

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Margarita Vassileva, Sofia, Bulgaria

It is our pleasure to introduce to you today **Margarita Vassileva** - a Senior Expert "EU Projects and Programmes" supporting SMEs, VET schools and NGOs in the development and implementation of their project ideas with support from EU-funding programmes. For more than 10 year she has been involved in the preparation, management and implementation of numerous projects funded under European programmes such as Erasmus+ KA1 & KA2, LLP- LdV TOIs & Partnerships, LLP Grundtvig, and Intelligent Energy Europe. Ms Vassileva has delivered a variety of training courses on topics such as Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation, Quality Management in EU-funded projects, etc.



Please review below what he has shared with us:

"According to me the main advantages of work-based learning are that it is self-paced so that the learner can adapt a comfortable personal learning speed and it is self-directed making it possible for the learner to choose the content suiting their interests and needs.

For companies it is a cost-effective tool for making the learning process more interactive, interesting, and fun. Through WBL the individual staff performance and productivity are improved and therefore business performance.

From my experience with work-based learning I may distinguish the following as the greatest challenges:

- lack of time - especially if the company is small and one person has to combine several roles it is very difficult to allot additional time for learning.
- low motivation - no one is willing to invest time and efforts in learning something that won't directly affect positively their job performance, career or personal life.
- unproductive working environment - noisy open-space where concentration is practically impossible, bad lighting or poor air-conditioning which can also be significant distractors.

Some of the SME employees with whom I have talked about WBL have expressed the opinion that they would be more motivated to take part in such form of learning if it would be recognized in some way by their employer such as bonuses, career advance, special section about WBL in the annual job review, etc. The employer should encourage the employees to be involved in this, give support to the process and when finalized, reward employees appropriately (salary, job level, position, study). Employees should be provided access to the required resources like time - for example every second Friday afternoon in the month is announced free time for the employees to engage themselves in some WBL activities; opportunities and materials - access to relevant learning content, internet, more experienced colleagues, etc. A common learning place where people can stay and interact such as a coffee corner, mini hall, relaxation room, etc. will enhance the learning in the workplace.

According to me the most important competences for a work-based learning professional are:

- The capacity to build a continuous learning attitude in the team and to motivate.
- Coaching and mentoring skills - to be able to convey the knowledge and experience you have to others.
- Interpersonal awareness allowing them to notice, interpret, and anticipate others' concerns and feelings, and to communicate this awareness empathetically to others.
- To be technically skilled as many forms of WBL use online tools for e-learning and require good computer literacy in order to use them efficiently.
- To be credible i.e. to be perceived as responsible, reliable, and trustworthy.

Recently, I have been involved in the implementation of the project "From School Class to Business Class", project reference № 2014-1-NL01-KA200-001185, funded under the ERASMUS+ Programme, Strategic Partnerships in VET. The project was fulfilled in the period 2014-2017 in the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Iceland, Italy and Slovenia.

The main goal of the project is to fill the educational gap between the school class and the entrepreneurial reality outside the school. This goal is to be achieved through a holistic approach linking successful entrepreneurs, students in VET schools and their teachers. With this project, students learn what it takes to start a business: which practical things you have to think of, what media can do for you. How important are fundamental things such as keeping your appointments... and so on. The final result consists of a business plan and a simulation in which students set up the company. Pupils learn in this project not only by taking theoretical knowledge from books, but also especially by doing things themselves under the guidance of an experienced person from a business company resembling a kind of master and apprentice relationship.

The primary target groups of the project are:

1. Young learners/students in (preparatory) VET including disadvantaged learners
2. Teachers in schools and other educational institutions for (preparatory) VET

3. Teachers in special schools and rehabilitation institutions offering VET courses
4. Starting young and/or disadvantaged entrepreneurs just leaving (preparatory) VET
5. Company managers in areas/regions of project activity

A simulation of each company was done so that students get an idea of what an operating company looks like. Teachers and in-company mentors supervise the student's activities. This is the most practical way possible to learn about entrepreneurship, with experienced company staff as inspirers and mentors for the students.

If you are interested in the project and would like to learn more about it you can visit: www.sc2bc.eu"

Feel most welcome to like our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/wblpro> and join our linkedin group <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13505202> to meet more of the professionals we talk with, learn more about our project and follow our progress!

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