

DRAFT AMENDMENTS TO BULGARIAN LEGISLATION ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The dual system of training (training during the course of work) is relatively new to Bulgarian industry and the educational system as it was first introduced in 2015 by means of the Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA). The dual system of training was introduced as a response to calls on the side of businesses for measures to address the increasing insufficiency of the work force in regards to certain technical skills. The Ministry of Education and Science has recently released a proposal for amendments to the VETA which aim to further develop the existing legal framework for this type of education and training. At present, the proposal contains several main suggestions, which are discussed in brief below.

Included in the draft proposal are certain *criteria as to which employers* are eligible for participation in programmes for dual training. Assuming that the proposal will be voted for by the National Assembly, companies willing to participate in the dual system will need to meet several standard requirements related to their status and financial situations, such as no pending liquidation/bankruptcy procedures, no liabilities for social security and tax obligations, no criminal convictions of their management, etc.

In addition, employers must also possess a material base allowing for the education/training to comply with the respective national educational standard for professional qualification. Employers must further ensure that their employees occupied in the training meet the respective legislative requirements.

The proposal actually introduces formally *the position of trainer* to the system for the first time. A trainer is determined to be one who guides the education/training in question and for that purpose he/she must hold the proper professional qualifications and have experience of at least three years relevant to the training/education in question. A successful pass from a mandatory training course is also required.

The proposal also provides for a *teacher-methodologist* who would be appointed by the director of the training institution and is meant to ensure the functioning relationship between the employer, the trainer and the educational institution. Similarly to a trainer, he/she must hold the proper professional qualifications and have relative experience of at least three years.

The scope of the training institutions covered by the dual system is planned to be expanded and these shall include secondary schools which educate in various professional fields.

The creation of a publicly available *database of employers* eligible for participation in dual training is also envisaged by the proposed amendments. Employers registered with the system would likely benefit from faster processing and conclusion of training contracts. If an employer is not registered, a training contract may be concluded on the basis of a decision of the director of the relevant training institution following an ad hoc review of the data and documents for compliance with the requirements.

The proposed amendments are expected to contribute to the higher quality of vocational education and thus to the overall business environment in Bulgaria. The amendments are however subject to adoption by the National Assembly and the final text of the VETA remains to be seen.

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