Policy Round Table Discussion on systemic integration of ePortfolio approach in VET system at the New Technology in Education Conference (NTiEC)

Within the project Supporting VET teachers' Continuous Professional Development through ePortfoilo (eReflect), policy round table discussion on systemic integration of ePortfolio approach in VET system in Serbia was held on February 9 at the New Technology in Education Conference (NTiEC), organised by British Council and its partners. More than 6600 teachers, school directors and decision makers registered to attend the event and more than 150 were present in the Insert hall where discussion took place.

At the beginning of the session the video presentation was released, explaining the key elements of ePorfolio and its characteristics, advantages, and levels of integration in school: focusing on individual and personal experience in learning. Video presentation was previously prepared by the eReflect Project team. As an introduction to the discussion, Ms. Milica Grahovac from Centre for Education Policy presented the project, from its background to main activities, project objectives and expected outcomes, and invited representatives of schools to join this initiative. Ms. Tina Zubovic, teacher from Croatia, presented her experience and lessons learnt regarding the ePortfolio use by students of classical ballet. The presenters agreed that ePortfolio provides space for discussion and thorough monitoring of one's progress, improvement of learning skills and self-reflection. In addition, it indirectly contributes to modernisation of teaching with digital content, enhances cooperation and creativity.

After the presentations the Panel discussion took place with four panellists, representatives of national bodies and institutions in charge of education policy making and teacher representative form VET school. Questions for the panellists were previously prepared by the eReflect project team.

In the discussion that followed, Ms. Jelena Najdanovic Tomic, Head of the Department for Standards at the Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation emphasized the importance of ePortfolio for formative assessment of teacher professional development and quality of work of schools. In her opinion, it can be valuable tool for achieving more objective processes of self-assessment and external assessment.

Ms. Tatjana Glisic, Adviser in the Sector for Qualifications Development and School Network at the Institute for the Improvement of the Education underpinned the need to establish a system of portfolios, with conceptual approach, that would encompass portfolios for students, portfolios for teachers, portfolios for curricula and school portfolios. "When the portfolio was introduced in 2012 by the new legislation, there was no systemic support to teachers for its implementation. From 2015, when the term "portfolio" was withdrawn from the Rulebook, teachers quit updating their websites", said Ms. Glisic, underlining the need to define criteria for quality portfolio and provide continuous systemic support to them in this process.

Ms. Marija Krneta, Adviser in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development added the benefits of ePorfolio, and also regular portfolio in the process of pedagogical supervision, as it allows the inspectors to gain better insight into the work of teachers and more accurately and objectively assess the work of a teacher. In her opinion, ePortfolio is beneficial instrument for achieving more efficiency in work and receiving valuable feedback from colleagues, advisers and wider audience.

Since 2012, when the portfolio was introduced on systemic level, there has been no research done on the teachers' use of portfolio (its purpose, quality, etc.). Some insights imply that portfolio has mainly been used in the process of career advancement and external evaluation, while its foremost purpose is learning, self-reflection and personal development. There is however, a question, as Ms. Aleksic said "Is our ethical ecosystem mature enough to support making mistakes", which is necessary for reconsidering the purpose of portfolio: from self-promotion to place where a teacher feels free to develop, be imperfect and make mistakes.

There are numerous challenges in systemic implementation of the ePortfolio: IT infrastructure varies in different parts of Serbia, level of IT skills of the teachers, there are initial costs that should be covered and initial resistance to change overcome. Elaboration of ePortfolio requires time, and there is a question on how to make the best use of all the tools available for its development – maybe solve it on the level of school.

The support that decision makers could provide for wider acceptance of the ePortfolio amongst the teachers in VET schools is the preparation for the change: in order to use it, the teachers need to recognise the personal gain from ePortfolio; not all teachers share the same level of computer literacy; the decision makers should find an appropriate rewarding system, including public acknowledgement, and collect good practice examples and use them are a resource for further support. From the teacher perspective, Mr. Zolt Konja, VET teacher form Electro technics school ,,Mihajlo Pupin" Novi Sad, explained that the adequate support from the system would be in terms of suggesting guidelines for quality ePortfolio and sharing of good practices.

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The New Technologies in Education conference and fair aim to raise awareness of the significance of using new technologies in education. Over the course of the three days the participants can hear over 160 presentations from speakers from Serbia, the region and the UK, share their experiences and ideas. At the fair they have the chance to see and use for themselves products and services of more than 50 international companies that present their technological solutions.

The event was live-streamed and presentations and videos from all sessions will be accessible online within the next one or two months.

For more information please visit http://www.britishcouncil.rs/en/new-technologies