

Currently, employers are not duly interested in training their personnel, as there is yet no direct co-relation between their investments in training and the growth of productivity, on the one hand, and on the other – the existing level of unemployment offers employers a wide choice of workers and specialists.

The situation is further aggravated by the fact that employees are not aware of rewards of upskilling. Besides, the limited savings and the undeveloped crediting system seriously hamper opportunities of individuals to “borrow” money to pay for tuition. Unlike physical capital, human capital is not yet considered a credit security. Also, there is no comprehensive up-to-date system of information about the labour market opportunities.

Within the state system of supplementary (in-service) training standard training programmes fall into three major categories: skills upgrading (72 hours), re-training (over 500 hours), re-training to obtain an additional qualification (over 100 hours).

Major categories of trainees in the state system of state supplementary training:

- civil servants; managers; executives and specialists from sectors of material production;
- executives and specialists from the social sphere; medical workers and teachers; the retired military; the unemployed.

Priority areas of upskilling cover:

- Accounting, management, state and municipal administration, personnel management, economic and social policy, finance and credit, marketing, document processing, small enterprise, property management, crisis management, insurance; transport, ICT, production technologies, fuel and energy, ecology and use of natural resources, technology of life systems, new materials and chemical products.

The network of private supplementary training is made up by about 600 providers.

In the context of the on-going economic reform the country is going to need more and more qualified workers and specialists with secondary VET and university diplomas. On the average, in the coming years about 20 million specialists with a SVET diploma, and about 2-2.5 million of workers (including those threatened with redundancies) have either to be re-trained or receive skills upgrading.
3. Training the unemployed

Training participation of the unemployed and workers threatened with redundancy amounts to 250-300 thousand people annually, about 85-92% of them find employment upon completion of training. Special attention is given to training such target groups, as the youth, women, the retired military, while the training needs of the disabled are not properly met.

3.1.1 Constraints in fostering life-long learning

Major constraints in the development of life-long learning can be summed up as a lack of:

- a national qualifications framework of vocational and high education,
- a consistent classification of occupational qualifications, and occupational standards,
- approaches to progression and transfer,
- mechanisms of recognition of prior learning and validation of non-formal learning,
- an independent quality assessment and certification system;
- a methodology and infrastructure to identify current and anticipate future demand for the workforce with regard to structural changes in the economy and employment;
- full-fledged market orientation of VET and of competence-based VET;
- inadequate financing (funds provided by the federal budget can barely address the needs of VET institutions, especially in the IVET sector);
- up-to-date facilities and equipment, especially in the IVET sector;
- adequate social partnership mechanisms;
- flexibility of the VET system in accepting innovations;
- an adequate understanding of the concept of life long learning as it is interpreted internationally.