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The e-FOST European Project – a New Chance

Food and drink industry is the third industrial employer in the European Union with more than 26,000 companies across the EU employing around 2.7 million people (the data is available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/food). The fast development of the sector in the EU enhances even more the usually high level of competitiveness on the global market. However, the high standards of the sector still need additional measures to be supported in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the European Union’s participation into the activity of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The food sector improved its position in the R&D sector in the context of the late health safety crises (BSE, Avian flu, foot and mouth disease).

In addition, the recently activated enlargement process made the food industry the largest contributor to the EU-25 value added because in the new member and candidate countries food is still the largest expenditure.

The coherence between quality, safety and competitiveness should be ensured in the legal context. The aim of the regulatory initiatives is to provide high consumer protection and fair practice in European food and agricultural industry. Meanwhile, the work on a regulatory framework should not be too burdensome for the companies and adapted to the national circumstances in the European countries.

e-FOST Project

The main task of the project “E-reference Tools for VET Trainers in Food Industry (e-FOST)” is the development of an innovative programme for continuous training of teachers/trainers in food industry. Additional products are the electronic-based reference tools and a relevant Internet site functioning as a working basis for dissemination and exploitation of the project outcomes. The project network is established around a working team of partners, associated partners and users, which organizes elaboration of the programme and efficient testing and evaluation of the teaching/training material and methods.

The focus of the evaluation procedure should be put mainly on European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) applicability of the outcomes.

The structure of the reference tools is based on modular principle – 1–3 units with flexible content depending on the competence level of the trainees. The project programme is organized as independent courses (learning pathways) evaluated on the basis of ECTS. Industry-specific case studies are used in building an effective model for adult learning. The course materials offer practical information about recent developments in the food industry.

e-FOST promotes a variety of up-to-date approaches for searching, processing, delivery and exchange of specialist knowledge. The training programme uses ad-
vanced methodological practices based on ICT and innovative training content. It covers variety of topics and provides information about the tools and methods that can help the teachers / trainers make the appropriate decisions. Dissemination of the training materials aims also at increasing the understanding of food-related issues.

The range of competence of partner organizations gives the e-FOST training programme and its potential users an excellent opportunity for gaining the necessary recognition in accordance with best practices in the field. The project partnership consists of 5 partners representing Bulgaria and 3 EU countries (Austria, Germany, France, and Italy). The partnership is built on a two-level principle – the project partners and the associated ones. This structure predicts the efficient diffusion of project outcomes and a realistic feedback through consolidation of national and international efforts towards building of efficient European training network in the field of food industry.

The project team introduces a model of collaboration between business and industry, and social and educational organizations, to help the training staff to understand and use modern educational tools.

The resource pool built reflects the European quality criteria compliant principles and gives the VET practitioners knowledge and skills with a significant level of on-the-job experience. The e-tools are encouraged to provide potential employees with a sense of opportunity and to stimulate their creativity and chance of taking the right decision in the job-searching process.

The programme is enhanced by including pre-work and post-work tests as a part of a more formal expert-guided learning experience. The content and structure of the controlling tests are administered by renown professionals in the field.

e-FOST Contributive Value

e-FOST mission is mainly concerned with the increasing demand for balanced information on food issues, such as: safety and quality of food and food products; nutrition and health; and application of new technologies in the food-related industry.

The project e-FOST maintains a network of independent scientific experts, food company specialists, educators, government agencies and consumer organisations for creation of efficient e-based training tools in the field of food industry science and management for improvement of competence and skills of professionals working in this area.

International cooperation with partner countries and organizations like UNESCO and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are one of the major contributions to the development of the target field.

The project outcomes will stimulate teachers’ introduction to new technologies and new lesson patterns, as well as encourage the introduction of lifelong learning into the learning model.

e-FOST aims at harmonization of national and European measures at sectorial level in food industry. It extends the relevant geographical coverage by working within the partners’ network and establishment of links with other programmes and projects.

The newly introduced VET system and practices optimize the European VET system, linking the education and the production process. Thus, it provides the permanent training required by SMEs and the business sector.

The actual project measures present a vision for building a programme that successfully bids to deliver the innovative value and provides an opportunity for extensive education.

e-FOST Partnership

- Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Scientific Research Department (SU-NIS)
- “Intelect” Foundation
- Institute of Polymers, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IP-BAS)
- “Minds” company
- Euroconsulting Ltd.
- “Modrina”
- University Paris Sud
- Bologna University.