

## WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Rumyana Shalamanova, Sofia, Bulgaria

Today we are happy to invite you to come to Sofia and meet **Rumyana Shalamanova** – the Chairperson of Know and Can Association. Rumyana possesses more than 27 years of experience in teaching and training. She is a soft skills trainer, career consultant, educational adviser.



Please find below what she has shared with the WBL-PRO team:

### 1. Please share with us what the main advantages with respect to work-based learning are:

For several years work-based learning is a priority of the EU policy and is gaining more and more human and non-human resources in the implementation of this policy. For me, as a person leading a company organizing different activities connected to work-based learning and apprenticeship trainings, the advantages are more than the disadvantages.

As a whole the work-based learning and apprenticeship programs are aimed at empowering newly graduates (either from high schools or universities) or still at study students to further building their personal career, engaging into lifelong learning, as well as adapting to the novelties and mastering changes in labour market in the most efficient way.

Another advantage is connected to the improvement of the professional skills of workers-to-be in the sector chosen by them, with a particular view to facilitating their adaptation to new technologies and new market expectations by encouraging their mobility. Professional improvement is something that can be achieved only in working environment and nowhere else. No matter how advanced the education is, having no practice connected directly to the future work tasks makes the education not

applicable. That is why working in the real environment when you are still at study or is newly graduate is priceless.

## **2. Please share with us what the main challenges with respect to work-based learning are:**

Know and Can Association has been working on apprenticeship and trainees programs for about 8 years and for these years we have gathered different point of views of the both sides of this collaboration. To be honest, these opinions vary from absolutely negative to utterly positive. As a whole I may dare to summarize all the opinions (no matter positive or negative) in a one sentence - everything depends on people and their attitude to the process. If you are keen on learning and getting to know the essence of your future work - there is a way. And this way is called work-based learning. If you want to have in your team employees with good professional knowledge and personal skills - there is a way. And this way is called work-based learning. The only challenge for me is how to cross both ways and make people realize that actually it is ONE way.

Employers still have their fears regarding employing apprentices or trainees although they lack staff. What they share as the main challenge is that after they train the trainees or apprentices they leave or do not come back. So they invested time, efforts, knowledge and skills are benefits only for the trainees, not the employers. That is why employers are not keen on hiring trainees and when they do it, usually by force or personal request, the trainees are put in a position of men of all work - on paper they are performing their apprenticeship/trainee program but on practice they do nothing connected to their personal or professional development.

Another challenge is to motivate the trainees to dedicate their time to learning by doing or learning the work place they are. In most of the cases trainees take this opportunity as something that is obligatory and they must go through it in order to graduate. Some of them even do not want to continue working in the same sphere, some of them plan to deal with another profession, some of them want to find a well-paid job, no matter in which field, and some of them want to go abroad looking for better opportunities. Unfortunately these groups form the majority of the newly graduated or trained and the ones that really want to master themselves cannot be noticed among them. So here is the main challenge to employers - how to recognize the "pearls" among all the other beads and to make out of them a high-quality jewelry that both sides will be proud with.

## **3. Please describe any solutions with respect to challenges and/or weaknesses related to work-based learning:**

During our work with employers and employees-to-be we become aware that most economic sectors are increasingly affected by the shortage of skilled labor and employers are complaining that they do not find the appropriately trained personnel

with the desired attitude. Employers are becoming more aware that in addition to training, informal transversal skills make a good employee. Employers become more keen on investing in different trainings not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but on interpersonal skills that are learned and developed informally "on the job" or in the private environment. But as real investors they want their investments back with good benefit after some time. So for them a good solution is to make a commitment agreement between the employers and the employees-to-be with clear responsibilities from both sides. In this way both side will be absolutely aware what can be expected till when by whom. So they decide to commit themselves or not.

In my opinion a good decision to solve the challenges in front of apprenticeship and training programs is work placements abroad under different EU programs. We are delivering this service for a few years and can confess that they improve a lot the attitude to apprenticeship on the first place and motivation to work on the second. Last but not least the trainees realized that these programs are of their professional and personal benefits and are not delivered pro forma but in reality. But for making this happen the companies which are making the connection between the employers abroad, and not only abroad, and the trainees must make the selection of both parties very precisely and to be sure that they will gain what they are looking for and not simply spend some time somewhere. These are the responsibilities of the companies which are doing the logistics and looking for job placements. The job is not easy but is satisfactory.

**4. Please share what the most important knowledge, skills and competences for the work-based learning professional are according to you. What kind of trainings are necessary to acquire them?**

While learning at workplaces employees-to-be consistently improve two groups of competencies: 1) specific competencies necessary for performing professional tasks and increasing competitiveness of their employers; 2) generic and transversal competencies that allow acting efficiently in various work and life environments.

Most often employers focus on the first group of competences partially or fully ignoring the second group. Although generic and transversal competences are developed even if you do not pay special attention to them. They develop naturally because you work in a team, you become a part of a whole, you communicate, and you are gradually finding your place in a new environment. To be honest recently more and more employers pay equal attention to both groups of competences.

In today's work environment, ability to learn quickly and efficiently is one of the main keys for the success of the personnel and the company. Learning at workplace means: learning through being proactive, solving real work problems, applying existing knowledge in practice, acting autonomously or in cooperation with colleagues, observing their operations. Employers tend to consider that newly graduates and especially

students are not well prepared for the labour market requirements and lack motivation to improve their qualifications. Shortages of the mentioned competencies are obstacles to both business development and to the employees themselves, who want to remain on demand in the labour market. The best way to satisfy the needs of the future employees and the demands of the business world is to meet them and let them adjust to each other. This can happen only at work-based environment.

**5. Please share information about work-based learning projects you are involved in - the name, the funding program, the main aims, the target groups, the intellectual outputs, link to website, facebook group, etc.**

Projects:

Strengthening the Competence of the Ability to Learn in Workplace for VET Graduates (phase I) - Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals

Strengthening the Competence of the Ability to Learn in Workplace for VET Graduates in the sphere of tourism (phase II) - Key Action 1: Learning Mobility of Individuals

Compass - developing competences of young people from marginalized groups - KA2

Strategic partnerships - <https://www.comp-pass-project.eu/compass>

Validating Informal Transversal Skills of young workers in seasonal tourism - KA2

Strategic partnerships - <http://valits.eu>

Please feel most welcome to like our facebook page and join the linkedin group to get acquainted with many best practices and other useful materials, tools and resources supporting the high quality performance of work-based professionals around Europe and beyond its borders!

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