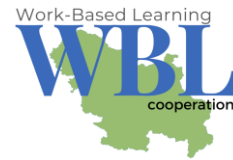




Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# Project: BALKAN WBL COOPERATION

## THEMATIC AREA: SKILLS

### General report

WP 3 – Balkan WBL Cooperation recommendations development

Lead partner: Delta 360

Partners involved: MEF, MCEC, Municipality of Reșița City, NAVET

Document Version: 0.2 Status: final version

#### *Disclaimer*

*Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.*



MACEDONIAN  
CIVIC  
EDUCATION  
CENTER

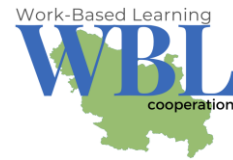


I.I.E.K.  
**DELTA**  
WWW.IEKDELTA.GR





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



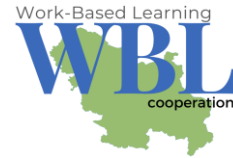
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Alignment of Apprenticeship Programs .....	4
3. Integration of Transversal, Green, and Digital Skills .....	8
4. Anticipating Future Skills Needs .....	14
5. Assessment of Apprentices' Skills .....	18
6. Conclusions and Recommendations .....	22
Country-specific recommendations .....	22
General recommendations.....	25



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



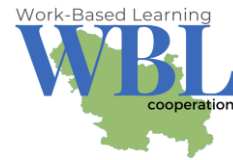
## 1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the skills related to Work-Based Learning (WBL) among the partner countries involved in the Balkan WBL Cooperation project: Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, and Romania. The information presented herein was gathered through desk research and surveys conducted by the respective partner organizations.

Through the collaborative efforts of the teams from these four countries, we have developed specific recommendations to address identified challenges in the following thematic areas: the misalignment between practical training and learning outcomes, the insufficient emphasis on transversal skills and competencies, and the need for enhanced knowledge exchange among stakeholders. Our objective is to generate valuable insights that will facilitate the ongoing improvement of WBL, ensuring that learning outcomes are better aligned with the evolving dynamics of both global and local labour markets.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



## 2. Alignment of Apprenticeship Programs

### *Bulgaria*

In Bulgaria, the alignment of apprenticeship programs with the expected learning outcomes reveals significant discrepancies and gaps. Although some institutions and companies make efforts to align practical training with theoretical knowledge, these practices show considerable variation in their effectiveness. While certain respondents indicated that the skills apprentices acquire in companies generally conform to the state education and qualification standards, many others highlighted critical issues, such as outdated curricula and insufficient flexibility to adapt learning outcomes to the ever-changing demands of the labour market.

One notable concern raised was the absence of a formal structure to effectively integrate practical tasks with theoretical learning. A respondent mentioned: "We rely on daily interactions between students and mentors, but there's no structured system to compare skills with learning outcomes." This underscores the need for a more coherent and standardized framework to better align work-based experiences with educational objectives, ensuring a seamless transition between the two.

### *Greece*

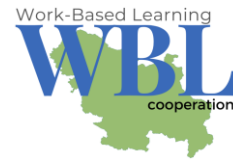
Greece has developed a structured system designed to align apprenticeship programs with state qualification standards and labour market demands. Learning outcomes are clearly outlined in the national curriculum, and agreements between VET institutions and companies ensure that apprentices' tasks in the workplace correspond to their field of study. This system is supported by Occupational Profiles (Epagelmatika Perigramata)<sup>1</sup>, which detail the required knowledge, skills, and abilities for various professions, with 204 profiles currently established across multiple

---

<sup>1</sup> ΚΕΚ Τεχνικές Σχολές Επιμελητηρίου Ηρακλείου (n.d.). Τα επαγγελματικά περιγράμματα. <https://www.katartisi.gr/2013-04-01-07-16-47/2013-04-01-08-05-09>



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



sectors. The presence of advisory committees helps keep these profiles and learning outcomes updated.

However, gaps remain in the practical application of these systems. Despite the formal frameworks, feedback from apprentices and studies suggests a misalignment between the theoretical knowledge acquired in VET institutions and the actual skills needed in the workplace. In some cases, apprentices report that their tasks during apprenticeships are not aligned with the learning objectives outlined in their training. For example, a recent study found that many apprentices did not receive adequate support or opportunities to apply their academic learning, highlighting the need for better integration of practical and theoretical components. While systems like the traineeship book, where apprentices record their weekly activities, offer some level of monitoring, inconsistencies in how effectively learning outcomes are implemented across different sectors and companies persist.

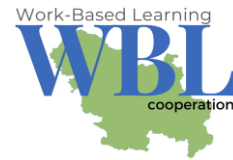
### *North Macedonia*

In North Macedonia, apprenticeship programs are centrally managed, with learning outcomes designed to meet qualification standards. These outcomes are developed by commissions that include business sector representatives and are approved by the Minister of Education. While the process of aligning programs with labour market needs exists and is officially prescribed, it typically only occurs when there are significant changes in VET programs, such as the introduction of new or revised curricula.

In dual VET models, there is greater cooperation between schools and businesses, with company-specific documents like the "Programming and Planning of Work-Based Learning at an Employer" being jointly developed. These documents ensure that learning outcomes are mapped directly to workplace tasks, with input from both teachers and company mentors. However, research shows that opportunities for alignment, such as adapting programs to the needs of local businesses, are rarely fully utilized. This is attributed to insufficient communication and a lack of interest among



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



key stakeholders. Flexibility in curricula (up to 30%) is available but underused, limiting the ability of programs to adapt to evolving industry demands.

Respondents emphasized the importance of partnership between schools and companies and the need for a more flexible approach to adjust programs to market changes. Digital tools could enhance communication and support this alignment process, but their integration remains limited.

### *Romania*

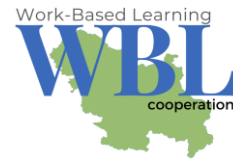
In Romania, apprenticeship programs are based on the "learning outcomes" framework, guided by tools like EQF, EQAVET, and ESCO, with a focus on ensuring that VET programs meet both national and European standards. Stakeholders, including employers, schools, and national/regional agencies, play crucial roles in this process. Employers frequently express concerns about the content of programs lagging behind technological advancements and workplace realities, which often leaves apprentices lacking in practical skills and up-to-date knowledge. There is also criticism of the low level of willingness among apprentices to adapt quickly to changing technologies and practices in the workplace.

Schools act as mediators, tasked with balancing the need for current technological knowledge from companies with the national educational framework. While national agencies, such as the National Authority for Qualifications (NAQ) and the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development (NCVETD), are responsible for revising occupational and professional training standards, employers feel that the process is too slow and complex, typically taking years for revisions to be implemented. This delay limits the ability of programs to respond swiftly to labour market changes, leading to mismatches between current curricula and workplace demands.

Currently, initiatives such as online meetings with local CLDPS and regional consortia are being conducted to improve collaboration and program alignment, though employers continue to call



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



for a more agile revision process. Survey results revealed a moderate alignment between training programs and workplace needs (scoring 6-7 out of 10), with key areas of misalignment in sectors such as food preparation, hairdressing, and digital technologies. The incorporation of green transition topics, climate change awareness, and digital literacy remains insufficient, with respondents stressing the need for continuous curriculum updates, rather than periodic revisions every five years.

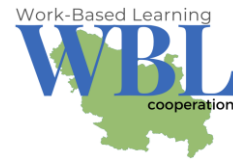
*Based on the insights from Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia, and Romania regarding the alignment of apprenticeship programs with expected learning outcomes, all countries emphasize the importance of connecting practical skills with theoretical education to equip students for the labour market. There is a shared recognition of the need for cooperation between educational institutions and companies to develop relevant apprenticeship programs.*

*Each country aims for ongoing assessment and revision of apprenticeship programs to ensure alignment with market needs, though the effectiveness varies.*

*There are therefore some differences among the countries, regarding the structure and Standardization. Bulgaria faces challenges in standardizing the link between practical and theoretical training, suggesting a need for more structured systems. Greece has a more developed system with clear processes for monitoring and certifying apprenticeships, including specific learning outcomes. North Macedonia's alignment is less frequent, typically occurring only during significant curriculum changes, with a focus on flexibility. Romania emphasizes the need for frequent curriculum updates but struggles with slow revision processes and mismatches between curricula and current industry practices.*



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



### 3. Integration of Transversal, Green, and Digital Skills

#### *Bulgaria*

In terms of the integration of transversal, green, and digital skills, findings from the Bulgarian context demonstrate a mixed picture. While transversal skills—such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving—are often organically developed through practical activities in the workplace, the inclusion of digital skills, though increasingly relevant, remains uneven. Green skills, in particular, are notably absent from most work-based learning programs. Although some efforts to foster digital skills are evident, as one respondent noted: "Our company offers online courses for apprentices to enhance their digital skills, but the uptake is limited," green competencies, such as those related to sustainability and environmental practices, are scarcely integrated. This gap indicates a pressing need to embed both green and digital skills more systematically within apprenticeship curricula.

Some positive development in this direction is the establishment of the new List of professions for Vocational Education and Training (LPVET), which contains 193 professions, of which 40 are in the digital and green sector.

Moreover, the assessment of these transversal, green, and digital skills also lacks comprehensiveness. Current evaluation methods tend to focus predominantly on technical skills, often neglecting the equally important transversal and green competencies.

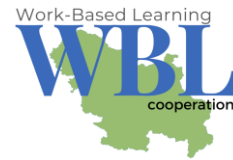
#### *Greece*

Greece has made strides in incorporating transversal, green, and digital skills into its work-based learning programs, but progress remains uneven. Transversal skills, such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, are often developed naturally in workplace settings. However, there are no standardized guidelines or formal tools for assessing these skills, and evaluations remain largely subjective, relying on mentors' observations rather than measurable criteria.





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Green skills are beginning to gain attention, particularly through initiatives like the binational R&D project Graeducation<sup>2</sup> which has introduced green modules into apprenticeship programs at EPAS. Despite these advances, the inclusion of green competencies remains limited and is still in the early stages of development. Only a few sectors have integrated green standards and modern technologies into their curricula, leaving significant room for expansion in this area.

Digital skills, on the other hand, are becoming more central in Greek VET programs. Efforts such as the creation of an e-learning VET platform, the digitalization of educational materials, and the introduction of micro-credentials are helping students acquire essential digital literacy. The 2023 Micro-CVET<sup>3</sup> project by EOPPEP aims to streamline the certification of digital skills through micro-credentials, making it easier for apprentices to document and demonstrate their abilities. However, despite these efforts, the integration of green and digital skills into the broader WBL curricula is still limited, and assessment methods for these competencies need further development.

Teachers in VET programs are required to undergo lifelong training to ensure they are equipped to teach new skills, particularly in the areas of digital and green competencies. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate transversal skills through project-based learning, and in some cases, they collaborate with external experts to supplement their teaching. However, many teachers report that they lack adequate training to effectively teach transversal, digital, and green skills. To address this, they often participate in specialized projects and professional development programs to upskill themselves before introducing these topics to their students.

In terms of mentorship, many companies, especially smaller businesses, lack dedicated mentors. Often, business owners assume this role without having received formal mentor training, particularly when it comes to developing transversal or green skills. Larger businesses may have

---

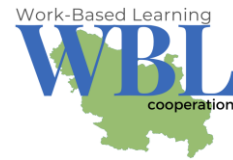
<sup>2</sup> Graeducation - ΔΙΤΤΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ. (n.d.). Dual Hellas. <https://dual.com.gr/graeducation/>

<sup>3</sup> Έγκριση της πρότασης του ΕΟΠΠΕΠ “Continuing Vocational Training link to Micro-Credentials (Micro-CVET)” στο πλαίσιο των δράσεων του Ευρωπαϊκού Δικτύου EQAVET και ειδικότερα του προγράμματος ERASMUS+ «EQAVET NRPs–2023 - 2026».

ΕΟΠΠΕΠ EQAVET. <https://eqavet.eoppep.gr/%CE%BD%CE%AD%CE%B1-%CE%B5%CF%80%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%B1%CE%B9%CF%81%CF%8C%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%84%CE%B1/%CE%B4%CF%81%CE%AC%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%82-%CE%B5%CE%BA%CE%B4%CE%B7%CE%BB%CF%8E%CF%83%CE%B5%CE%B9%CF%82/microcvet>



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



dedicated training staff, but their mentoring capabilities, particularly in areas like communication and empathy, still require improvement. Survey participants recommended that more structured mentor training be developed, and some suggested that schools could appoint mentors themselves to ensure better guidance in apprenticeships.

### *North Macedonia*

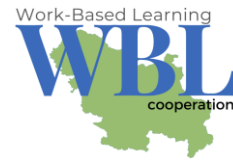
In North Macedonia, transversal skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving are embedded in work-based learning programs, particularly in the second, third, and fourth years. These skills are integrated through modular units such as Workplace Safety, Workplace Behavior, and Preparation for Employment. Digital skills are also included, particularly in relation to vocational skills tied to digitized workplace processes.

Green skills are gradually being integrated into VET curricula. As of 2024, students in ten sectors will be exposed to modules on environmental issues relevant to their fields. These modules will be delivered through hands-on activities, including laboratory work, projects, and debates, some of which are conducted in partnership with companies. A notable initiative is the partnership between the Nelt Group, UNICEF, and the Ministry of Education, which aims to provide 500 students with green skills-focused WBL over three years.

Research reveals a gap in the practical application of transversal and green skills, as many employers focus primarily on technical skills. Though digital skills are generally adequate, the adoption of new technologies poses challenges, partly due to the low digital proficiency of teachers. Training centers provide some professional development opportunities for teachers and mentors in transversal skills, but more comprehensive programs are needed to effectively integrate these skills into real-world teaching and training.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



## *Romania*

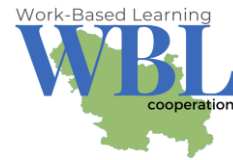
Romania has recognized the importance of integrating transversal, green, and digital skills into its VET programs, but practical implementation remains limited. Transversal skills such as communication, adaptability, and problem-solving are seen as critical for employability and career mobility, but there is still no standardized approach for embedding these skills into vocational education. Teachers and trainers are responsible for fostering these competencies through work-based learning (WBL), but the assessment and development of these skills are often informal and inconsistent. The move toward a competency-centered curriculum, based on Learning Outcomes, is a positive step forward, yet more concrete strategies are needed to ensure transversal skills are effectively taught and evaluated.

Digital skills are becoming more essential in Romania's VET programs, but the country lags behind the EU average in basic competencies, as highlighted by Romania's low rankings in the OECD PISA survey for mathematics, reading, and science. Despite this, there are ongoing efforts to improve digital literacy, particularly through PTS (Professional Training Standards) that incorporate digital competencies into learning outcomes. However, the application of digital skills remains uneven across sectors, with some industries integrating digital tools more effectively than others.

The integration of green skills is still in its early stages, despite growing awareness of the importance of sustainability, the green transition, and environmental protection. Employers have identified gaps in the inclusion of these skills in WBL programs, with only a few sectors actively promoting green competencies. The existing PTS frameworks include key competences like digital skills, but attitudinal and behavioral aspects of learning outcomes—important for transversal and green skills—are underdeveloped in terms of assessment. While efforts to update PTS are ongoing, there is a pressing need for more practical ways to embed these skills into day-to-day teaching and assessment.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



*All countries acknowledge the necessity of integrating transversal (soft), green, and digital skills into VET programs to meet labour market demands. Each country faces challenges in effectively incorporating green skills, often lagging behind digital and transversal skills. There is a shared emphasis on developing skills through practical tasks and workplace learning, although the actual assessment of these skills varies.*

*In Bulgaria, green skills are notably underrepresented, with calls for better integration into training programs. Greece has been actively developing and embedding green modules into curricula since 2017, supported significantly by the EU. North Macedonia is beginning to introduce environmental topics into curricula, with partnerships like UNICEF lending support. Romania faces challenges with outdated curricula; however, recent initiatives aim to embed green skills more effectively.*

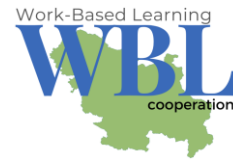
*In Romania, there is an urgent need to enhance students' basic skills, which form the foundation for transversal skills. Currently, statistics reveal that VET students consistently perform poorly in basic skills, making it difficult to build essential transversal skills needed for the workforce. Addressing this gap is crucial for Romania's effective integration of transversal and green competencies.*

*Bulgaria lacks comprehensive tools for assessing transversal, green, and digital skills; assessments mostly focus on technical abilities. Greece is adopting informal assessments for transversal skills and integrating micro-credentials to ensure more structured evaluations. North Macedonia shows a structured approach to assessing transversal skills, though emphasis on green skills remains low. Romania has made strides toward a competency-centered curriculum; however, practical assessments of transversal skills remain insufficient.*

*Teacher training varies significantly across the region. In Bulgaria, there is a limited focus on equipping teachers to teach transversal and green skills. Greece mandates lifelong learning opportunities for VET teachers to ensure they can effectively integrate these competencies. In*



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



*North Macedonia, professional development opportunities are available, though implementation varies. Romania identifies a need for enhanced teacher training to address transversal skills more comprehensively within VET programs.*

*Overall, there is a common recognition of the need to integrate transversal, green, and digital skills into vocational training, but the extent of integration and the effectiveness of assessment and training methods differ widely across countries.*



#### 4. Anticipating Future Skills Needs

##### *Bulgaria*

The capacity of VET institutions and employers to anticipate and respond to future skills needs remains a critical factor in ensuring the competitiveness of students in an evolving labour market. Although national frameworks like the Mechanism for including forecasts of supply and demand of labour and platforms such as MyCompetence have been established to improve skills anticipation, challenges remain. Respondents generally agree that there is limited capacity to forecast future skills trends effectively, particularly in rapidly changing sectors such as green energy and advanced digital technologies.

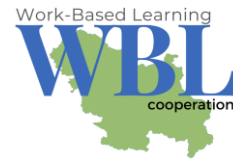
Many educators and employers still rely on informal sources, such as industry reports or expert consultations, to update their programs. However, the formal mechanisms for regularly updating VET curricula in response to market shifts are lacking. As one educator highlighted: *"We try to stay informed about industry trends, but there's no formal process for integrating these into our training programs."* This reflects a broader challenge within the system—while tools and forecasting models exist, they are often slow to deliver actionable data, making it difficult for VET institutions to adapt quickly to new skill demands

Although the National Competence Assessment System (NNCA) plays a significant role in aligning skills development with labour market needs, the speed and real-time applicability of these forecasts remain limited. Employers and educators alike have called for more agile and flexible mechanisms that can respond faster to emerging trends, particularly as the pace of technological and environmental transitions accelerates.

There are a List of State-protected specialties of professions and a List of specialties of professions with expected shortage of specialists on the labour market but they do not seem to be able to fully reflect the future skills needs of employers and industry.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



### *Greece*

Greece has implemented mechanisms to anticipate future skills needs, though these systems are not always fully effective in practice. The Labour Market Diagnosis Mechanism, introduced in 2016, is a key tool that analyzes labour market trends and forecasts emerging skills demands. It provides valuable data to help update VET programs, but the process of integrating these insights into curricula can be slow. Reports from CEDEFOP and studies by IME GSEVEE further support this by highlighting trends in high-demand sectors like green energy and digital technologies.

While there are formal channels for monitoring industry trends, such as collaboration agreements with organizations like SEV (Hellenic Federation of Enterprises) and TEE-TCG (Technical Chamber of Greece), many employers feel that the communication between industry and VET institutions remains inadequate. This is particularly true for smaller businesses, which often report that curricula don't evolve quickly enough to meet the fast-changing needs of the market.

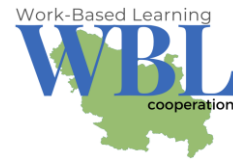
Efforts to enhance regional cooperation between municipalities, local businesses, and VET providers are underway, but gaps remain. Many educators stress that while mechanisms exist to revise curricula, the revisions are not frequent or flexible enough to keep up with evolving demands. Sectoral Skills Councils, established by Law 4763/2020, aim to monitor industry needs and propose updates to align training with labour market realities, but the pace of change is still insufficient, particularly in emerging sectors.

### *North Macedonia*

North Macedonia's VET system includes mechanisms for forecasting future skills needs, though their effectiveness varies. Programs in three- and four-year vocational education are 30% flexible, allowing for the incorporation of new learning outcomes based on employers' needs. In dual education and ferial practice, this flexibility is even greater, enabling companies to adjust vocational modules to better reflect current industry requirements.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Skill needs analyses are conducted by various institutions, including the Employment Agency and Chambers of Commerce, but there is still limited collaboration between schools and businesses. Teachers often rely on informal sources like colleagues and online resources to stay informed about new trends, while consulting with companies remains infrequent. Non-formal education providers, such as training centers, tend to take a more proactive approach, conducting market research and using labour market data to adjust their offerings.

Companies recognize the importance of vocational education in preparing a skilled workforce and actively participate in discussions with schools to identify skill gaps. However, the lack of systematic labour market analyses and standardized procedures for collaboration presents challenges. Policymakers acknowledge the need for improved data collection and stable funding to strengthen cooperation between businesses and VET institutions, ensuring that future skills needs are consistently addressed.

### *Romania*

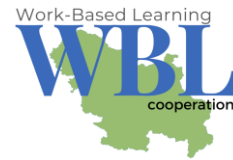
Romania has established a structured system for anticipating future skills needs, led by the National Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development (NCVETD). The system is decentralized, relying on Regional Education Action Plans (REAP), Local Education Action Plans (LEAP), and School Action Plans (SAP), which involve multiple stakeholders, including employers, trade unions, and civil society organizations. These action plans aim to align training programs with the evolving demands of the labour market, with a focus on decentralizing decision-making to regional, county, and local levels.

Despite this system, challenges persist in ensuring timely and relevant updates to VET programs. Stakeholders have highlighted the need for more agile mechanisms to adapt training programs to new trends, particularly as complex studies and forecasting methods often provide insights into past or current trends rather than anticipating future disruptions. Projects like ReCONNECT, led by the National Employment Agency, have developed tools to collect data and forecast skill needs, but the slow processing time and high costs of these tools reduce their practical impact.





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



Additionally, employers often struggle to receive real-time updates on evolving skills requirements, limiting the responsiveness of training programs.

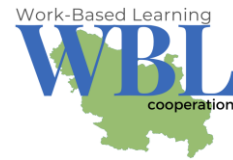
Employers and training providers have called for more flexible, localized systems that can respond quickly to emerging industry needs. Survey results indicate that while companies are actively involved in discussions with schools to identify skill gaps, the current tools for anticipating future needs are too slow and reactive. To better prepare for future skill demands, stakeholders argue that a more proactive approach is needed—one that allows for real-time collaboration between employers and VET providers to define and deliver the necessary skills as they emerge in the market.

*All countries acknowledge the necessity to adapt vocational education and training (VET) programs to meet evolving labour market demands. There is a general emphasis on the importance of partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to identify skills needs.*

*While all four countries recognize the importance of anticipating future skills needs in VET, Greece and North Macedonia show more proactive and systematic approaches. Bulgaria and Romania highlight significant challenges in adaptability and timely responses to market changes, indicating a need for improved mechanisms and stronger industry collaboration.*



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



## 5. Assessment of Apprentices' Skills

### *Bulgaria*

The assessment of apprentices' skills in Bulgaria remains inconsistent, with a wide variation in practices across institutions and companies. Many respondents reported relying on informal assessment methods, such as verbal feedback from mentors, while structured evaluation systems—such as performance checklists or evaluation cards—are less common. One respondent explained: "We use a point-based system to assess students' work, but the feedback is mainly verbal. There's no formal documentation of their progress." This indicates a clear need for more standardized, formalized assessment practices that encompass not only technical skills but also transversal, green, and digital competencies. Additionally, the feedback mechanisms in place are often insufficient, limiting apprentices' ability to fully understand their progress and identify areas for improvement, thus hindering their holistic skill development.

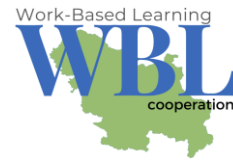
### *Greece*

In Greece, the assessment of apprentices' skills is governed by a combination of formal and informal methods, though significant disparities exist across industries and institutions. The country adheres to the EQAVET framework, which promotes continuous improvement and feedback mechanisms in the evaluation of VET programs. EOPPEP (the National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance) is the primary body responsible for ensuring compliance with these standards in Greece.

The role of mentors in the assessment process is crucial but also presents challenges. In many companies, especially smaller ones, the lack of formal mentor training means that evaluations of apprentices' progress are often limited to verbal feedback or informal observations, without structured documentation of skills development. Larger companies may have dedicated training departments or more formalized assessment practices, but they too face challenges in consistently evaluating transversal skills. Participants in various surveys recommended that



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



mentors receive more formal training to standardize their approach to assessing apprentices, particularly in the areas of transversal and green skills.

Regarding green and digital skills, these competencies are even less likely to be formally assessed. While some progress has been made in integrating green skills into certain VET programs, their assessment remains underdeveloped. Digital skills, which are increasingly integrated into the curriculum, are sometimes evaluated through practical applications and the use of micro-credentials. The introduction of micro-credentials has allowed for a more focused assessment of specific digital competencies, providing a clearer framework for recognizing and certifying these skills. However, these practices are not yet widely adopted, and the overall assessment of digital and green skills remains inconsistent.

While some apprentices receive structured feedback through tools like performance checklists or evaluation cards, many rely on informal, verbal feedback from mentors and supervisors. This lack of formalized documentation means that apprentices may not have a clear understanding of their progress, making it difficult for them to identify areas for improvement. VET schools also report issues with outdated bureaucratic processes and insufficient resources, which hinder the creation of more consistent and comprehensive feedback systems.

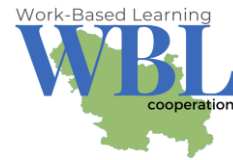
### *North Macedonia*

In North Macedonia, the assessment of apprentices' skills is carried out through both formative and summative approaches. Mentors track students' progress in the workplace using task forms and practical training diaries, while teachers conduct the final assessment based on predefined criteria. The final grade reflects the mentor's evaluation but is formally assigned by the teacher, ensuring alignment with the school's official documentation.

VET centers have more flexibility in choosing assessment methods, often using practical exams in simulated environments alongside written tests. However, resource limitations, such as a lack of



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



equipment and personnel, hinder the assessment process. Many centers suggest that integrating digital tools could help streamline assessments.

Research findings show that teachers and mentors work together to align workplace skills with curriculum outcomes, using practical projects and direct observations to evaluate students. Companies collaborate with schools to set assessment criteria but tend to focus more on practical tasks rather than transversal skills. Although companies provide feedback on apprentices' workplace performance, the formal assessment of transversal, digital, and green skills remains underdeveloped. Policymakers recognize that while mechanisms exist for assessing technical skills, more systematic efforts are needed to evaluate transversal and green competencies.

### *Romania*

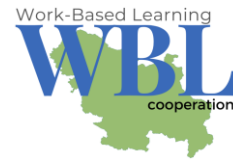
Romania's assessment of apprentices' skills follows ECVET principles, with a focus on certifying learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The final certification process involves a combination of practical assessments, oral interviews, and written exams, conducted by mixed commissions made up of teaching staff and company representatives. The outcome is a professional qualification certificate, supplemented by the Europass certificate, which details the student's competencies in line with European standards.

While the assessment process for technical skills is well-established, the evaluation of transversal, digital, and green skills is less consistent. Companies provide feedback on apprentices' performance during practical training, but the assessment of non-technical skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability is still largely informal. Teachers and company mentors collaborate to evaluate apprentices' competencies, but the criteria for assessing transversal skills are often subjective and lack standardization across sectors.

Further improvement is needed in the assessment of digital and green skills, as these areas are becoming increasingly important in the workplace. The Practical Training Certificate records students' achievements during WBL, but there is little integration of modern digital tools to



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



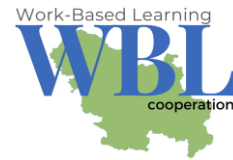
streamline the assessment process. Stakeholders have expressed the need for more comprehensive assessment methods that account for both technical and non-technical skills. While the current system emphasizes practical tasks, there is a growing recognition that the formal assessment of transversal and green skills is necessary to better prepare apprentices for future job market challenges.

*All countries utilize a mix of informal (e.g., verbal feedback) and formal assessment methods (e.g., written exams, evaluation forms) to evaluate apprentices' skills. There is a recognition of the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and industry for effective skill assessment. Most assessment practices emphasize the evaluation of technical and vocational skills, often at the expense of transversal skills.*

*While all countries utilize a blend of informal and formal assessment practices for apprentices, Greece and North Macedonia exhibit more structured frameworks and collaboration with industry. Bulgaria faces challenges in formalizing assessments and providing adequate feedback, while Romania's system is more developed but may still struggle with consistency and the practical application of skills assessments. There is a shared recognition of the need to enhance the assessment of transversal skills across all contexts.*



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### Country-specific recommendations

#### *Bulgaria*

- There is a need for more structured communication between VET institutions and employers, particularly regarding student progress and feedback. Formal feedback mechanisms should be implemented to ensure that students receive regular, documented evaluations of their performance.
- VET institutions should establish formal processes for updating their curricula to reflect emerging skills needs, particularly in the areas of green and digital skills. This could involve greater collaboration with industry stakeholders and the use of trend analysis to anticipate future skills requirements.
- More comprehensive and standardized methods for assessing both technical and transversal skills are needed. This includes developing tools to assess green and digital skills, which are currently underrepresented in most WBL programs.
- VET institutions and employers should work together to develop more formalized systems for collaboration, including regular meetings, structured feedback mechanisms, and joint development of training programs. This will help ensure that apprenticeship programs are aligned with industry needs and that students are receiving relevant training.

#### *Greece*

- While Greece has taken significant steps toward enhancing the alignment and relevance of skills training in apprenticeships, challenges persist.
- Despite the existence of a firm policy framework and ongoing efforts to integrate green, digital, and transversal skills into curricula, there is still a noticeable gap between the skills developed and those demanded by employers.
- There is a need for more coordinated, data-driven initiatives.

To strengthen the skills aspect of WBL programs in Greece, several steps can be taken:



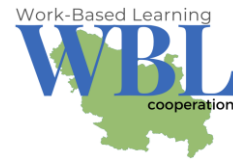
- VET curricula should be redesigned to equip individuals with the specific skills and knowledge needed. The leverage should include collaboration agreements with the industry, competency-based education, development and continuous updating and specialisation of the curriculum for every existing sector, and finally inclusivity, sustainability and social responsibility.
- Training workshops for business mentors should also be offered, so as to ensure that they have the required qualifications, both in terms of theoretical knowledge and in mentoring methodologies.
- Policy-makers and VET providers should make more precise and consistent efforts to fully integrate green skills and the Green Competence Framework throughout all specialties in the VET system.
- VET schools should establish a Framework for regular communication with well-informed Business Providers, in order to combat problems of inconsistency and misinformation.
- It is essential to create links between teachers and in-company trainers. Job shadowing could be used for strengthening such links, with teachers going to train in companies where their students undertake internships.
- Social partner visits to schools can be a valuable tool for informing learners about skills needed in the labour market. A systematic approach to social partner/company visits to schools or for organizing common events should be sought.
- The guidance provided to students at workplaces must relate strongly to the activities of the company employers.

#### *North Macedonia*

- Regularly update curricula to keep pace with rapid technological advancements and changing industry trends, ensuring that future employees gain the new skills and knowledge required.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



- Further strengthen partnerships between educational institutions and businesses, with genuine involvement from the private sector, to provide quality WBL opportunities for all students, enabling them to acquire practical skills and experience valued by employers.
- Improve the accessibility, collection, and analysis of data on skills to ensure that programs and expected educational outcomes continuously adapt to business needs, while ensuring accountability from all involved parties.
- Establish a centralized, standardized database that collects information on skills, expected educational outcomes, and labour market needs.
- Expand and improve the dual model, where students acquire practical knowledge in real work environments and where programs are more flexible.
- Utilize the flexibility in program preparation and implementation of WBL and ferial practice to integrate tasks and activities that enable the acquisition and enhancement of transversal, digital, and green skills.
- Train staff (teachers and mentors) to impart knowledge and design activities that apply transversal, digital, and green skills in real work environments through targeted tasks and activities, as well as to assess students' skills.
- Develop standards and clear, objective criteria for evaluating each skill to enable more objective, fair, and comparable assessments, and ensure continuous training for teachers and mentors focusing on modern/new models of assessment and collaboration, as well as the use of digital tools.

### *Romania*

- Better cooperation between social partners, employers and teaching staff to discuss and ensure a common understanding of the units of learning outcomes linked to work placements.





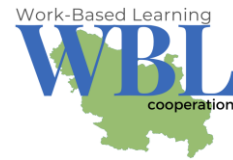
- Continued application of ECVET in Erasmus + projects and transfer into the formal VET system the benefits of using ECVET elements in learning mobility and in this way to adapt training provision to the needs of the labour market.
- When approaching transversal skills, we should refer to the lack of basic skills for a huge majority of VET students, and the desire to build on this complex qualification specific skills.
- Transversal skills are fundamental for employability, occupational mobility, but it is very difficult to transpose the different aspects of learning outcomes into the current teaching and assessment, examination processes which is an area that needs further improvement.
- The development of a methodology for the recognition of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal or informal contexts is imperative to make learning more flexible and more easily accessible, by involving the employers in the whole process.
- The provision by teachers of individualized learning for students is becoming a necessity in today's conditions, and ECVET elements facilitate this; starting from individual learning plans, students can achieve the learning outcomes they are missing, and these can be assessed and recognized, regardless of the context in which they were achieved.
- Guidance and counselling of learners is essential for them to have access to different training routes, and must be provided by specialized staff, but also through the specific work of teachers and influencers, and to this end they need to be further developed.

### General recommendations

Across all countries, the effectiveness of integrating practical training with theoretical knowledge varies widely. There is a recognized need for more consistent approaches to ensure training remains relevant and applicable in real-world contexts. At the same time, a more flexible approach that more extensively involves employers—rather than relying solely on rigid, standardized methods—could make learning more relevant and directly aligned with industry needs. Transversal skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, problem-solving), digital skills, and



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



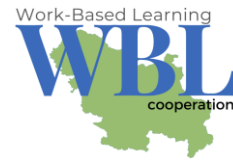
green skills are often underrepresented in curricula and assessments. This gap limits the employability of graduates and their adaptability to evolving job markets. Inadequate feedback systems hinder apprentices' ability to track their progress and improve their skills. Many students receive limited structured feedback, impacting their development. The collaboration between VET institutions and employers is frequently informal and inconsistent, resulting in a disconnect between the skills taught and those needed in the labour market. There is a lack of capacity to effectively forecast future skills needs, particularly in emerging fields like green energy and advanced technologies. This leads to outdated curricula and training programs. Assessment practices for both technical and transversal skills are often not standardized, making it challenging to ensure all apprentices meet required competencies.

#### **General Recommendations:**

1. **Standardize Assessment Practices:** Develop standardized assessment methods across all countries to evaluate both technical and transversal skills consistently. This includes tools for assessing green and digital competencies.
2. **Enhance Curriculum Relevance:** Regularly update VET curricula to reflect current industry needs and emerging skill trends. This should involve collaboration with industry stakeholders to ensure that training is aligned with labour market demands.
3. **Formalize Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement structured feedback systems that allow for regular, documented evaluations of apprentices' performance, enabling them to identify areas for improvement.
4. **Strengthen Employer Collaboration:** Establish formal collaboration frameworks between VET institutions and employers to ensure that apprenticeship programs are relevant and meet industry standards. This could include regular meetings, joint training program development, and shared assessment criteria.
5. **Invest in Teacher and Mentor Training:** Provide training for teachers and business mentors to enhance their ability to deliver effective training and assess skills accurately. This includes incorporating modern pedagogical practices and industry insights.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



6. **Conduct Skill Gap Analyses:** Regularly perform skill gap analyses to understand the evolving needs of the labour market and adjust training programs accordingly. This should involve collaboration between policymakers, educational institutions, and industry representatives.
7. **Utilize Technology for Education:** Invest in digital resources and tools to support teaching, learning, and assessment, particularly in underserved areas. This will help bridge the digital divide and enhance the learning experience.
8. **Promote Lifelong Learning:** Encourage a culture of lifelong learning by recognizing and validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This will help individuals adapt to changing job requirements and enhance their employability.