



Impact report

VET and Employers' engagement

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Executive Summary

This report is the result of a specific work phase of the European project ELVETE. In this report we want to gather best practices where VET providers and employers are working together to train students so that they can acquire appropriate skills which enable them to enter the labour market as quickly and successfully as possible.

After introducing the methodology that we have followed to elaborate the report, we do a brief overview of the most important features of the VET systems of the countries taking part in this research, as well as the local and national policies which promote and coordinate internships and sandwich training programmes for VET students.

Then, we describe the most important details of some successful cases of collaboration between VET providers and employers selected by each country. For this, we analyse their strengths, their weaknesses and the final skills of the students who take part in these experiences, indicating also which could be the key messages and recommendations.

Analyzing all the data found in the research phase, we draw some final conclusions on the key factors that can make the collaboration between VET providers and employers a qualitative and efficient experience.

These key factors are the leadership, the strategies and the people who are involved in the process. We must also include a number of cultural factors that have a decisive influence on the quality level of the process: the organizational support, the values, attitudes and behaviour of individuals. And, finally, the link and coherence between all these factors which should support the qualitative contribution of internships and sandwich training programmes.

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1. Research and contextualisation methodology

The aim of this Work package is to:

- Identify best practice cases where employers and VET education providers are working together to create students who graduate with the right skills to go into work;
- Highlight good practices in employers' engagement with VET education;
- Use this information to analyse needs in training;
- Use this information to create guidelines for a draft IT curriculum and suggestions for how other people can create their own curriculum.

This research has been developed in 5 steps:

Step	Aims
1	Agree case study report structure, templates and guidelines
2	Collection of 4 case studies per partner
3	Elaboration of Case study report
4	Elaboration of Impact Report
5	Elaboration of training need analysis

2. VET systems, relevant national and local policies

The collection of case studies has been developed mainly in five countries: Italy, Spain (Basque Country), Bulgaria, Portugal and Lithuania. In all these countries there are specific regulations and policies for all these internship and Sandwich Training Programs.

2.1 In Italy, at national level, we highlight the **AlternanzaScuola-Lavoro (ASL) programme**. The concept of ASL defines a didactic programme, the aim of which is to merge schooling and work. It is necessary to notice the difference between what is called "Stage" in Italian (internship) and AlternanzaScuola-Lavoro. While the first is an internship performed in an enterprise regardless of schooling, the second – as the self-explanatory name hints – is the result of a unitary project created thanks to the cooperation of school and enterprise, on the basis of the convergence of their interests. The Legislative Decree n. 77 / 2005 explains that "students over fifteen [...] can choose and apply for completing their [...] educational period from 15 to 18 or part of it, by alternating periods of study and work, under the school or VET provider's responsibility".

There are also some regional policies in order to promote the collaboration between VET providers and companies:

- Integrated Plan for Youth Employment (Veneto Region);
- Commitment to support a mutualinteraction with the economic sector to develop a culture of "network synergies" (Marche Region);
- The Coordination Group for ASL projects (Gruppo di coordinamento dei progetti di alternanza scuola-lavoro) (Lombardia Region);
- The Regional Law n. 5/2011 introduced the new EaVT - Education and Vocational Training system (Emilia-Romagna Region);

2.2 In Basque Country (Spain) the internship programmes have a long tradition, therefore we highlight the **HEZIBI programme**. This programme started two school years ago. HEZIBI promotes a type of training that takes place alternating periods of time between the VET centre and the workplace. Its aim is to facilitate the student to acquire some other skills in order to complete those acquired in the VET centre, discover the daily management of a company and acquire knowledge, skills and competences needed to practice a profession and meet the specific needs of the company.

HEZIBI is aimed at young people aged 16-30, registered in Lanbide, the Basque Employment Agency. The work done by the student in the company must be closely related to the professional profile of the training cycle. Students will acquire technical and soft skills in both the VET centre and the company.

The students will do the 1st year of the training cycle in the VET centre and on the 2nd year they will alternate between the company (not exceeding 75% of the total hours of the agreement) and the centre (not less than 25% of the hours of agreement).

The training programme is supported on an agreement between the company, the students and the training centre. The company and the student sign an Employment Contract (for training and learning) lasting at least for 1 year.

- 2.3 Unfortunately Bulgaria does not have a long-standing tradition with internship programs, thus there isn't sufficient code of law to support the Bulgarian internship initiative. However, in recent years the development of young human capital in order to ensure higher employment, income and social inclusion has been a priority for the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Thus, there has been a number of developments towards better policy making on this topic. In order to improve the conditions for young adults, the Bulgarian government and the national representative organisations of employers and employees have made the commitment to cooperate on initiatives to support the integration of young people into the labour market. They want to provide more opportunities for young people to gain work experience by committing to internship schemes and have pledged to help them make the transition from education to work.

As part of a national initiative on 6 June 2012, ministers and representatives from employers' associations and trade unions signed the **First Job National Agreement**. The agreement aims to create new opportunities for young people in the labour market and to provide employment for at least 22,000 of them, reducing the youth unemployment rate by 5%. The commitments from all partners on this initiative vary. The social partner on the project is responsible for circulating information about current and future opportunities for young people and for encouraging employers to recruit young people on internship or permanent contract, providing the chance to acquire initial work experience. Additionally the ministers will support the agreement by developing new initiatives to increase youth employment using additional funding from the state budget and European funds.

The agreement includes a plan for eight programs and initiatives for young people to be funded under the National Action Plan for Employment and the Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development' 2007–2013. These include the '**New start**' (an apprenticeship programme), '**First job**', '**New job**', '**Development**', and '**Start of career**' programs, as well as subsidised schemes encouraging employers to hire the young unemployed.

- 2.4 In Portugal the government has been promoting a series of initiatives mainly for young people. We highlight **GarantiaJovem programme**. It is aimed for young people under 30, NEETs to promote their qualifications, ease the transition towards the labour market and reduce youth unemployment. This program provides support in several areas: 1) definition of the professional path and in the active search for employment, 2) continued education or training opportunities, 3) internship opportunities, 4) employment opportunities. This program is not an employment guarantee, rather a guarantee to support NEETs under 30.
- 2.5 In Lithuania it is foreseen to strengthen work-based learning when implementing the **LTQF (Lithuanian qualifications framework)**. This is a priority in the 2012-16 government programme and will be supported by European structural funds in the period 2014-20.

3. More highlights of case studies in different countries

In this section we would like to highlight the main conclusions that we have elaborated regarding the information obtained from the case studies of employers' engagement with VET education providers through the internship programmes and the Sandwich Training Programmes.

3.1 In Italy the conclusions are based mainly on the **AlternanzaScuola-Lavoro (ASL)** programme:

Strengths:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree of satisfaction of companies with this programme is medium; ▪ Students have the opportunity to approach the labour market and develop employability skills; ▪ Enterprises can monitor the regional training and working reality, and take part in the definition of training paths in tune with the needs of the labour market; ▪ Enterprises benefit from taking part in students' training: they can prepare people who could be useful in terms of employment.
Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bureaucracy becomes very complex when public funds are concerned; ▪ Teachers have a key role in determining the success of ASL programme since the contacts with the enterprises depend on their own commitment. However, they often give priority to ministerial educational programmes and do not dedicate enough time and energies to ASL; ▪ Sometimes the teaching in the schools is too much focused on theory; ▪ Contacts between the actors involved should be more frequent, schools should be more active and bureaucracy should be lighter; ministerial educational programmes should not be obstacles, and teachers should give priority to the implementation of ASL; enterprises should have an active role in the definition of training paths; ▪ ASL programmes within the enterprise should be longer than the current 2 to 3 weeks period, in fact only the 10,7% of the Italian student population had a school-work experience in the school year 2013-2014, and the average number of training hours per year outside school is 72,1; ▪ Private VET providers are generally more active and motivated than public schools; ▪ Students should engage themselves more, be more pro-active, and work not only on their technical skills, but also on their transversal ones; ▪ Gap between skills assessment methods of companies and schools.
Students' Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In general the companies think that the students' competences are inadequate and they appreciate more and more the transversal skills; ▪ According to the companies, competences in Italian and foreign languages, in mathematics, science and technology, in informatics, social and cultural skills, a positive attitude towards learning, ability in taking the initiative and in entrepreneurship are fundamental employability skills.
Key messages and recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce the bureaucracy of all these programmes; ▪ Build strong and long-lasting relationships, keeping direct and personal contacts between VET providers and professionals of companies and strengthen cooperation; ▪ Improve the skills assessment methods of companies and schools; ▪ Increase length of students' stay within the company with ASL (2 to 3 weeks now); ▪ Engage enterprises in the definition of training objectives before the traineeship begins; ▪ Improve the commitment of public VET providers; ▪ The companies value transversal skills the most and expect students to have them (especially self-awareness, cultural awareness, pro-activity). Technical skills can be taught on the spot (if the person starts with solid foundations the company can help him/her boost these skills).

3.2 In Basque Country (Spain) the conclusions are based mainly on the **HEZIBI** programme:

Strengths:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree of satisfaction of companies with this programme is very high; ▪ The students have a salary that is proportional to the working time in the companies; ▪ There are reduced employer contributions to the Social Security: a 100% and a compensatory allowance to finance the cost of the company tutor; ▪ The companies think that students who study with these programmes finish the training period more qualified to deal with the labour market, with higher work experience and maturity; ▪ The company is an integral part in the student assessment process and in achieving the intended learning outcomes; ▪ A lot of Work Contracts are signed between the companies and the students at the end of the programme.
Weaknesses:
<p>The companies think that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The date when the students start the dual training in the company is very important; ▪ The students have to do a bigger effort to do both things (School and work) at the same time; ▪ It's necessary for teachers and schools to be more in touch with companies to clearly see what students require; ▪ The company needs (students for these sandwich training programmes) have to go in line with the skills acquired in the VET Schools.
Students' Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The companies describe that both technical and transversal skills are well developed with this collaboration program. However they would like students to be more competent in foreign languages.
Key messages and recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve the students' skills in foreign languages; ▪ Start the dual training period in the company in more appropriate dates; ▪ Teachers and schools would have to be more in touch with companies to clearly see what students require; The company needs (students for these sandwich training programmes) have to be aligned with the skills transmitted in the VET Schools.

3.3 In Bulgaria the conclusions are based mainly about the **internship** programme:

Strengths:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree of satisfaction of companies with this programme is medium-high; ▪ The companies usually see the internship initiative as an extremely rewarding process; ▪ This programme gives the students an opportunity to develop practical skills and knowledge but also to train and retain students with the potential to further their career in the companies; ▪ This programme provides more opportunities for young people to gain work experience by committing to internship schemes and helps them make the transition from education to work.
Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some companies think that the students have not enough information about internship programme (only when they ask about it); ▪ Some companies think that students are not encouraged enough to acquire practical skills and knowledge in the companies through this internship programme; ▪ Lack of motivation among participating students; ▪ The connection to the high schools is very bureaucratic and often occupies vital time for important day-to-day work tasks.
Students' Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The companies describe that the students' technical skills are well worked in the schools. However they would like that the students to be more competent in foreign languages and to be more proactive.
Key messages and recommendations:

- The government should play a greater role in the career guidance for young students and inform students about options for skill and knowledge development outside the classroom;
- It is very important to motivate the students towards these kinds of programmes.

3.4 In Portugal the conclusions are based mainly about the **internship** programme:

Strengths:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree of satisfaction of companies with this programme is medium-high; ▪ These programs aim to promote higher and better qualifications more oriented to the labour market.
Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers should have a more active role on the process; ▪ Sometimes the teaching process in the schools is too much focused on theory and not very oriented to practical activities and real situations; ▪ Some companies complain about the bureaucracy of this programme.
Students' Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The students are moderately well prepared for the conclusion of the activities during the internship, especially on IT, Science and Technology and Social and civic competences. The skill that is less developed is communication in other languages; ▪ Entrepreneurship also could be better developed.
Key messages and recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduction of the bureaucracy and better time management; ▪ Teachers should be more active on these type of initiatives; ▪ Courses in the schools with more practical activities and focused on the companies' realities; ▪ This programme could be improved with bigger involvement of the companies on the entire learning process and with more interaction between VET providers and companies (the development of synergies and other projects); ▪ Improve the students' skills in foreign languages.

3.5 In Lithuania the conclusions are based mainly about the **internship** programme:

Strengths:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The degree of satisfaction of companies with this program is medium-high; ▪ This programme provides practical training opportunities in the companies which supports the development of students' professional skills and contributes to easier and faster employment.
Weaknesses:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most of the companies are not willing to accept students and invest in development of practical skills; ▪ VET providers are not always interested in practical training and improvement of training programs; ▪ The Interaction between companies and VET providers is seen as not necessary and is not constant (it's usually only dedicated for problems solving and evaluation of practical training); ▪ Unfortunately students consider this training as working for free and it lowers their motivation.
Students' Skills:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Companies value usually more the technical skills but in recent years the importance of transversal skills is being stretched. In most cases students have research and problem solving skills but they are missing communication and team work abilities.
Key messages and recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Companies should take actions to attract students for practical training; ▪ Companies should have an active part in the design of training programmes and training path; ▪ Interaction between companies and VET providers should be constant and more frequent (including visit from the VET provider to the company); ▪ Motivation of students requires improvements; ▪ The importance of transversal skills is increasing.

4. Conclusions

Given the key messages and recommendations offered by ELVETE Project partners based on the analysis that they have made of the results of the surveys to various companies in their territories, we can conclude that there are several factors to consider.

Factors which influence the establishment and improvement of partnerships between education providers and business, in general, and specifically the implementation and optimization of internships and sandwich training programmes which in some places of Europe have long tradition and are considered as to be essential within systems of advanced training.

Leadership

Considering the benefits gained from the experiences of collaboration between education systems and business, it is for **governments** and **academic authorities**, first, to make decisions and provide, in their sphere of responsibility, some dynamics and initiatives aiming to increase the school-business relationship and, secondly, to accompany their decisions with **resources and funding** so that the relationship can give birth to specific programmes, for example, training in the workplaces and sandwich training programmes.

Strategies

Providing coverage to the vocational approach between centres and businesses, political and academic authorities should establish **general strategies**, wisely enough, aligned with **European guidelines** in this field, as these guidelines are the result of learning from previous experiences and good practices carried out in other countries.

Making an effort, they also should **adapt these strategies** to their specific local, regional and national reality, in order to make those policies viable in their zone.

And, of course, at this early stage **the business world should be already involved**, so that from the very beginning the guidelines established focus on meeting the demands of society in general and of those of enterprises in particular.

Schools leaders should be persuaded; they themselves should be aware of the need for specific **programmes and plans** to strengthen the relationship with nearby businesses and look at that relationship as a mechanism to improve the way of transferring the vocational and technical skills which they want to transmit to their students through their academic offer.

People

For equipping the training programmes with efficient protagonists, we have to choose the appropriate people, those teachers who are **more favourably disposed** to work not only inside the classroom but in the setting-up of new learning environments that, as the workplaces, provide the education system a new and rich perspective.

These learning environments demand **good initial training, knowledge and skills** which the academic authorities should contribute to provide, with good initial teacher training programmes, good selection processes and dynamics, hours and incentives of some kind and, of course, the due recognition, so that teachers responsible for these activities could get involved in them offering their best version as professionals and as individuals.

VET Culture

To create an environment conducive to the establishment of close relationship between education systems and the world of work, and to enhance the programmes and initiatives arising from that relationship, there are some steps that must be taken.

For instance, parallel to the promotion of policies and regulations in this field, we must foster **awareness-raising campaigns** aimed at businesses, schools, families, teachers and students to convey the importance of the

collaboration between centres and companies in the VET field and to make them aware of the potential benefits that such collaboration entails, not only in the field of internships or training in Sandwich Training schemes, but in others fields as well: joint participation in innovation projects, ongoing education, the support of entrepreneurship, and so on.

Without this prior conviction, the disposition of the actors involved in these sandwich training programmes will be inadequate and the lack of interest for contributing and taking part in its development will be undoubtedly perfectible.

Specifically, and aimed at students, beyond the awareness-raising, the training in Sandwich Training initiatives should be sustained with good support by the **Career Guidance** programmes which help students to become aware of the future benefits that to participate in sandwich training programmes is going to provide and, thus, help them as well to make right decisions about whether to participate in sandwich training programmes.

Organizational Structure

The willingness of the academic authorities and that of the VET centres leaders to improve internships and sandwich training programmes, at national and regional level, must turn into action and produce results.

The strategies and plans designed need to be executed, and it is therefore compulsory to enact **clear rules** and facilitate the process **reducing bureaucracy**, and organizing adequate structures to support their implementation.

Thus, the availability of **time to devote to this task**, the necessary **coordination** between the tutors at the centres and the monitors at the companies with the students is a critical success factor which will determine the quality of the internship and sandwich training programmes.

Attitudes

Among the cultural elements that indeed affect the management of internships and sandwich training programmes, the attitude displayed by the actors involved is a key aspect.

Having a flexible attitude towards changes and showing adaptability to evolving and ever changing environment will encourage proactive behaviours, willing to network, to collaborate and to devote **the adequate dedication and effort** to the programmes. This can be strengthened by organizing structures favouring the autonomy of the protagonists, the individual initiative and the **entrepreneurial mindset**.

Awareness

The adequacy of the general strategies and plans to the specific context of each place demands that the training centres establish **awareness processes** to monitor the situation of the nearby companies at different levels: management, production, degree of innovation and technologies. So, they can know first-hand their needs and expectations and, therefore, have the opportunity **to align their interests with the companies'**, meeting their demands and inviting them, as necessary collaborators, to take part in the decision-making processes, selecting and adopting measures under their own responsibility, and keeping over time a **willingness to evolve and improve** the collaborative process for implementing training programmes. This attitude, by the way, has been a key factor for some vocational training systems, in Germany and in Austria, which enjoy great prestige today.

Process Management

Regarding the management of the training programmes, it is important to gradually settle several improvements: Some in the process itself, offering programmes of a reasonable **duration**, just to make them significant, and some in the teaching-learning process, which has a close relationship and a direct impact on the internship and on the sandwich training programmes that will be developed later:

- Teaching methodologies need to be **more active**, closer to what will subsequently be in the business activity.
- They cannot focus, due to lack of resources or competence, exclusively on a magisterial approach which prioritizes only the transmission of **theoretical knowledge**, forgetting current demands and the relevant role that soft skills have nowadays. Soft skills that, as the ability to communicate, **to speak other languages**, to network, to be creative and entrepreneur, will largely determine the level of success that a student is going to achieve in the XXI century.
- At the same time, we should take advantage of European mobility programmes that can greatly facilitate the transmission of such **social and communication skills**, skills which otherwise are difficult to convey. These mobility programmes offer students the chance to know the world of business abroad, to initiate contact with other cultures and other ways of interacting which will bring them an added value.
- **Skills assessment systems** should change as well.
- Harness the teaching process in the classroom so that, through methodologies and dynamics, through the information and vision transmitted, it becomes an incentive and an opportunity to encourage students to approach internship and sandwich training programmes with **interest and motivation**.

Links

In short, regarding the issues we are dealing, the relationship between centres and business, the internships and the sandwich training programmes, to work properly, these elements detailed so far, leadership, strategies and people need to make a qualitative contribution.

If so, we'll see that, internally, in the VET centres, new dynamics will reveal and new attitudes will emerge.

Attitudes and behaviours which will contribute to achieving worthwhile results

On the one hand, by better **addressing the needs of the companies**, by helping them to accelerate their prospects for innovation, regarding processes and products development, and on the other hand, even more relevant, by helping to create a lasting culture of collaboration, effort and engagement, **values** which if exhibited, the teachers, in their daily activities will be easier to convey to the students, values that they will transfer, at the end of their school period, to the world of work and to the society where they will live tomorrow, which undoubtedly will contribute to make a more progressive, more helpful and more intelligent Europe.