

# *PRACTICAL GUIDELINES*

*regarding the performance of activities  
at the level of Executing Institution*

*under the project*

*“Swiss Support for the Introduction of the Dual-Track  
Principles in Bulgarian Vocational Education System“  
(DOMINO Project)*

*Version 2016-2017*

## **INTRODUCTION**

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**The project** “Swiss Support for the Introduction of Dual-Track Principles in Bulgarian Vocational Education System” (*DOMINO* project) is implemented as part of the Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Program in the period 2015-2019, together with the Ministry of Education and Science with the support of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Ministry of Economy.

The vision of the project includes a sustainable Bulgarian system for vocational school education where vocational education is closely linked to the business needs. According to this vision vocational schools generate competent, informed and highly skilled workforce able to meet the pressing market needs. This vision looks at the companies as responsible partners of schools; the former are motivated to invest in their workers and cooperate with the state and local authorities. The system of dual vocational education and training is regarded as one of the operational tools and a starting point in attaining this vision.

The main goal of DOMINO is the creation of a reproducible model and the relevant capacity for the introduction of the system of dual vocational education and training in Bulgaria.

## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL**

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The local level projects (called micro-projects) carried out by the Executing Institutions (vocational schools) aim at improving the quality of vocational education and facilitating the access to practical training via:

- More and better opportunities for practice in real work environment;
- Active involvement of the businesses in the development of programs for theoretical and practical education and training by professions and specialties of professions;
- Enhancing the connection between VET outcomes and the needs of the changing labor market;
- Facilitating the transition from school to the labor market or higher education by increasing the quality of VET, and;

- Enhancing the qualification of VET teachers and trainers with specific competencies regarding the organization of practical training in real work environment and in conditions of operational partnership with partnering employers.

### ***PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT***

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This document has been prepared as part of the implementation of DOMINO activities and aims at assisting the school teams in organizing and performing the main activities in the micro-projects as well as in introducing uniform standards in organizing and performing micro-project activities on the local level.

### **Objectives**

The goal of these Guidelines is to assist the Executing Institutions (EI) in the implementation of micro-projects.

The objectives are:

- Assist the Executing Institutions in the management of their micro-projects and the effective implementation thereof;
- Clarify issues that have arisen in connection with the Agreement for Joint Activity and its Annexes;
- Provide practical information which shall be used for reference in the course of implementation of the entire micro-project;
- Provide guidelines for micro-project reporting and monitoring methods and the dissemination and utilization of micro-project outcomes;
- Provide guidelines regarding the financial management of micro-projects;
- Encourage the good interaction between the Executing Institution and partnering employers by setting the operational framework for micro-project implementation.

The rules laid in these Guidelines have been developed in line with the Thematic Fund Agreement which is carried out within the framework of Swiss – Bulgarian Cooperation Program and the Annexes thereof. The implementation of micro-projects carried out by the Executing

Institutions creates conditions for the development of a sustainable mechanism of cooperation between the VET system and the business for practical training of students in real work environment and placing the student in the center of educational process.

### ***STARTING A PROJECT***

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#### **➤ Signing an Agreement for Joint Activity**

A micro-project starts with the conclusion of a tri-lateral Agreement for Joint Activity between the Executing Institution (EI), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Federal Council of Switzerland, represented by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). All micro-project-related activities carried out after 15 September 2016 shall be considered legitimate regardless of the date of signing the Agreement. This means that costs allocated and approved in the project proposal for these activities shall be regarded as legitimate. The Agreement for Joint Activity (herein called the Agreement) includes timeline for activity implementation, funding and eligibility of costs, payment conditions, obligations of EI, reporting mechanisms and deadlines, approved Project Plan (Annex 1 to the Agreement), Project document “Swiss Support for the Introduction of Dual-Track Principles in Bulgarian Education System” (Annex 2 to the Agreement), agreement/s for partnership with employer/s (Annex 3 to the Agreement), mechanisms for amending the Agreement, as well as termination provisions. The Agreement comes into force at the date the three parties sign the Agreement.

Once the Agreement is signed, the micro-project follows the approved plan enclosed in the Project Plan (Annex 1 to the Agreement) and sticks to the approved budget therein. In the course of micro-project implementation numerous activities are carried out which should be in conformity with the main points laid in the Plan. For the smooth commencement of the micro-project, all partnering organizations should be familiar with the goals set in the Plan and the approved budget.

#### **➤ Amending the Agreement**

In the course of micro-project implementation a need may arise to amend certain clauses in the Agreement for Joint Activity. In case the Executing Institution requires any amendment of the Agreement, the request for amendment should be submitted to MoES/PMU no later than 15 days prior to its coming into force unless there are specific circumstances duly justified by the Executing Institution and accepted by Project Management Unit (PMU) and MoES. The amendment shall not have as an objective or outcome the introduction of changes in the Agreement which may question the decision taken in terms of granting financial support. More detailed information regarding all aspects of making amendments and extending or terminating agreements is included in the individual agreements for joint activity.

➤ **Operational partnership groups**

Operational partnership groups (OPG) are nominated groups of representatives of partners in the micro-project (vocational schools, school boards, parents, companies, local authorities and other stakeholders) whose task is to endorse micro-project implementation on the local level. The purpose of an OPG is to guarantee the cooperation between schools and companies and to hold meetings between representatives of vocational schools, school boards, parents, companies, local authorities and other stakeholders. An OPG shall discuss and supports the good cooperation between schools and companies. An OPG may consult and coordinate the feedback of micro-project implementation on the local level. An OPG may provide the implementing partners with recommendations about process improvement and may participate in the review of educational content.

A small budget is allocated in the micro-project budget for the work of OPG to cover operational and special costs provided for in the Project Plan. OPGs shall report their work through minutes from meetings and sessions as well as attendance lists of participants in every meeting.

➤ **Quality assessment and monitoring**

In the course of micro-project implementation, representatives of PMU and/or MoES shall perform monitoring and evaluation of activities. The following aspects shall be in the focus of assessment: quality of activities, outcomes and their utilization. Four main components may be

Four main components may be used for project quality control:

- Monitoring – has the micro-project plan been implemented at any moment of monitoring;
- Is there any need for updating the plan;
- Are the outcomes of the micro-project useful for the target group, i.e. for the participating students and employers;
- Is there any need to fine-tune the expectations, objectives or priorities of the micro-project outlined in the Plan.

The following questions should be addressed during micro-project impact assessment:

- Does the micro-project help participating students increase their employability, knowledge and skills and if not, why and what should be changed?
- Does the micro-project impact positively the work process in the participating organizations and if not, why and what should be changed?
- Do the participating students increase their motivation and if not, why and what should be changed?
- Does the micro-project achieve raised public awareness regarding the benefits and effect of dual-track education, and if not, why and what should be changed?
- Is the sustainability of achieved results guaranteed, will the Executing Institution and the partnering organizations continue to use the new curricula and syllabi developed according to the Swiss model, and if not, why and what should be changed?

### ***MICRO-PROJECT VISIBILITY***

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The Executing Institution (EI) should take all necessary measures to promote the goals of the micro-project and to create conditions for maximum publicity of its achievements before the target groups and the public. The Executing Institution should take measures to raise the awareness about the financial support received through the Bulgarian-Swiss Programme for Cooperation. To that end, the Executing Institution should use the logos and symbols of the Programme which have been provided by the PMU. All activities for micro-project promotion

should be encouraged and coordinated among the Executing Institution, the PMU and MoES. To achieve better visibility, the schools should publish information about the micro-project on their websites.

The standard promotion methods may include:

- Press releases;
- Promotion of the micro-project at various conferences and seminars involving representatives of EI or partner organisations;
- Brochures, posters, information boards, etc.;
- Various kind of promotional materials (memory sticks, pens, etc.);
- Posting information about the micro-project in the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, etc.;

The micro-project promotion raises the reputation of the EI and its partner organisations on a local, regional and even on European level.

#### ***REPORTING TO THE PMU AND TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (MoES)***

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The reporting methods have been set out in the individual agreements for joint activity of every executing institution. Under such an Agreement, an executing institution is obliged to make interim, annual and final reports. These reports should consist of a substantive (descriptive) part and a financial part and they should comply with the model provided by the PMU. Detailed information on reporting intervals and specific requirements for different types of reports has been specified in the individual agreements for joint activity.

#### ***FINANCIAL PARAMETERS***

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Funding through the Bulgarian-Swiss Programme for Cooperation covers 100% of the cost of the micro-projects, provided they are directly linked to the practical implementation of dual track education system to vocational education.

The size of the grant cannot exceed the total amount determined on the basis of the estimated eligible costs in the approved Project Plan annexed to the Agreement for Joint Activity. The maximal annual disbursements under the micro-project have been indicated in the Budget to the Plan.

### ➤ Eligible costs

Eligible costs are the costs that have actually been incurred by the Executing Institution and as such should meet the following general criteria<sup>1</sup>:

- They were incurred between the first and last date of eligibility, according to the Agreement for Joint Activity;
- They were related to the scope of the Agreement and are listed in the budget
- They were proportional and necessary for the execution of the activities;
- They were incurred in order to achieve the goals of the Agreement for Joint Activity and the expected results and in a way which corresponds to the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- The costs are verifiable with primary accounting documents; they were accounted for by the EI and comply with the applicable national accounting standards;
- They comply with the requirements of the applicable tax, insurance and labor legislation.

The costs are deemed to have been incurred at the time of invoicing, payment and actual execution of a supply, service or another eligible activity.

The following categories of costs are considered *eligible*:

- **Monthly scholarships** for students in grades 9 and 10 participating in the dual track form of education, as well as for students in grade 11 before they have entered into employment contract with employers (but not later than the end of the first school term). The amount of the scholarships may be up to BGN 50.00 per student per month. If the partner organisations (employers) assume the responsibility to cover the cost of scholarships, the

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<sup>1</sup>The costs incurred by the Executing Institution must be evidenced with invoices and/or other primary accounting documents.

Executing Institution is obliged to notify the PMU and the MoES.

The Headmaster shall issue an order specifying the students who will take part in the school practice and the place where the latter will be held. This order should be communicated to the heads of partner organisations. The scholarships for the students participating in the project become payable based on an *Application for Project Participation* and a *Contract for Practical Training* signed between the school and the student (parent/guardian of a minor student). Application forms for project participation and the Contract for Practical Training are provided to the Executing Institution by the PMU.

Payment of scholarships should be verified with an attachment to the Headmaster's Order listing the amounts paid with the date of payment, and the three names and signatures of the students. These documents should be submitted to the PMU and the MoES as attachments to the reports required of the EI.

IMPORTANT! In case a student has accumulated more than 5 unexcused absences a month, the monthly project scholarship under the project is to be suspended. The penalty thus imposed should be documented and referred to in detail in the reports submitted by the Executing Institution to the PMU and the MoES. Additionally, the school should notify the parent/guardian of penalized students within a reasonable time period.

- **Work clothes**, if not provided by the partner company. This category of costs should be evidenced with contracts, invoices, payment documents, bank statements, guarantees, acceptance protocols, inventory lists, etc.;
- **Teaching aids and equipment**. These expenses should be proved with contracts, invoices, payment orders, acceptance protocols or cash disbursement forms.
- **Insurance for participating students**. Prior to the start of school practice, accident insurance must be purchased for the students who participate in the dual track form of education. The insurance may be in the form of a group policy covering all participants or, if necessary, individual ones. The incurred expenses should be proved with bank payment orders or cash disbursement forms.
- **Expenses for meetings held under the Operational Partnership Group**. The expenses in this category should be proved with an invoice, list of cost items attached to the invoice,

payment document, event agenda, copy of attendance list containing attendees' three names, contact information and organisation they represent, personal signature, photos of the event (if applicable), copies of presentations (if applicable), materials, lectures used in the course of conducting the activity (if applicable), copy of participants' folders (if applicable), event promotion materials or invitations (if applicable), questionnaires (if applicable), copy of press publications (if applicable), etc.;

- **Project promotion expenses.** Depending on the activities carried out by the Executing Institution for raising the awareness about the project, this category of expenses can be proved, for example, with contracts, invoices, bank payment orders, acceptance protocols, bank statements, etc.

#### ➤ **Ineligible costs**

The following expenses are **not** considered eligible:

- debts or compensations for losses, or debts or fees for servicing them;
- interest due;
- budget items which been funded under a different financial framework;
- land or buildings acquired;
- VAT, to be refunded to the Executing Institution (or, where applicable, to the partners thereof);
- loans extended to third parties;
- donations;
- return on capital;
- expenses declared by the Executing Institution and covered by another activity or EU-funded Programme;
- excessive or unreasonable spending.

#### ➤ **Procedure for reporting the expenses of Executing Institution**

The EI reports its expenses to the PMU and MoES with three types of obligatory reports, within the time periods specified in Art. 5 of the Agreement for Joint Activity: interim reports,

yearly reports and final reports. The reports should be written in two languages, English and Bulgarian, using the forms provided by the PMU.

The interim project report should contain all available financial accounting documents applicable for the reporting period, certified with a “True Copy” inscription, signed and sealed by the responsible official. The interim project reports should correspond to the performed activities and should be supported with copies of financial and accounting documents and the necessary technical evidence for the related activity, also certified with a "True Copy" inscription.

Each report consists of a substantive and a financial part. The report should have the following attachments:

- list of cost justification documents in English and Bulgarian. The forms are to be provided by the PMU;
- certified copies of all cost justification documents related to the reporting period;
- bank identification form completed by the EI's (required for the first report only, subsequently, only in case there is a change of EI's bank).

The EI should also attach scanned copies of all cost justification documents and all applicable documents in an appropriate format to be submitted to the PMU and the MoES.