



University of St. Gallen

Center for Governance  
and Culture in Europe



## GCE Research Grant

### for a junior researcher interested in vocational education and training in Central and Eastern European Countries

Policymakers consider increasing the proportion of work-based learning elements in school-based education tracks a key policy tool to achieve economic (higher production, competitiveness), social (education, inclusion, combating youth unemployment), and individual (labour market skills, education-to-employment transition) objectives.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, over the last years, various European policy initiatives (e.g., Bruges communiqué in 2010, Riga conclusions in 2015, European Skills Agenda 2020, European Alliance for Apprenticeships), educational reforms (e.g., curricula reforms, legislative reforms) and pilot projects have been launched. They aim at increasing the availability and quality of work-based learning experience at upper-secondary and tertiary level, primarily within vocational education and training (VET) programs.

Countries in Central and Eastern Europe have been particularly active in launching reforms and initiatives to facilitate work-based learning elements in their predominantly state-led and school-based VET systems.<sup>2</sup> While during socialist times work-based learning predominantly took place in local state enterprises, this connection between school-based and work-based learning environments declined after the 1990s. However, over the last years, new initiatives and elements have been introduced to revive this connection. These elements include among others strengthening social dialogue in educational policy-making processes to organise these learning phases, introducing competence-based curricula, or adopting dual VET laws. A common driver of these reforms is that these countries are, to different degrees, faced with similar structural challenges and developments (e.g., skills mismatches, weak economic competitiveness, deindustrialisation, the rise of the service and knowledge economy, emigration of skilled workforce, population degrowth, youth unemployment, deepening

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop. (2021). *The role of work-based learning in VET and tertiary education: evidence from the 2016 EU labour force survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 80.

European Commission. (2017). *Business cooperating with vocational education training providers for quality skills and attractive futures*. Brussels. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

ILO. (2019). *A framework for quality apprenticeships*. (Report IV(1)). Geneva. International Labour Organisation.

OECD. (2010). *Learning for Jobs*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

UNESCO. (2012). *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012. Youth and Skills. Putting education to work*. Paris: UNESCO.

Winterton, J. & Turner, J.J. (2019). Preparing graduates for work readiness: An overview and agenda. *Education+Training*, 61 (5), 536–551.

<sup>2</sup> In the present context in particular Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

process of EU integration). Today, there is a significant variation in the types of work-based learning taking place, ranging from informal company visits and job shadowing, internships and traineeships to apprenticeships and dual-study programmes.

From a governance perspective, we know that introducing work-based learning phases is highly cooperation-intensive and requires the balancing of competing interests and logics. For example,

- a) *businesses* of different size, with different resources and different skills requirements, need to provide work-based learning opportunities that are potentially costly and do not guarantee a return on investment,
- b) *employer organisations* need to provide services to their members to facilitate work-based learning and organise their interests within the education system and social dialogue processes,
- c) the *state* must balance between keeping the education system attractive to employers interested in strong candidates to train at their premises and at the same time keeping it socially inclusive,
- d) incumbent *decision-makers* and *political parties* need to be committed to implementing the necessary reforms,
- e) *VET school staff* (e.g., teachers and directors) must support the shift from classroom-based learning to work-based environments,
- f) *trade unions* and *parents* must agree that learners in work-based settings receive lower wages than regular workers to create incentives for firms to cooperate, and
- g) *students* and their *parents* must see work-based education programs as an attractive option next to purely school-based and academic education.

To increase our understanding of VET governance in this region, the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE) and the research project GOVPET (Governance of Vocational and Professional Education and Training) are jointly granting a research fellowship to a promising junior researcher from a research institute located in a country in Central and Eastern Europe. The grant-holder should conduct independent research to help us better understand a) how education systems and policies are designed, b) educational institutions and institutional settings are transformed, and/or c) how actors and stakeholders can contribute to overcoming and balancing these logics and interests. In addition, he or she will provide support in the organisation of a research conference. Applicants must be in their late PhD phase or have completed their doctoral programme in political science, economics, business administration, sociology, or education sciences within the last five years. The grant is awarded for a funding period of one year and amounts to 4'800 Euro. The funding period will start in December 2022 (or upon agreement). The executive board of the GCE and senior researchers from GOVPET will evaluate and select the candidates.

## Application

Please send your academic CV, a motivation letter, copies of your diploma and grade transcripts, and one exemplary piece of academic writing (e.g., a research article) to **[gce-info@unisg.ch](mailto:gce-info@unisg.ch)** by **31 August 2022**. For any further questions and information please do not hesitate to contact [linda.wanklin@unisg.ch](mailto:linda.wanklin@unisg.ch).