

## Linking VET and business service centres

The services sector offers a promising opportunity for economic growth, reducing dependency on the automotive industry which is currently the biggest economic sector in Slovakia. Business service centres (BSCs) are establishing partnerships with training centres and universities to increase the employability of graduates and improve the relevance of education and training provision.

The automotive industry is expected to grow as an increasing number of car manufacturers bring their production plants to the country. Although this growth is well received, concerns have been raised due to the likely impact of the fourth industrial revolution on the 250 000 jobs linked to the industry.

BSCs form a rapidly growing sector in the Slovak economy and can offer an alternative pathway for economic growth. They provide international support services for their parent companies and other subsidiaries or execute specific outsourced business processes for third-parties from abroad. Currently, there are 63 BSCs in 16 cities, with 35 000 employees; in 2015 there were only 35 BSCs.

A BSC forum has been set up, aiming to raise awareness of the sector's role in the Slovak economy and help growth. One of the three main goals of BSC Forum is to cooperate with universities and secondary schools to adjust qualifications and increase the employability of graduates. Its members are active in provision of education and are offering internships both for students and teachers. There are four major actions linking BSC and education structures:

- the Train the trainer course targets university and secondary education teachers. Teachers are offered training in business premises to improve their soft skills and communication competence. In 2017, seven enterprises organised workshops in thematic areas: how to engage the audience; the art of negotiation; teacher-student relationship; continuous improvement and project management; technology and communication; presentation skills; and non-verbal communication;
- the project Send your IT teacher to IBM was based on previous experience from the IBM academic day for university and secondary teachers, hosted by IBM within the European vocational skills week 2017. More than 20 IT teachers were familiarised with open source tools, which can be included in classroom practice; they were informed about cognitive systems under development and trained in artificial intelligence based communication knowledge.
- Skills for success—from university to practice, developed by business people, is part of the curriculum of four major Slovak universities. It is focused on improving those soft skills required by the labour market. Graduates who have successfully completed this course are given a BSC certificate that raises their chances of being recruited in a BSC. The course is composed of five modules: team work; time management; verbal and non-verbal communication; conflict resolution and mind-set; and presentation skills. It is followed by a feedback and evaluation session;
- the Mentor network programme is targeting MA and Ph.D. students, with 50 currently participating. Chief executive officers of participating enterprises will meet a mentee to offer him/her a detailed insight into the company, and tailored advice for his/her career. Subsequent meetings are subject to agreement between the company and the mentee.

In 2017, 46 300 man-hours of training and internships were offered by BSCs to students and teachers; 1 855 university students, 740 secondary students, 170 university professors and 56 secondary teachers were trained, while 465 and 76 internships were offered to university and secondary students, respectively. Over 80% of BSCs forum members cooperate with universities and a third of them with secondary schools.

Read more: [Business Services Center Forum](#)

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