



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The national research report on the state-of-the-art Slovenia

www.empowering-teachers.eu

WP1 - Deliverable 1.3

January 2022

The creation of this publication has been co-funded by the Erasmus+ grant program of the European Union under grant no. 626148-EPP-1-2020-2-PT-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY. This publication reflects the views only of the author. Neither the European Commission nor the project's national funding agency are responsible for the content or liable for any losses or damage resulting of the use of this publication.



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Version	Date	Comment
01	May 2021	
02	October 2021	
03	November 2021	
04	January 2022	

Authors:

Marko Weilguny, UL

Anrdreja Schmuck, MESS

Miha Lovšin, MESS

Roman Globokar, UL

David Kraner, UL

Urška Jeglič, UL

Matej Purger, UL



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**EMPOWERING TEACHERS PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL
AND SOCIAL CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH
INNOVATIVE PEER - INDUCTION PROGRAMMES**



National report - Slovenia

0. Executive Summary	5
0.1 Lessons from the preparatory study.....	5
0.1.1 Initial training of teachers	5
0.1.2 Career induction programmes	5
0.1.3 Continuous teacher training	7
0.1.4 Systemic possibilities for changes to the framework	8
0.2 Lessons from the field research.....	8
0.2.1 Teacher situation and needs.....	8
0.2.2 Teacher induction programmes.....	9
0.2.3 Mentor capacitation programmes.....	9
0.3 Additional notes.....	10
1. National Context: Slovenia	12
1.1 The teachers' career in Slovenia: an overview	12
1.2 Main actors	12
1.2.1 Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport	13
1.2.2 Public institutions.....	14
1.2.3 Universities.....	15
1.2.4 Schools	15
1.3 Teachers initial training	16
1.4 Continuous teachers training opportunities for teachers induction and career diversification	17
1.4.1 Teachers induction.....	17
1.4.2 Continuous training.....	18
1.5 Formal and non-formal induction programmes and practices.....	19
1.6 Formal and non-formal mentoring programmes and practices for teachers peer-support	20
1.7 How the national framework can evolve to integrate formal teachers induction programmes and mentoring programmes.....	21
2. Teachers Needs	23
2.1 Perception, satisfaction & motivation	23
2.2 Initial teacher training.....	24
2.3 Induction programmes	24
2.4 Mentoring	26
2.5 Induction programmes at the school.....	27
3. Main Features of Formal Induction and Mentoring Programmes	29
3.1 Induction programmes	29
3.1.1 Content of the induction programme.....	29
3.1.2 Structure of the induction programme.....	31
3.2 Mentoring	32



0. Executive Summary

0.1 Lessons from the preparatory study

0.1.1 Initial training of teachers

The initial teacher education is carried out by universities or their members, as well as single higher education institutions. The study programmes that offer teacher training qualification can be concurrent (study programmes of one or two subjects of teaching leading to the professional title of professor of one or two subjects (a second cycle study programmes, leading to the professional title Magister Professor or Professor, or a study programme that includes the relevant professional content)) or consecutive (study programmes, which impart necessary knowledge about the subject of teaching or the field of education, but do not provide the necessary professional courses for acquiring the required teaching skills. To obtain relevant pedagogical knowledge a person has to complete a postgraduate non-degree teacher training programme (supplementary study programme), amounting to a minimum of 60 ECTS).

So, all teaching professionals receive their initial training at the appropriate institutions offering tertiary education (or in some instances of pre-school assistants also vocational secondary). There are three public universities in Slovenia and each of them has a Faculty of Education. There are however many pedagogical studies that are offered by other faculties from their respective professional fields. Combining the pre-bologna reform programmes and the ones currently being implemented there are 170 studies that can enable a graduate to receive a pedagogical degree (for all levels of education).

For a teacher to be considered fully qualified, they must – in addition to his formal initial training education – pass the professional examination. In order to be able to approach the examination he must have the appropriate formal degree, sufficient number of hours of work experience, and the approval of his mentor and head teacher based on the required lesson implementations.

0.1.2 Career induction programmes

Teachers in Slovenia enter the pedagogical profession in two ways: through induction programmes or by applying for open recruitment job positions advertised by schools. The induction system is not compulsory and schools may – on vacancies – hire teachers beginners (with finished adequate initial teacher education) who have yet to take the state professional examination to be fully qualified. Schools must hire teachers already holding the professional certification and can hire applicants without it only if no teachers with qualification have applied.

There are two **formally implemented induction programmes** run by the Ministry of Education, Science and sport (MESS) and co-funded also by the ESF. These programmes are in part based on a traineeship programme that is described in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act and has not effectively been run since 2014. In this same period, the ESF programmes “First Employment” and “Learning to be a Teacher” have been the entry point into the profession for about 10 % of new teachers every year.



Under those programmes teachers beginners enter the profession by initially undergoing practical training under the mentorship of an experienced teacher, gradually taking over more responsibility. In the induction programme, they familiarise themselves with the contents so they can work independently and prepare for the teaching professional examination. The induction programme is prepared by the mentor who has to comply with certain requirements ensuring their expertise in cooperation with the teacher beginner. The mentor is appointed by the school headmaster.

The induction programme includes the familiarisation with the actual subject-specific teaching processes in the pre-school institution or school and with various methods and forms of teaching. Teacher beginners deepen their knowledge of and improve their skills in subject-specific didactics. They learn to design lesson plans, prepare lessons and execute them while observing the mentor's lessons and other teachers. They cooperate with classroom management and the leadership of the school, organising parent meetings and consultations. In addition, they gain knowledge and skills outside their pre-school institution or school, particularly in areas important to the teaching professional examination. The headteacher appoints the mentor for trainees for the period of 10 months.

Teachers beginners applying for **open recruitment job positions** work independently and to a lesser extent, they receive mentoring support. Their initial work is still based on the interaction with mentor and headteacher. The mentor is at least formally appointed for a teacher beginner since it is required to obtain a positive evaluation of the mentor to be able to approach the professional examination.

The competencies of teacher beginners for individual work in education are being examined at the teaching professional examination at the end of the induction period or after gaining the prescribed work experience. The professional examination is a national examination and is taken at the Ministry. Applicants must have the relevant educational qualification and relevant experiences in educational work, and they have to carry out certain activities which have to be submitted before making an application for teaching professional examination (successfully assessed teaching presentations graded by the mentor and the headmaster in the school/educational institution). After passing the professional examination, teachers acquire a full professional qualification to pursue the profession independently.

Formal induction programmes in existence are the path into the teaching profession for approximately 10% of young professionals. The above described programmes “First Employment” and “Learning to be a Teacher” have stricter requirements for mentoring and supporting the teachers and schools are motivated to enter these programmes as the teacher trainee positions are financed by the Ministry for the entire traineeship period (of 10 months for teachers and 5 months for kindergarten assistants). Schools later must employ these trainees for at least a half-time employment for at least 6 months (or 2 months for kindergarten assistants).

It is interesting to note that the most recent and relevant existing survey of Slovenian teachers (with a representative sample of 4297 teachers) TALIS 2018 also shines some light on the implementation of these programmes in practice. **In Slovenia 48% (compared to 58% in the OECD) of teachers report that they were not included in any kind of formal or informal induction practices** at their current schools. Furthermore only **5 % of teachers in Slovenia (compared to 22% in the OECD) have had a mentor in the induction period to their profession.**



0.1.3 Continuous teacher training

After obtaining full qualifications, a teacher might progress along his career path and receive specific grades of his proficiency. There are three titles that a teacher might earn that are connected with years of carrying out his profession, the evaluations of his superior, points for continuous teacher trainings and points for additional professional activities (among them one can find also mentoring teachers beginners). These titles are mentor, counsellor and alderman.

Training for in-service teachers or **continuous professional development of teachers (CPD)** is one of the requirements for **the career progression**. The participants at CPD programmes are awarded points that they can use in relation to their promotion to professional titles.

CPD is also a right and duty of all educational staff. It is defined by law and the Collective agreement for the educational activity, as well as with the relevant Rules. The collective agreement determines the right of the educational staff to 5 days of CPD per year, or up to 15 days over three years. The Ministry organises and finances CPD with the aim of the professional development of education staff, the development of schools, as well as the development of the system as a whole and thereby improving its quality and efficiency.

Every year, the Ministry responsible for the field of education announces a public call for proposals and co-financing of continuous development programmes. The Ministry outlines the priority topics and fields. The Council of experts for general education defines priority themes on the recommendation by the Ministry and in cooperation with the development and counselling institutes. The programmes are then selected by the tender commission and approved by the Minister's decision.

Schools plan the CPD for their education staff in the annual work plan. It is up to teachers to decide on the training programmes they want to take (usually together with the headteacher). The training for changes of major curricular or other reforms is either compulsory or recommended. The CPD programmes could also qualify teachers for different posts, for teaching a new subject or a subject on a higher level (supplementary study programmes). Providers of these programmes are higher education institutions that have developed and implemented the programmes in accordance with the rules on higher education.

Shorter CPD programmes of career development aimed at professional and disciplinary development of education staff include: programmes of professional training, thematic conferences, extraordinary programmes, as well as project programmes. These programmes are offered by a variety of institutions and are appraised and accredited by the ministry that compiles a yearly catalogue of continuous professional development programmes (KATIS).

There are usually some CPD programmes that focus on mentoring or coaching, but there are not many of them and they are not highlighted. **The career progression** of teachers is segmented in **three ranks** (mentor, counsellor and alderman), connected with appropriate professional titles. The first title that a teacher obtains on this path is the title of mentor. A teacher holding this title can be appointed as a supervisor to a teacher beginner (on his path to professional examination) but this has no real significance for the mentor himself. Mentoring a teacher beginner only brings the mentor a small number of points that can help him on his career progression path.



0.1.4 Systemic possibilities for changes to the framework

Any programmes developed should be well integrated with the national teachers professional examination. Since the examination presents a natural and organic stepping stone in the career development of a young teacher, it would be very sensible and logical to include the completion of a formal programme of induction as one of the requirements to approach the examination.

With only 10% of teachers currently participating in such induction programmes, it is a systemic reality in Slovenia that young teachers' first teaching experiences are often scattered and not always very well structured. A programme that could be easily integrated into the Slovenian context, based on the initial field research, would be a modular programme. One where different teaching competencies would be divided into segments and where novice teachers could work on specific segments at specific times in their employment (possibly supervised by different mentors for each of the segments).

Since this programme would be intended for all teachers prior to approaching their professional examination, the programme would need to be predominantly self-sustained in an online environment (and not subjected to in-person training sessions). There could be some content that teachers would need to go over, there could be some assignments, and some feedback from the mentors required. The final evaluation of the completion of various segments would be subject to self-assessment of the teacher beginner in combination with an external feedback from the appointed mentor. In order for a teacher to be able to take the professional examination, all modules of the course should be finished.

On the other end, experienced teachers could be better motivated to take on the role of mentors. The system would need to be similar to the one for the induction programmes, as all teachers would be required to finish the programmes in order to advance on the track of their career titles. In order to reach the first title of mentor, a teacher would have to complete the training modules. In order for a teacher to reach the second title of counsellor, they would need to actually mentor a beginner teacher through a number of modules.

0.2 Lessons from the field research

0.2.1 Teacher situation and needs

Teachers in Slovenia report the greatest deficiency in their competencies coming out of initial training carried out at the universities as being the lack of practice. They are usually formally well prepared, they have their qualifications and along with them a significant mastery of the subject matter that they are covering. On the other hand they express discontent with the level of pedagogical skills and concrete didactical techniques and specifically finding their role in the classroom in dealing with concrete situations. They are rather highly motivated for their work and normally express high levels of willingness and desire to attend various in-service trainings.

The situation requiring them to obtain enough experience to approach the professional examination leading to splitting up the first couple of employments to various institutions, teachers often express the need for the availability of an on site support. This support is primarily expressed in a desire for an appointed mentor, a go-to person that would be able to give them some concrete situation specific advice as well as a general atmosphere



of acceptance and welcomeness by the entire staff. Additionally, there is a great benefit that could be seen in a sort of practice sharing peer support group.

A very significant need that is also expressed among the teachers would be a sort of psychological support/training. Even the experienced teachers state that they see some deficiencies in their knowledge and applicable skills to better understand young people and their specific situations, struggles, challenges. Besides the knowledge of basic psychology that would improve teachers in class demeanor towards students, some sense of empoweredness towards a better mental health management for the teachers themselves would also be quite beneficial.

0.2.2 *Teacher induction programmes*

Based on the research a model that could be suggested as one that would be appreciated and welcomed by the teachers in Slovenia would lean heavily on the aspects of mentoring and a teaching/school community and leave room for a lot of self-reflection for the beginner teacher under appropriate mentorship, guidance. It is stressed very much that an on-site availability of the mentor that also still has some direct pedagogical obligations in addition to the mentoring would be a great benefit to the induction process.

A structure of the programme would need to be concentrated to a year or two, a period during which it would be necessary to some extent to relieve the new teacher of at least a small part of their regular obligations. In this time approximately 4 hours of direct involvement with the programme would be seen as appropriate and useful.

The main point of what would be desirable for such a programme that can be drawn from the field research is that it should above all be constructed as practically as possible. It is important to leave enough time and space for reflection and self-evaluation and planning but the main emphasis should be on learning-by-doing. New teachers would need to be active as a part of the induction activities and supported in these activities.

For this matter observing lessons by the mentor, performing joint lessons, having the mentor attend their lessons and guide them through the process of reflection would be appropriate. A periodical 1:1 meeting with the mentor and periodical sessions aimed at sharing the examples of good practice, experience obtained would also help expand the horizons while maintaining a sense of practicality.

0.2.3 *Mentor capacitation programmes*

In so far as mentoring is concerned there seems to be a significant motivation among teachers to disseminate their knowledge and experience to younger colleagues. Main motivations for an experienced teacher to assume a role of the mentor are to expand on the path of career diversification, recognition of experience and competence, being awarded a responsible role and position. Though financial incentive and less direct pedagogical obligations are seen as motivational elements, they are not seen as most important ones.

Even experienced teachers express that they would prefer maintaining at least part of their pedagogical work, but usually no less than 50%. It seems important both for new and experienced teachers that mentors have hands on experience and are staying in touch with the reality on the field.



When it comes to the character of the mentors the personal, relational aspects are seen as those of paramount importance in comparison to the requirements of pedagogical, professional expertise. Mastery of own subject is a sort of presumed given. What new teachers express as important for them is that they would have approachable mentors who would be willing to listen, patient and good communicators.

For this to be achieved it is crucial that mentors enter into a sort of collegial relationship where though not symmetrical the relationship bares some mutuality. The mentors need to make sure not to appear as an unreachable ideal of the teaching profession but rather imperfect human beings willing to improve and continuously learn and progress on their path. Obstacles, mistakes need to be presented as a part of the learning procedure so that new teachers can feel that they are accepted and despite their possible struggles have the potential to develop a successful and fruitful career in education.

Besides some required experience it is very necessary that mentors in addition to personal qualities have the desire to assume the role. It is widely considered that teachers need to be invited, motivated or encouraged to become mentors and not forced or designated.

When it comes to an appropriate design of a programme, once again the need for practicality has been widely expressed among teachers. A peer support group for sharing examples of good practice and a training delivered by experienced teachers who have exemplified successful mentorship would be seen as desirable by the teachers. Among the theoretical knowledge and skills to be covered by such a capacitation training aspects of psychology were underlined as important. Both gaining a better understanding of the students and especially understanding the logic of a mentor-mentee relationship are the desired goals of such course matters.

Some of the various topics that would be seen as beneficial for a capacitation programme include: various mentoring styles, coaching, concrete techniques for giving feedback, guiding self-reflection sessions, methods on how to actively conduct joint lessons, active listening and also constructing a conducive atmosphere in the general teaching staff.

Concrete tools to be used in the process to guide observations, give feedback, help the new teacher plan their work and similar would also be beneficial.

0.3 Additional notes

In Slovenia a development of a unified formal teacher induction programme is seen as one of the ways to progress the desirability of the teaching profession which is an important mission to all the stakeholders in the field of education. In the coming years there will be a very significant shift of generations and the teachers that will be retiring according to the current rates will not be replaceable within the current system. For this matter it is important to work towards higher enrolment into pedagogical studies as well as to put solid induction programmes in place to potentially bridge some upcoming deficits in new teacher qualifications.

The National Institute for Education has been developing a programme for both new teachers and mentors in the recent years which was brought to the attention of the project partners in the period of concluding with this national report. The Ministry has taken appropriate steps to more fully include this public institution into the project national consortium. It needs to be emphasized that the Ministry being the public authority with the power



to promote legislation and regulations has serious intentions in reforming the system to better ensure some level of concrete induction (not only time passed) to be a requirement to approach the professional examination and also to include mentoring as one of the conditions to progress a teacher's career.

This means that in the Slovenian context this project will have to work hand in hand with the reform of the regulations to the formal teacher career progression path (which is underway) and also to coordinate in part with the universities providing initial training and the National Institute for Education when it comes to the existing structures in Slovenia. This is both a limiting factor to the freedom that we will have within the consortium in our national context and also a potential benefit that could help us reach greater potential and greater systemic impact.



1. National Context: Slovenia

1.1 The teachers' career in Slovenia: an overview.

Teachers enjoy professional autonomy and the headteachers have the autonomy in accordance with requirements to employ teachers of their own choice.

All teaching professionals receive their initial training at the appropriate institutions offering tertiary education (or in some instances of pre-school assistants also vocational secondary). There are 3 public universities in Slovenia and each of them has a Faculty of Education. There are however many pedagogical studies that are offered by other faculties from their respective professional fields. Combining the pre-bologna reform programmes and the ones currently being implemented there are 170 studies that can enable a graduate to receive a pedagogical degree (for all levels of education).

In the sphere of career development for teachers, there are some provisions for the induction of teachers beginners and some incentive for experienced teachers to mentor their younger colleagues. For a teacher to be considered fully qualified, he must pass the professional examination. And in order to be able to approach the examination he must have the appropriate formal degree, sufficient number of hours of work experience and the approval of his mentor and headteacher based on the required lesson implementations. To facilitate the attainment of all of these conditions there are currently two programmes for teachers beginners in place but these programmes are attended by only 10 % of teachers entering their profession.

After obtaining full qualifications, a teacher might progress along his career path and receive specific grades of his proficiency. There are **three titles that a teacher might earn** that are connected with years of carrying out his profession, the evaluations of his superior, points for continuous teacher trainings and points for additional professional activities (among them one can find also mentoring teachers beginners). These titles are **mentor, counsellor, and alderman**.

1.2 Main actors

The Slovenian education system is organised into several levels of education:

Pre-school education is optional, and encompasses the early general pre-school education and care. Children can enroll as early as at the age of 11 months and attend it until they start basic school.

Compulsory basic education is organized in a single-structure nine-year basic school attended by pupils aged 6 to 15 years.

Upper secondary education takes 2 to 5 years (typical age of students: 15-19). Educational programmes include vocational, professional, and general programmes.

Tertiary education includes short-cycle higher vocational education and higher education study programmes. First cycle higher education programmes encompass professional and academic study programmes (typical age of students: 19-22). Short-cycle higher vocational education is provided by higher vocational colleges that offer two-



year vocational education (typical age of students: 19-21). The first, second and third cycle study programmes are offered by public or private universities and single higher education institutions.

Adult education is marked by its considerable diversity of programmes and institutions.

Education system of the Republic of Slovenia is organised as a public service rendered by public and private institutions that provide officially recognized or accredited programmes. On the levels of pre-school, basic, and secondary education over 95% of the population attend programmes in institutions with public founders (state or municipality).

Institutions are controlled by the founders' appointment of representatives to governance bodies, public funding, salary system, adoption of common rules and guidelines of public service, centrally adopted curricula, etc. All providers of public service are also under the supervision of the school inspectorate.

There are several institutions that hold specific roles and need to be considered as instrumental in any efforts and approaches towards specific systemic changes.

1.2.1 Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport

The governmental authority overseeing the field of education in Slovenia is the **Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport**. The organisational units of the ministry (Legal Service, Finance Service, Department of Educational Development and Quality, and sectoral directorates) offer support from their fields to both school leaders and teachers.

The part of the Department of Educational Development and Quality is the Development of Human Resources in Education Unit, which performs tasks related to the education staff in the fields of pre-school education, basic and secondary education, music education, special education needs, and adult education. It takes care of the career path of professionals in education at all stages: initial teacher education, entry into the profession, induction period, support for taking the state professional examination, for continuous professional development, promotion to the titles, recognition of professional qualifications.

The Development of Human Resources in Education Unit:

- **Organizes and monitors traineeships for teachers** (the Ministry advertises open recruitment trainee job positions, applicants are selected and placed by the Ministry),
- **Organizes and carries out the performance of the professional examination in education** (this state examination for teachers is taken at the Ministry),
- **Plans, coordinates and develops continuing professional development of teachers:** it announces a public call for proposals and co-financing of programmes, outlines the priority topics and fields (on the basis of the decision of the Council of experts for general education and in co-operation with the development and counselling institutes), carries out the selection of programmes (the tender commission) and provides professional and operational assistance in implementing the CPD programmes,
- **Plans, organizes, and manages procedures and implements study support** (study aids) for teachers who work in kindergartens and schools (through a public call for grants),
- **Manages the procedures for the promotion of educational staff to titles,**



- Offers support to school leaders on educational staff's professional qualification, planning, professional and career development...

1.2.2 Public institutions

There are several **public institutes** that have been established at the state level to provide various forms of support to teachers and school leaders: National Education Institute (the main national research, development and consultancy institution in pre-school, basic and general upper secondary education), National Institute for Vocational Education and Training (the central Slovenian institution dealing with development, research and counselling in vocational and technical education), Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (the main national institution for research and development of adult education and a partner in the lifelong learning strategy), National School of Leadership in Education (the national institution for training and professional development of school leaders).

The institutes provide advisory service for staff and leaders in education, organise continuous professional development (CPD) of education staff and leaders, organises and carries out the mobility of staff in education...).

The National Education Institute provides various forms of support for teachers and schools (aimed at the development of professional competencies):

- Seminars, study groups, mentor networks,
- Consultation, project work,
- Thematic conferences,
- Symposiums and professional conferences,
- Multiplier training,
- Professional publications.

The consultants from the National Education Institute also coordinate work of teachers of the same subject or subject area which are organized as a regional study group.

The main support for the school leaders and other school management staff is the **National School of Leadership in Education**. **Leadership of schools is the responsibility of headteachers. They assume two roles: the role of an educational leader and the role of an executive manager.** In public institutions divided into organisational units, the managerial function may be the responsibility of a director, while the function of the pedagogical leadership in the organizational unit may be the responsibility of a headteacher. If the school has a branch school, the headteacher appoints the head of the branch, whose tasks are usually defined with internal rules or the headteacher. Assistant headteachers do managerial work as assigned to them by headteachers, and act as deputies in the absence of headteachers.

The **National School of Leadership in Education** was established for training and professional development of school leaders and candidates for school leaders. Activities of the National School of Leadership in Education



include professional development, training and other educational programmes, publishing books, journals and proceedings as well as promoting research and experimental development in education. The National School of Leadership in Education provides support to headteachers in their first year of appointment and throughout the whole management period, new headteachers can enroll in the programme mentoring for newly appointed headteachers, there are also programmes to support to headteachers with objectives to provide headteachers with support in the scope of legal and financial operations (headteachers may also make an appointment for a consultative visit of the institution), programmes with the aim to improve the management practices of headteachers after active period in school managing (the headteachers development programme is designed for headteachers after two mandates of headship, when a need emerges to acquire additional knowledge and skills; the programme is composed of four intertwined methods of work: three three-day modules, one one-day elective activities, mutual advisory work and project work) and other programmes.

The programmes of the National School of Leadership in Education introduce new forms of networking for the development of school leadership.

The respective Ministry and the National School of Leadership in Education annually convene a national professional conferences for headteachers of kindergartens, basic schools and upper-secondary schools (by separate levels). On those events, headteachers discuss new details of the upcoming school year.

1.2.3 Universities

There are three public universities in Slovenia and each of them has a Faculty of Education included as a member of the university. Some of the teachers receive their initial training at these faculties, while there are a number of other faculties that also offer a pedagogical education in their specific study field.

In addition to the first and second study cycles these faculties (and the Department of Pedagogics at the Faculty of Arts) also offer supplementary modules that allow professionals without appropriate pedagogical knowledge to gain sufficient education to enter the teaching profession (provided that they have prior knowledge of their subject-matter field).

Traditionally, universities also offer some shorter CPD programmes intended for teachers continuous training.

1.2.4 Schools

At an important level **schools** also directly play an important role in the process of the formation of young professionals. Public schools have counselling services. They operate by the national programme guidelines that specify among other, the work areas of the counselling service. Counselling staff pursues three related and often intertwined types of activities: help and support, development and preventive activities, as well as planning and evaluation. The counselling service among other things provides support and assistance to pupils, and parents, but also to teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well in the field of interpersonal relations. The school counsellors are psychologists, pedagogues (also social, special and rehabilitation (including speech and language therapist) and inclusive), social workers and graduates of the study programme Supervision, personal and organisational counselling.



The basic school may employ an additional teacher or school counsellor who offers Roma children learning and other assistance.

Teachers of the same subject or the same subject field in school form an expert working group, which discusses issues related to a subject or a subject field, harmonise criteria of assessment, propose improvements in education to the school assembly of teachers, discuss comments made by parents and students, and perform other expert duties defined in the annual plan.

The headteachers of different schools cooperate with each other, they have their own respective associations.

1.3 Teachers initial training

Legislation regulating the initial teacher education determines the general educational qualification conditions that teachers have to meet: the law determines the level of education and the pedagogical-andragogical knowledge, implementing regulations determine the relevant field of education.

The Organisation and Financing of Education Act specifies the level of education: teachers of general subjects in basic and secondary schools in Slovenia must have the educational qualification of a second cycle study programme in the relevant field, and teachers of professional subjects in secondary schools must have the educational qualification of at least a first cycle study programme in the relevant field. The law specifies also the pedagogical or pedagogical-andragogical training required to pursue the educational work. Teachers at vocational and technical schools must have the relevant work experience, as well. General educational and pedagogical-andragogical professional requirements apply to teachers in adult education, as well as teachers of children with special needs. The latter must have the relevant special pedagogical educational qualification.

The initial teacher education is carried out by universities or their members, as well as single higher education institutions. The study programmes that offers teacher training qualification can be concurrent (study programmes of one or two subjects of teaching leading to the professional title of professor of one or two subjects (a second cycle study programmes, leading to the professional title Magister Professor or Professor, or a study programme that includes the relevant professional content) or consecutive (study programmes, which impart necessary knowledge about the subject of teaching or the field of education, but do not provide the necessary professional courses for acquiring the required teaching skills). To obtain relevant pedagogical knowledge a person has to complete a postgraduate non-degree teacher training programme (supplementary study programme), amounting to a minimum of 60 ECTS.

The study programmes are usually implemented at two cycles. All first cycle pedagogical study programmes give access to the second and third cycle study programmes and all second cycle study programmes give access to third cycle study programmes. First cycle pedagogical study programmes are 3 to 4-year university study programmes. The second cycle study programmes take 1 to 2 years to complete. The study at both cycles takes together 5 years. There are also few integrated pedagogical study programmes and take 5 years, as well.

Study programmes for teachers at ISCED 1 level of basic school are integrated: professional, general and subject components are inseparably intermingling. Study programmes for teachers at ISCED 2 level of basic school and teachers of general subjects at upper secondary schools are concurrent: they can be semi-integrated at the first



cycle (hybrid) and modular at the second cycle. In the modular structure of the second cycle study programme, students can study concurrently or consecutively. The standard pedagogical module is comprised of 20 to 40 percent of practical-vocational and theoretical content. The initial education of teachers of technical and practical subjects in vocational education typically follows the consecutive model. Experts with work experience in a particular field and a first cycle or second cycle degree with relevant subject knowledge have to complete a supplementary pedagogical-andragogical study programme.

The basic initial **headteacher** education is the same as for the teachers because they must have the same qualifications as they apply for teachers or school counsellors. In addition, candidates for principals must have at least 5 years of work experience in education and the title counsellor or councillor (or the title mentor for at least 5 years). Next phase of initial head teacher training is the training programme leading to the license for head teacher, the headship license programme. The training programme for prospective head teachers of 144 hours of attendance encompasses 6 modules, optional subject matters, and a programme completion. The goal of the programme is to train participants for the tasks of school and kindergarten leadership and management as defined within education legislation, as well as to develop knowledge, skills and competences contributing to personal and organisational efficiency. The headship license is the overall requirement and it must be acquired within one year of the appointment for the head teacher.

1.4 Continuous teachers training opportunities for teachers induction and career diversification

1.4.1 Teachers induction

Teachers in Slovenia enter the pedagogical profession in two ways: through induction programmes or by applying for open recruitment job positions advertised by schools. Induction system is not compulsory and schools may – on vacancies – hire teachers beginners (with finished adequate initial teacher education) who have yet to take the state professional examination to be fully qualified. Schools must hire teachers already holding the professional certification and can hire applicants without it only if no teachers with qualification have applied.

There are two *formally implemented induction programmes* run by the Ministry and co-funded also by the ESF. These programmes are in part based on a traineeship programme that is still described in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act and has not effectively been run since 2014. In this same period the programmes “First Employment” and “Learning to be a Teacher” have been the entry point into the profession for about 10% of new teachers every year.

Under those programmes teachers beginners enter the profession by initially undergoing practical training under the mentorship of an experienced teacher, gradually taking over more responsibility. In the induction programme they familiarise themselves with the contents so they can work independently and prepare for the teaching certification examination. The induction programme is prepared by the mentor who has to comply with certain requirements ensuring their expertise in cooperation with the teacher beginner. The mentor is appointed by the head master.



Induction programme includes the familiarization with the actual subject-specific teaching processes in the pre-school institution or school and with various methods and forms of teaching. Teacher beginners deepen their knowledge of and improve their skills in subject-specific didactics. They learn to design lesson plans, prepare lessons and execute them while observing the mentor's lessons and other teachers. They cooperate with classroom management and the leadership of the school, organising parent meetings and consultations. In addition, they gain knowledge and skills outside their pre-school institution or school, particularly in areas important to the teaching professional examination. The headteacher appoints the mentor for trainees for the period of 10 months.

Teachers beginners applying for *open recruitment job positions* work independently and to a lesser extent, they receive mentoring support. Their initial work is still based on the interaction with mentor and head teacher. The mentor is at least formally appointed for a teacher beginner since it is required to obtain a positive evaluation of the mentor to be able to approach the professional examination.

The competencies of teacher beginners for individual work in education are being examined at the teaching professional examination at the end of the induction period or after gaining the prescribed work experience. It is a national examination and is taken at the Ministry. Applicants must have the relevant educational qualification and relevant experiences in educational work, and they have to carry out certain activities which have to be submitted before making an application for teaching professional examination (successfully assessed teaching presentations graded by the mentor and the head master in the school). After passing the professional examination, teachers acquire a full professional qualification to pursue the profession independently.

The National School of Leadership in Education provides special support to head teachers before and after the appointment. For candidates for head teachers it implements one-year training preceding head teacher's appointment (Headship license program). For head teachers in the first year of headship they have a programme Mentoring for newly appointed head teachers, which is intended for the systematic support and assistance for head teachers at the beginning of their mandate. The programme is implemented in the form of five one-day meetings of newly appointed head teachers and mentors to head teachers. Following every meeting, intermediate activities take place, as well as individual collaboration between the mentor (experienced head teacher) and the newly appointed head teacher.

1.4.2 Continuous training

Training for in-service teachers or continuous professional development of teachers (CPD) is a right and duty of all educational staff. It is defined by law and the Collective agreement for the educational activity, as well as with the relevant Rules. The collective agreement determines the right of the educational staff to 5 days of CPD per year, or up to 15 days over three years. The Ministry of Education organises and finances CPD with the aim of the professional development of education staff, the development of schools, as well as the development of the system as a whole and thereby improving its quality and efficiency.

Every year, the Ministry responsible of Education announces a public call for proposals and co-financing of continuous development programmes. The Ministry outlines the priority topics and fields. The Council of experts for general education defines priority themes on the recommendation by the Ministry and in co-operation with



the development and counselling institutes. The programmes are then selected by the tender commission and approved by the Minister's decision.

Schools plan the CPD for their education staff in the annual work plan. It is up to teachers to decide on the training programmes they want to take (usually together with the head teacher). The training for changes of major curricular or other reforms is either compulsory or recommended. The CPD programmes could also qualify teachers for different posts, for teaching a new subject or a subject on a higher level (supplementary study programmes). Providers of these programmes are higher education institutions that have developed and implemented the programmes in accordance with the rules on higher education.

Shorter CPD programmes of career development aimed at professional and disciplinary development of education staff include: programmes of professional training, thematic conferences, extraordinary programmes, as well as project programmes. These programmes are offered by a variety of institutions and are appraised and accredited by the ministry that compiles a yearly catalogue of continuous professional development programmes (KATIS).

The participants at CPD programmes are awarded points that they can use in relation to their promotion to professional titles.

CPD of teachers is state-funded – teachers get paid leave of absence (teachers may take the training during their regular work) and their travel costs, stay expenses during the training and participation fees reimbursed. For this purpose, the Ministry of education allocates funds to cover the cost of participation in programmes of professional development for teachers.

The National School of Leadership in Education has developed a system of lifelong learning professional development of head teachers. In addition to the programmes for new head teachers (headship licence and mentoring for newly appointed head teachers) the National School of Leadership in Education implements also different continuous professional education and training programmes for head teachers: mentorship for head teachers-beginners (for head teachers in their first year of appointment), headship development (a two-year programme for experienced head teachers after two mandates of headship to adopt innovative and effective management approaches, to learn, and develop quality and organisation efficiency), and different programmes of support to head teachers for promoting and developing actual and real solutions (some of them also co-financed by European Social Funds).

1.5 Formal and non-formal induction programmes and practices

As stated, the field of teacher induction programmes is regulated primarily by the Organisation and Financing of Education Act and the professional examination of teachers that is required for new teachers to be recognised as fully qualified.

In order for teachers to approach the professional examination they need to fulfill certain requirements. A formal induction programme is not one of them. They need to have appropriate formal education concerning their professional subject-matter including a pedagogical education (either holding a degree of a pedagogical nature or



completing separate pedagogical modules). In addition they must reach a predefined quota of work hours of experience. This number varies based on the level of education and is somewhere between 560 and 840 hours. Of these – up to 247 hours of experience can come from the practical assignments included in initial training. The average of hours that are recognised over all 170 programmes of initial teacher/educator training programmes offered at universities is just over 60 hours. The last requirement that a teacher needs to fulfill before approaching professional examination is the practical implementation of 5 lessons that are evaluated by the mentor and the head teacher.

Formal induction programmes in existence are the path into teaching profession for approximately 10 % of young professionals. The above described programmes “First Employment” and “Learning to be a Teacher” have stricter requirements for mentoring and supporting the teachers and schools are motivated to enter these programmes as the teacher trainee positions are financed by the ministry for the entire traineeship period (of 10 months for teachers and 5 months for kindergarten assistants). Schools later must employ these trainees for at least a half-time employment for at least 6 months (or 2 months for kindergarten assistants).

It is interesting to note that the most recent and relevant existing survey of Slovenian teachers (with a representative sample of 4297 teachers) TALIS 2018 also shines some light on the implementation of these programmes in practice. In Slovenia 48% (compared to the OECD’s 58 %) of teachers report that they were not included in any kind of formal or informal induction practices at their current schools. In addition to that only 5 % of teachers in Slovenia (compared to OECD’s 22 %) have had a mentor in the induction period to their profession.

1.6 Formal and non-formal mentoring programmes and practices for teachers peer-support

Contrary to the requirements of teacher beginners there are no formal mentoring programmes in place for teachers in Slovenia. As stated, teachers are free to participate in CPD programmes according to their interests and there are some programmes that concentrate on the topic of mentoring or coaching that are usually offered in the catalogue.

Teachers can seek the help of a specially organised counselling service and they have several sources of help and counselling throughout their time of service. Educational consultants of the National Education Institute constitute another permanently accessible source of professional assistance.

The units of the Institute are positioned in all regions of the country. Teachers' circles are organised according to school subjects and subject areas, where pre-school and school teachers meet, develop new ideas, share experience and solve expert problems. Teachers of vocational schools can be linked with pedagogical consultants of the Centre for Vocational Education. Teachers in adult education can rely on the experts of the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education.

Additional assistance is offered by the Slovenian Education Network (SIO), which provides online classrooms for various school subjects and topics. The portal of the online classroom helps teacher find his or her online community in which to exchange experience, find a list of seminars and advice for his or her area and links to useful addresses.



During the COVID-19 epidemic SIO website (www.sio.si) has become the main entry point to support teachers and school leaders in delivering distance education. The contents are constantly updated.

The important sources of support for the teachers and as well for the school leaders are the National School of Leadership in Education, the School leaders associations, as well the Ministry.

Already mentioned above – consultants from the National Education Institute also coordinate work of teachers of the same subject or subject area in study groups.

No direct links to mentoring programmes, however, exist. The career progression of teachers is segmented in three ranks, connected with appropriate professional titles. The first title that a teacher obtains on this path is the title of mentor. A teacher holding this title can be appointed as a supervisor to a teacher beginner (on his path to professional examination) but this has no real significance for the mentor himself. Mentoring a teacher beginner only brings the mentor a small number of points that can help him on his career progression path.

1.7 How the national framework can evolve to integrate formal teachers induction programmes and mentoring programmes.

The starting point of any reflection in the field of teacher induction programmes should be the Organisation and Financing of Education Act that has provisions for teacher traineeship programmes that were being implemented until 2014 and offers an appropriate legislative foundation for any new developments.

Additionally, any programmes developed should be well integrated with the national teachers professional examination. Since the examination presents a natural and organic stepping stone in the career development of a young teacher, it would be very sensible and logical to include the completion of a formal programme of induction as one of the requirements to approach the examination.

Since there are only 10% of teachers that currently undergo types of induction programmes, a systemic reality in Slovenia is that young teachers often gain their first teaching experiences in a scattered manner, not always very well structured. A programme that would be easily integratable in Slovenian context, based on the initial field research, would be a modular one. One, where various teaching competences would be broken down into segments and where teachers beginners would be able to work on specific segments at specific times of their employment (potentially mentored by various mentors for each of the segments).

Since this programme would be intended for all teachers prior to approaching their professional examination, the programme would need to be predominantly self-sustained in an online environment (and not subjected to in-person training sessions). There could be some content that teachers would need to go over, there could be some assignments, and some feedback from the mentors required. The final evaluation of the completion of various segments would be subject to self-assessment of the teacher beginner in combination with an external feedback from the appointed mentor. In order for a teacher to be able to take the professional examination all modules of the course should be finished.



At the other end, experienced teachers could be better motivated to take on the role of the mentors. The system would need to be similar to the one for the induction programmes, as all teachers would be required to finish the programmes in order to advance on the track of their career titles. To obtain the first title of mentor, a teacher must complete the training modules. To earn the second title of counsellor, a teacher would need to mentor a beginning teacher through a series of modules.

All of the outlined changes to the national framework would not be to significant and are realistic and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in Slovenia has expressed direct support to the development of the programme in this way in the initial stages of conversations within their participation in the *LOOP – Empowering teachers personal, professional and social continuous development through innovative peer-induction programmes* partnership.



2. Teachers Needs

Parts covering the teachers' needs and formal induction and mentoring programmes are informed by the two pieces of field research conducted by the project research partner University of Ljubljana. A broad online survey with 177 participants was conducted between the end of June and beginning of November 2021. It was disseminated through various channels of the university as well as the ministry and was open to all stakeholders in the teaching profession.

Based on the expressed willingness to participate further, some participants were selected and invited to a focus group discussion that was implemented in December 2021.

2.1 Perception, satisfaction & motivation

Most survey participants from Slovenia report high levels of commitment and dedication to their work. Less than 1% of them report that they do not agree with being either committed or motivated. Three quarters of participants strongly agree with the statement that they are committed/dedicated to their work.

A general note should be made on the representativeness of the sample used in the survey. Though the total number of respondents of 174 offers a somewhat instructive outlook into the field it is by no means a number that would qualify as great enough to represent the sentiment of the teaching population. The structure of the sample being in most part derived from the active teachers that want to engage with the opportunities for systemic improvement also probably skews the standpoints of the sample towards the attitudes of general satisfaction, higher motivation and a greater drive for their work.

Looking into the future teachers only express a bit less satisfaction with the prospect of spending their entire career being teachers. Two thirds of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that they would be happy to spend their entire career as teachers. About 70% of teachers responding to the survey expressed that they would like to get the opportunity to mentor their younger peers sometimes in their careers.

A very telling bit of information are the motivating factors that teachers identify as those that would help convince them to assume the role of mentoring. Nearly two thirds of them state the opportunity to share experience and knowledge with younger people as the main motivating factor and about a third would like the possibility to diversify their career with assuming the new role.

The level of empoweredness for the implementation of their work varies a lot depending on the level of experience that the participating teachers have. As one might expect, students training to become teachers feel a lot less empowered for their work than more experienced teachers and later school leaders. The differences here are not negligible and represent a mean score percentage difference of 16%.

It is interesting to note the extremely high level of commitment to their work from the participating school leaders. Over 90% of them strongly agree with the statement that they are committed to their work. About three quarters of them also strongly agree with the statement that they would like to personally mentor younger people with the rest of them "just" agreeing and no one being on the fence about it.



2.2 Initial teacher training

The issue of the initial teacher training not being practically oriented enough, not being rooted in practice might be perhaps one of the biggest takeaways of the entire research conducted through the survey as well as interviews. When given the opportunity, the respondents express that they have gained a lot of professional knowledge from their field, less pedagogical/didactical knowledge and nearly not enough practical, hands-on experience.

About 60% of teachers agree that the initial training prepared them well when it comes to the question of professional knowledge where only 20% disagree with that. On the level of being well equipped with didactical approaches and purely pedagogical skills of delivering the content the number of those that disagree (40%) is already larger than those who agree (30%). The largest gap in the system however seems to be the bureaucratic periphery of the educational professions. Only 10% of teachers feel that they were well prepared for that by their initial studies, whereas nearly 70% disagree.

It is interesting though that teachers do not really view this area as one of the more important ones as it is rarely brought up in open end questions and as they ascribe little or no value to the mentor for a new teacher being well versed in this area and as when rating things that they see important in induction programmes, administration and bureaucracy are low on the list of priorities.

Among specific topics that were most underrepresented during initial teacher training a number of issues pertaining to the field of psychology are evident in a large portion of the responses to the open questions. Participants in the survey have listed challenges of teaching children with special needs, different learning styles, and challenges understanding their psychological make in general. A number of self-reflection, emotion management and mental health hygiene issues were also brought up in large volumes. After that the most represented answers were those mentioning that the initial teacher training did not deliver enough soft skills needed to manage a classroom, act in conflict situations, work in different dynamics with colleagues, parents and students.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the aspect of newer teaching approaches and methods. Mentions of this are prevalent especially in the responses of teachers with a bit more experience. Not the most experienced teachers though. One might draw a very anecdotal conclusion that the generations of teachers that now have about 15-20 years of experience were a bit ahead of their times and expected more on this field from their initial teacher training.

On the other hand, students learning to become teachers often express that they are getting a lot of useful knowledge and skills when it comes to teaching approaches and new methodologies.

2.3 Induction programmes

About 80% of teachers participating in the survey have participated in some form of an induction programme when they started their professional careers. An even higher 90% had help from more experienced mentors or



colleagues in the course of their first years on the job. Seeing this numbers being relatively high we can add that on the other hand only 30% of the teachers state that the schools where they began their careers had specific induction programmes.

In contrast to the initial teacher trainings these induction programmes that participating teachers attended concentrated a bit more on the pedagogical and didactical aspects of the teaching profession and not so much on the knowledge of the professional field. Almost three quarters of participants state that they have gotten practical knowledge on teaching strategies and approaches. Emotional and socio-cultural aspects were brushed upon a bit and the administrative duties were still not addressed in a mention-worthy extent.

When asked what they valued the most from the induction programmes, teachers rank the practical exchanges with their more experienced colleagues at the top. Other cherished insights include more concrete hands-on classroom experience often connected with psychology, classroom management know-how, and concrete solutions, ideas, good practices gained from their colleagues.

When directing their attention towards what an ideal induction programme would entail, participants in the survey clearly see the benefits of such a programme. They do see positive effects also on the motivation of new teachers but even more than that – they see these kind of programmes as contributing in a large extent to the competencies of a new teacher. More than two thirds of teachers completely agree that it is necessary for young teachers to attend these programmes based on that reason.

Nearly 90% of teachers place the ideal length of such an induction programme at up to 2 years and about 60% see up to 4 hours a week as most appropriate. If we were to calculate the average of all the responses in an attempt to practically represent the teachers opinion we would have approximately 4,5 hours weekly for 1,5 years as the desired extent of the induction programme.

When it comes to the desired form of such an induction programme again – as already reflected in the past experience of the teachers – the aspect of mentoring, collegial assistance is at the very top. These answers are the only ones where a very consensual majority of respondents agree that they are very important for a programme. Namely 1:1 meetings with the mentor and observing the mentor in practice and assisting in their lessons. Other elements that would be especially valuable for an induction programme are getting feedback to conducted lessons and connecting with other new and experienced teachers through networks.

Deliberating about a proper structure of content for such an induction programme teachers were given 37 elements form 5 larger areas to assess and the ranks of priority of these areas are as follows. Generally, emotional aspect of the teaching profession seems to be the area where some training would be most desired. Special emphasis should be put on teachers' self-esteem and their coping strategies in dealing with (demanding) parents, being dragged into students' personal stories and similar.

The title of the second most important area for induction programme to deal with is shared between the socio-cultural aspect and the pedagogy/didactics aspect of the teaching profession. An astounding 80% of teachers stated that it would be very important to dedicate attention to developing an attitude of cooperation with the students. Through the ranking and open questions we can see that teachers are expressing the desire to be able



to understand young people better, to understand how they can learn and also what their world consists of, what motivates and drives them. Teachers are especially interested in getting experiences, skills, advice on integrating into their regular, “normal” work the care for the students with greater needs as well as those with talents, developing interesting and engaging materials for all of them.

Even though bureaucracy is according to our survey the most underrepresented aspect in the process of training to be an educator, it is also viewed as the one that is least important or necessary to be a part of an induction programme. There is a little bit more interest to deepen and further teachers professional knowledge of their subject areas but as this is very well covered during initial teacher training the need for this to be a part of an induction programme is not so dire. The one element that was rated a bit higher is the updating of the professional knowledge and gaining skills of presenting it using new approaches or methodologies.

2.4 Mentoring

The general consensus among teachers that mentoring is paramount to the induction processes it is of course rather consistent to expect a vast number of teachers participating in the survey to agree with the proposition that experienced teachers should be given the opportunity to mentor newcomers to the profession during the course of their career. And indeed an overwhelming 97% agree with that.

A very similar fraction of survey participants agree that the mentoring should be done alongside the direct teaching practice and should not exceed 50% of work obligations. So the participating teachers agree that mentors should maintain their personal experience of being a teacher and adding the mentoring to that rather than completely replacing one career path with the other. Most teachers agree (more than half) that about 25% of work activities aimed at mentoring would represent a sort of sweet spot to get the balance just right.

In addition to the overwhelming consensus on the nature of the mentoring position being connected with remaining a teacher in its own right again a high 85% of survey participants state that the mentor should work at the same school or school cluster as the new teacher. Thus not only guaranteeing appropriate availability of help and assistance to the newcomer but also a real in depth knowledge of the concrete situation, student population, leadership and colleagues that the new teacher might benefit from.

When it comes to the character of the mentor every proposed element is deemed highly important and the expectations for mentors are indeed very high. The most important characteristics of the mentor, though, seem to be the necessary prerequisite of being a person from the teaching practice (having hands-on expertise) and in addition to that their attitudes and dispositions rather than certain professional mastery. It is extremely important that the mentors are people who want to be mentors and not who are assigned the role and that they want to pass their knowledge and experience and dedicate time and effort to the role.

Among the soft skills required to conduct the role properly the ability to provide concrete and constructive feedback are regarded the most. Once again we can note that being well versed in administrative and bureaucratic procedures is at the very bottom of the list of priorities for the mentor and in addition, survey participants do not see a need that the mentors should technically have any sort of national certification or that they have completed



a formal course. When asked to rank the top 6 competences of a mentor not a single participant selected a national mentor training as one of their top 6 priorities.

Interestingly the number 1 selection for the top priority of the mentor characteristic is a good professional understanding and knowledge of their subject field which otherwise was not graded very highly. This might implicate that teachers assume a certain level of subject mastery as a prerequisite. Similarly to actually coming from the field of education and not being an outsider with mere technical and methodological know-how on mentoring. About three quarters of survey participants identified this as their top 3 priorities for the character of the mentor.

It seems rather clear that a successful mentoring programme would try to find motivated teaching professionals and equip them with proper methodological know-how on mentoring and not the other way around.

About two thirds of participating experienced teachers have already had the opportunity to mentor younger colleagues and practically all of them are interested in doing that. As already indicated above the main motivation for this is predominantly intrinsic – having the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience to form younger colleagues, to potentially be given a direct responsibility and gain some recognition and to diversify their careers. Reducing the workload of direct pedagogical obligations or increasing the earning potential seem to show low levels of importance when deciding for the role of mentors.

The above mentioned lack of perceived importance of a national mentoring capacitation programme is interesting if you analyse it together with the answers that experienced teachers gave to the questions about what they would need in order to decide to take up a role of a mentor and to implement it well. About 60% of teachers feel directly capable of assuming the role of mentorship while 20% of feel that they would need such a programme.

The potential elements of such a training are generally assessed as important. The most important element being very appropriately direct practical experience and examples of good practice. If this is the most important element for induction programmes it is perceived as such also for the mentor capacitation programmes as well.

One of the key takeaways from the survey is thus the need to keep the programmes developed for the purpose of teacher induction and mentor capacitation as practical as possible. It is an element most lacking in the initial teacher training and it is what teachers identify as most important.

Practically, some contents that experienced teachers would benefit from are concrete observation tools that they might use and tools for giving concrete and coherent feedback as well as methodologies of giving good feedback. They are also quite interested in some psychological aspects and competences of establishing a mentor relationship with the mentee but they are not very interested in establishing links with the school leaderships to continuously reflect on the mentoring role.

2.5 Induction programmes at the school

Some schools represented by school leaders participating in the survey have implemented their specific programmes. Most of these programmes at least partly coincide with the two major national teacher induction



programmes (described in more detail in section 1 of this report). The national programmes being not too well defined and leaving much up to specific schools lead to these programmes being implemented in rather different manners.

A common denominator seems to be the involvement of the teaching collective and the assignment of specific mentoring roles to specific teachers. In most instances one teacher is designated as the mentor but there are instances where several teachers are involved and they have certain specific obligations in regards to the new teacher.

A welcomed information is that about 90% of participating school leaders see a benefit of having an induction/mentoring capacitation at their school or for their teachers. The main benefit is the increase in the level of professionalism and direct school work. A close second perceived benefit is the more cooperative and connected professional environment where teachers are more used to cooperation and working together.



3. Main Features of Formal Induction and Mentoring Programmes

The overall impression of surveying the professional field both through quantitative online survey as well as through the conducted focus group interview and also the periodic anecdotal contacts that the research team has had with various stakeholders during the phase of collection of good practices and research into existing environment within the professional sphere is one of an affinity towards the topic and goals of the LOOP project. The area of teacher induction is recognised as an important one and there seems to be a lot that practitioners want to offer up to the policy makers to help them form better and more usable tools and programmes to help them advance their profession.

In this section we will draw from the information gathered from various stakeholders on the two programmes to be developed within the project consortium, namely the teacher induction and mentoring capacitation.

3.1 Induction programmes

3.1.1 Content of the induction programme

Starting from the point of entry into the profession by the newly qualified teachers fresh out of university it need to be noted that the perception of various stakeholders is that the level of professional knowledge provided by the initial training at the university is of a high level. Both new teachers rarely express that they would require specific support at this area and the experienced teachers and school leaders do not earmark this area as something deserving more attention.

Even statistical data shows that teachers being employed in the recent past have all the necessary requirements to hold the teaching profession fulfilled. This means that they have completed appropriate university level courses and studies that prepared them well for the mastery of their selective subject fields.

On the other hand, the pedagogical aspect of teaching, even though present at the university, is underrepresented in the programmes and is perceived as not substantial enough by a large part of participants in the data collection phase. The reasons for this lack of skills and training in the area of pedagogics/didactics may be varied but they certainly include a lack of practical experience. This was very evidently presented also at a Slovenian partnership stakeholder meeting hosted by the Ministry where several representatives of pedagogical faculties were present as well as some public agencies from the field of education.

Lack of practical experience is what motivates especially new teachers to identify the area of pedagogical approaches as one that would deserve a large amount of attention within the programme of induction into the profession. What needs to be underlined in this remark is the express need for this knowledge to be presented in a very practically engaged manner. New teachers do not feel that they would greatly benefit from lectures or even types of workshops on various pedagogical approaches and concrete didactic tools. What has been crystallised as



a potentially appropriate approach towards this, has been a sort of learning-by-doing paradigm. New teachers would like to be able to perform various tasks of their occupation together with the mentor, under his/her guidance, with his/her feedback and availability for help “on the go”.

Both new and experienced teachers have stated that it is quite difficult to plan for what you think you might need as a form of assistance in your first steps within the professional field. Because of this, it is important that the new teacher has the mentor available and is able to confer with him/her directly within the process of conducting certain tasks or activities for the first time (or within the induction period in more broader terms). This has been highlighted as a proposition for the structure of an induction programme in general but also specifically reflecting on the area of pedagogy. In several instances it was expressed that having a mentor providing you with feedback in real time or potentially even help you directly with your work in class might be a very useful and fast way to progress in your professional development.

If the area of professional ability was not recognised as one requiring much attention due to the perception that it is already at a reasonably high level in new teachers the area of bureaucracy and administration has been left aside mostly due to the perceived importance of it. Even though the benefits of new teachers being better acquainted with this part of the job and even though new teachers often express that their capacity in this field is relatively low, it was very rarely singled out as an area that would need to be emphasised in an induction programme.

Most participants connected this with the basic idea of setting the priorities and this not being very high on the list due to other things being more important. But an additional interesting aspect was pointed out during the focus group discussion. Beginning in any career can often feel overwhelming. There is a lot of new things and aspects that one must get acquainted with. The workload takes more time and energy without the experience that could facilitate processes. An induction programme should take this into account. It is not only a question of getting the right information and skills to people but rather also a question of motivating them for their work, not overburdening but rather inspiring them. It is about *empowering teachers*. Because of this – the programme should respond to concrete perceived needs of the new teachers.

And in this aspect the two areas that were identified as more important ones for an induction programme are the emotional-personal development into a professional of the field (in the sense of plotting out a proper course and being supported a bit during the difficult first steps) and the socio-cultural aspect of the job (in the sense of truly understanding the professional environment – especially the “black box” of how a student “functions” in the classroom and how can a teacher engage with him or her).

The area of emotional capacity has been identified as the single most impactful area with greatest overspill into all other areas. A new teacher that is able to soundly set up his emotional operation in his first years is most likely to be able to develop a reflective outlook enabling him/her to progress in other fields as well throughout his/her career.

Seeing the statistics of how many teachers change their careers and how many teachers are not satisfied with their employment the importance of this area is clear. What was often expressed in the open questions and also in the focus group discussion is the fact that the teaching career can in its start be quite overwhelming. Due to various reasons – the lack of practical experience during initial training high on the list among them – there is a



lot that a new teacher need to get accustomed to in his/her first professional environment. And it is very difficult for him/her to identify true priorities, leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed, not focusing efforts towards the most important or potentially most impactful activities, leading to doubts, insecurities.

Because of this, the need for training in building up a proper self-esteem as well as an adaptive reflectiveness allowing for progress and improvement is paramount in our environment according to the research in Slovenia. Besides that, issues of setting up proper habits for maintaining (and/or improving) mental health were pointed out as an important aspect in the area of the emotional component of the teaching profession. This area was seen to be best targeted within a very relational aspect of the mentor – mentee relationship. Again – very practically oriented, not excluding completely potential training sessions and/or lectures but to a greater extent in a form of a supervision.

The one area where the best approach within the induction programme would potentially be a form of lessons, lectures, concrete training sessions, would be the aspect of understanding the socio-cultural environment of the teacher. When analysing the open questions and later discussing them within the focus group the one aspect that teachers (both experienced and new) identified as important was gaining an understanding of how a child, a student “works”. How is he/she responding and to what, how is he/she motivated, how he/she learns ... So really a better understanding and knowledge of basic psychology (perhaps with current finding in neuro-science).

If other areas an average appropriate mentor would not have many issues being well prepared rather quickly to be of assistance to the new teacher, here additional knowledge would be needed. This was also the area identified as one, where potential mentors would like to improve in the most.

3.1.2 Structure of the induction programme

A rough indication of a preferred method of implementation and a structure was already outlined in the description of the content of an induction programme but some more emphasis should be placed on that issue and the findings will be detailed more clearly.

The initial finding on the question of a proper structure of an induction programme is that the best thing that practitioners can envisage for this is indeed a mentoring programme. This was really well received as a staple of the project partnership and it was validated a step in the right direction.

The new teachers need to be personally welcomed into their profession, accepted, supported and given an active role. All of this can be achieved through a mentoring programme. Proper selection and preparation of mentors is obviously very important and will be detailed below. But the important thing is that mentors ensure that the induction programme is conducted in a personal manner with them being really available to the new teachers.

We need to restate the need for the programme to be practical. Not a lot of added value is seen in lectures or presentations or similar. Induction should be happening within the working process. Therefore a need for the mentor to be present at the institution where the new teacher is beginning his/her career is quite expressed.

What was also brought up was that the process needs to be relaxed almost informal in nature. It should not feel as an additional task or a burden for the already quite an overwhelmed newcomer to the profession. It should be



aimed at helping, supporting the new teacher – specifically by helping him/her develop a proper self-reflection attitude.

It is quite essential that the mentoring relationship is two-directional. New teachers need to be supported in their individuality and not moulded into a pre-existing teacher profile (potentially the carbon copy of the assigned mentor). New teachers should be supported in finding their own voices, their drives. And for this to happen it is necessary that the relationship with the mentor is two-directional. Obviously it cannot be symmetric, but even the new teacher needs to have an active role. It is great if the experienced teacher can learn from the new teacher, if the new teacher is given responsibilities.

The aspect of community is also something that the analysis has shown as important. Even if a new teacher only has one mentor, it can be extremely beneficial if the general atmosphere when it comes to new teachers is welcoming and accommodating. For this reason something might be prepared for the entire teaching staff to facilitate the integration of the new teachers into the professional sphere. New teachers would benefit from the wider array of experience of all of their colleagues. Perhaps with contact with various professionals certain new reflections will arise and help with the growth of new teachers.

In addition to the community of the school where teachers work an additional community that might prove supportive and effective would be a group where new teachers would be able to exchange experience and reflections. This could be formed either within the school, school cluster or even wider.

From a technical standpoint, a period of about one year but certainly not more than two years would be seen as appropriate for an induction programme to take. As the preferred design of such a course would be more informal it would be hard to conclude a specific timeframe for the programme. What shows some potential for a good implementation of this kind of induction is a modular programme – perhaps in the sense of offering materials for both the new teacher and the mentor to study certain issues and even more importantly to open questions for reflection.

3.2 Mentoring

Mentor being the pivotal role within the induction programme as would be seen most impactful in Slovenia, it is obviously quite important who is the mentor, how is he/she selected and what kind of a capacitation programme he/she is provided with to perform the mentoring tasks as best as possible.

If we focus on the character and skills of the mentor, we can see that quite a lot is expected of the mentor. Both new and experienced teachers see the role as very important and place a great deal of responsibility for the induction process of a new teacher on the mentor. So the survey and the open questions saw all sorts of competencies listed and there was not a single skill that would be considered unnecessary from the very comprehensive list.

However, a very important aspect was brought up and widely debated in the focus group implementation. Even though we seem to be hoping for an exceptional mentor and an almost saintly person the ideal mentor is an imperfect one. It is very important that the mentor is genuine and does not represent himself/herself as a sort of



unattainable ideal, superior to the mentee. An important message for a new teacher is exactly in the imperfection and the realistic uncertainties, insecurities of the more experienced colleague. The message for the new teacher being also – you do not need to be perfect, no one is and we are working together, supporting each other to be the best we can be.

So aside from imperfection, what sort of qualities were stressed in the field research? The professionalism and certain mastery of the subject are a sort of a prerequisite. Mentoring support in the professional area is not identified as a top priority, partially because of the rather high level among new teachers, partially because more experienced teachers are professionals in their field almost “by default”. For this reason professional proficiency in the subject matter is not regarded as the most desirable skill.

As one would expect corresponding to the ideal of the induction programme, the skills seen as most important for the mentor are the interpersonal skills. Ability to create a welcoming atmosphere, ability to ask questions and guide through the process of reflection, supportiveness for trying out different things, openness and patience.

As stated it is important that the mentor is available. To illustrate the point – It seems that an informal 5-minute feedback on the spot would be more appreciated than a scheduled 90-minute formal reflection session every two weeks outside the regular work hours. Because of the unpredictability of needs and questions of the new teacher it is hard to plan on what he/she might need – so the ability to access help when needed is invaluable.

In the structuring of the mentor position it is important to give certain merit to the role. Either by relieving the mentor of some other obligations, or by specifically reimbursing this engagement or just by stating the importance of this role. As the survey showed that the primary motivation to be a mentor is the desire to pass knowledge along it was reconfirmed also by the discussion within the focus group. This is and should be the main motivation to enter the role of a mentor. Teachers should not be forced into the role, the role should rather be offered to them and they should be acknowledged for it.

The starting point of a mentor capacitation programme based on the field research could be developing a good understanding of the situation of the new teacher. Mentors should be prepared either through a series of psychological trainings or even some concrete reflections about the new teacher, perhaps workshoping through their own induction years, perhaps through exchange with recent newcomers or even materials with testimonies of new teachers. A series of potential scenarios or needs should be presented to the mentor trainee. The mentor would be a bit more sensitivised to the situation of the newcomer through these reflection processes.

Other than work aimed at creating an appropriate disposition within the mentor the most concrete training that should be offered to them, based on the survey and the focus group discussion should be, should focus on coaching process. Mentors should be acquainted with some psychology, taught on how to help lead a reflection process by setting the right questions, be trained in basic coaching methodology.

Additionally, as already mentioned above, there is a need to establish an aspect of the community. On the one hand this means that the mentor should be able to connect the new teachers with other experienced teachers in the school. He/she should not be jealous but rather happy to be cooperating. Some specific knowledge on how to



set up a conducive environment should be given to the mentors. Perhaps some materials could be prepared for schools to use for this purpose.

On the other hand it would be beneficial if mentors would be given the opportunity to exchange ideas, practices, reflect on their own work. Either in the form of regular supervisory meetings, or in the form of a support group – it would be important to give also the mentors the opportunity to reflect on their work.

We can conclude with a general remark on the form of the mentor capacitation programme. An important aspect of this programme should be its practical nature. As with new teachers, the experienced teachers as well do not see a lot of benefit in an overly formalised, frontal, theory based approach. Teachers are interested in what works. They would appreciate examples of good practices, concrete tools that they can use in the mentoring process, training on how to use these concrete tools, what they are good for. Though some basic capacitation programme is obviously justified in being presented as a series of training sessions, an important aspect of this programme should be the sort of continuous support.



Co-funded by the
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