

# QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR THE COOPERATION IN VET SYSTEM

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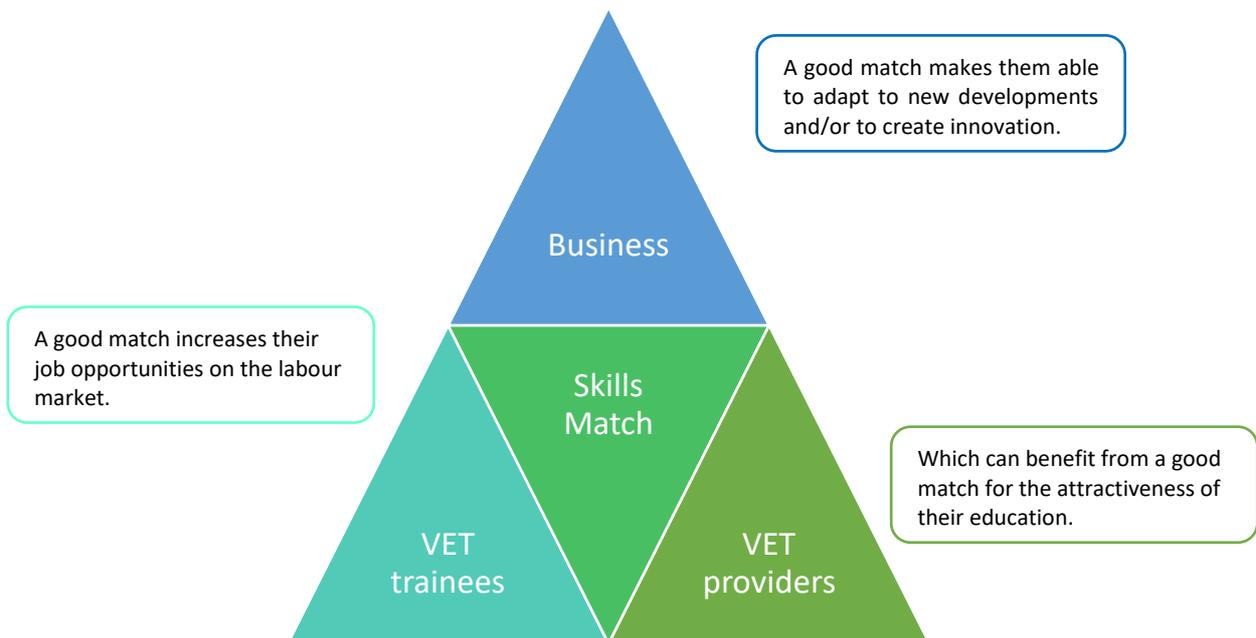


## Introduction

### Soft Skills and VET curricula

Nowadays the importance of Soft Skills is becoming more and more predominant in our society and VET providers are engaging in delivering educational programmes focused more on soft skills due to the demand of the job market. Since employers are considering soft skills as the main factor during the hiring process, VET centers and schools have accepted them as a privilege for the employability of their students and trainees<sup>1</sup>.

Dealing with these new developments requires a good match between the demands of the labour market and the skills and number of potential employees. A good match between supply and demand is important for all actors involved:



The **2010 Bruges Communiqué on Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training**<sup>2</sup> calls for flexible, high quality education and training systems which respond to these labour market needs. Moreover, the document highlights the importance of improving the 'capacity of VET to respond to the changing requirements of the labour market', and goes on to state that 'We need to adapt VET content, infrastructure and methods regularly'. For this reasons, labour market actors, VET providers and public authorities need to be involved in a constant dialogue for developing and renewing standards in order to fight against skills mismatches. This requires close and systematic cooperation between authorities and providers in this field.

In this context, national VET systems need to be connected to the wider world in order to remain up-to-date and competitive. They have to be more capable of attracting learners

<sup>1</sup> Md. Abdullah-Al-Mamun. (2012). The Soft Skills Education for the Vocational Graduate: Value as Work Readiness Skills. Accessed on 08<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, European Social Partners & European Commission. (2010). The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available [here](#).



from other European and third countries, providing them with education and training as well as making it easier to recognise their skills<sup>3</sup>.

To achieve a good match between the supply in terms of VET graduates and the demands of the labour market, more VET-business cooperation is needed. This cooperation should be focused on regulating the match in terms of skills for certain professions, or the numbers of VET graduates<sup>4</sup>.

According to a study conducted by the European centre for the Development of Vocational Training<sup>5</sup>, VET learning experience can lead to different social outcomes. For the purpose of this document, there are three outcomes to take into consideration:

Impact on Skills and Competences

Relationship with other individuals

Potential for success in the labour market

### Impact on Skills and Competences

Different studies carried out by the European centre for the Development of Vocational Training<sup>6</sup> found that Vocational Education and Learning is connected with the increase of learner confidence, self-esteem and desire for education. Moreover, another positive result is that VET education can help learners with the development of their professional identity. Professional identity enables individuals to take control of their work life and also to influence conditions in the workplace due to the autonomy and problem-solving competences gained from their VET experience. Some evidence concerning the social and cultural benefits of VET exists: over 50% of different experiences of apprenticeships in the VET sector carried out through the Leonardo da Vinci programme, experienced high or very high benefits in terms of interpersonal skills, adaptability and willingness to take on new tasks<sup>7</sup>.

### Relationship with other individuals

*“VET education has the capability to help the development of network between learners and between learners and teachers, mentors, masters and employers<sup>8</sup>”*. As the quote highlights,

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> European Union. (2018). Mapping of VET graduate tracking measures in EU Member States - Final Report. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> European centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2011). Vocational education and training is good for you – The social benefits of VET individuals. Research paper. Accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> Idem.

<sup>7</sup> Idem.

<sup>8</sup> Idem.





some of the benefits of VET are based on socialisation, through the transmission of attitudes and behaviours.

The relationship between learners and tutors can be considered the most important one. There are different types of mentoring: industrial mentoring in schools through business education partnerships; community mentoring aimed at supporting young people from ethnic minorities; or mentoring as an intervention responding to issues of social exclusion. Mentoring learners is important as tutors usually represent positive role models for success and offer support and advice for young people in training, helping them developing their skills and attitude.

### Potential for success in the labour market

The main goal of VET education is to lead and facilitate students and trainees' possibility of success in the labour market, with access, integration, stability and mobility. According to Field and Malcolm<sup>9</sup> individuals with higher levels of education have more control over their work, with a sense of agency and autonomy which results in increased self-esteem. For instance, the German dual system offers an interaction between the benefits of VET for individuals, such as agency, self-esteem, autonomy, overall physical and psychological well-being, and the benefits of VET for firms and industries, such as more engaged workforce, mobility based on performance.

The OECD<sup>10</sup> carried out an analysis on the need of VET education in Europe answering to two main questions:

### Why look at Vocational Education and Training?

The answer to this question is connected to the world we live in nowadays. Indeed, global economic competition increasingly requires countries to compete on the quality of goods and services. That requires a labour force with a range of mid-level trade, technical and professional skills alongside the high-level skills associated with university education. Moreover, strains in existing vocational systems include lack of workplace training places and trainers. In some countries the rapid expansion of tertiary education has undermined school-based VET and as a consequence, VET education has been neglected receiving limited attention compared to other parts of the education system and often leaving it with lower social status.

For these reasons, focusing towards a better and functional VET education is something that the European educational system should do, calling to action both VET providers and the business world in order to address the needs and requirements to educational authorities at national and European level.

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<sup>9</sup> Field J & Malcolm I (2010) Learning in emotional labour and emotion work. In: Cooper L, Walters S (ed.). Learning/Work: Turning work and learning inside out, Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Press, pp. 169-181. Accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>10</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2011). OECD reviews of vocational education and training – Pointers for policy development. Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).





## Why is initial Vocational Education and Training needed?

First of all, employees learn many skills in the workplace either informally or through formal training. But for several reasons, Vocational Training cannot simply be left to employers, because firms provide firm-specific training to their employees, but they have little incentive to provide training for general skills. Firms may also face barriers or be too small to provide effective training.

Moreover, employers may be reluctant to recruit young people unless they are “job ready”, especially where hiring young inexperienced people is expensive (e.g. because of employment rules). Therefore, those with lower levels of education, who would benefit the most from additional skills, are less likely to develop new skills once in the labour market. A high-skilled labour force may encourage investment in the country, increasing economic growth, while an employee’s skills may promote the skills of workmates (i.e. creating positive “spillovers”). Vocational programmes can pay off in the labour market, with studies showing good rates of return for upper secondary VET education.

## VET education and labour market

According to a survey conducted by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)<sup>11</sup>, VET education is seen as a positive aspect in Europe. Around two in three Europeans (68%) think that vocational education at the upper secondary stage has a positive image in their country. This proportion with a positive image is slightly higher among those that participated in VET than among general education participants.

Speaking of the connection between the job market and VET education, the survey reveals that most EU citizens agree that *‘people in vocational education learn skills that are needed by employers. Moreover, there is a general idea that ‘vocational education allows you to find a job quickly after obtaining a qualification or diploma’.* Around three in five respondents agree that *‘vocational education leads to well-paid jobs’.* Overall, these findings confirm the generally positive image of vocational education across the EU, particularly in terms of gaining relevant employment skills.

People in vocational education learn skills that are needed by employers’ in their country. The European Commission has emphasised the importance of VET in responding to employers’ needs and addressing skills shortages.

Generally, VET learners agree that they developed different useful soft skills that can re-use in other working contexts; first of all, the ability to work with others, the ability to pursue and organise their own learning and communication skills. Other skills VET learners declare to have acquired thanks to their vocational path regards the ability to be creative, the ability to think critically, mathematical skills and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

<sup>11</sup> CEDEFOP. (2017). European public opinion survey on vocational education and training. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of Marh 2019, available [here](#).





## VET-Business Cooperation

### Why is VET-Business cooperation important?

VET institutions have realised that students and trainees need to learn soft skills before going to practice them in a job environment, considering them a privilege. Although things are moving toward this direction, there is still a lack and confusion over how soft skills should be defined and implemented. VET centres acknowledge that companies and employers have begun to give priority in behavioural skills over technical skills, and individuals who have the pertinent soft skills are preferred over those who perhaps have more technical skills<sup>12</sup>.

With this said, soft skills are more and more integrated in VET curricula since teaching practices related to the development of soft skills to students and trainees of VET education is extremely important, in order for them to be prepared once they will be entering the labour market. Adult workers request specific learning needs, and therefore teaching these skills to students separately from the technical skills may also be needed. For these reasons the Vocational Education and Training system concentrates on practical as well as personal skills in order to make the most of young people's employability potential. It prepares people at various levels from a trade, a craft, a technician, or a high professional practitioner position in a number of different careers. Therefore, teaching practices in connection to the development of soft skills to trainees of VET education is extremely important<sup>13</sup>.

This aspect is also one prerogative of the VET\_GPS project which aims at applying in VET schools a process of understanding and improving specific soft skills among students and trainees both through the help of their teachers and schools' counsellors and individually.

Generally, most formal VET programmes provide a set of skills that do not focus exclusively on the technical aspect of the profession, but also on other skills that are more general and useful for daily activities. The main features in VET are, consequently, its emphasis on learning outcomes<sup>14</sup>. Practical examples come from two European countries where VET education provides different skills as learning outcomes for schools and trainees: in France, accredited VET comprises seven core skills: proficiency in French; knowledge of a foreign language; mathematics and science; ICT; humanities; social and civic skills, and independence and initiative. VET in France also includes both *savoir-être* (attitudes and behaviour) and *savoir-faire* (professional skills). Similarly, in Scotland, individuals engaged in VET education have to pass employability skills training to achieve certification<sup>15</sup>.

In order for VET providers to train students to develop their professional identity, a process of social and institutional recognition of VET education needs to be addressed as earlier as possible, especially from educational authorities and the business sector.

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<sup>12</sup> Institute of Entrepreneurship Development. (2016). The importance of soft skills and the existing situation in VET – A need analysis. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> Md. Abdullah-Al-Mamun. (2012). The Soft Skills Education for the Vocational Graduate: Value as Work Readiness Skills. Accessed on 08<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>14</sup> European centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2011). Vocational education and training is good for you – The social benefits of VET individuals. Research paper. P. 31. Accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> Liz Speake. (2007). Vocational education and training in Scotland and France a comparative study. Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).





The final goal of this collaboration needs to be the association of VET education with the increase of students and trainees' confidence towards themselves, their skills and their approach towards the job market. For instance, in France, the VET education has been found to increase self-esteem, confidence and desire for education in those who had previously felt failed by the education system. On the other side, in Germany, professional identity enables individuals to take control of their work life and also to influence conditions in the workplace due to the autonomy and problem-solving competences gained from VET education<sup>16</sup>.

### Who is involved in VET-Business cooperation?

Actors in VET-Business cooperation are fundamental and they do not comprehend only tutors in VET providers and companies. Interesting for the purpose of this document is the diagram implemented in the In-VET European project<sup>17</sup> (one of the predecessors of the VET\_GPS project). The diagram shows the need of an important network of actors that are needed to cooperate and interact together. This process of an active participation is needed also in the framework of the VET-Business cooperation.

Firstly, we always need to think of the student/trainee at the centre of the process with all the other actors as a “net” that provides training and contribute to the integration of the student/trainee into the labour market and the society in general. In the VET-Business cooperation the main actors that should be taken in consideration comprehend:

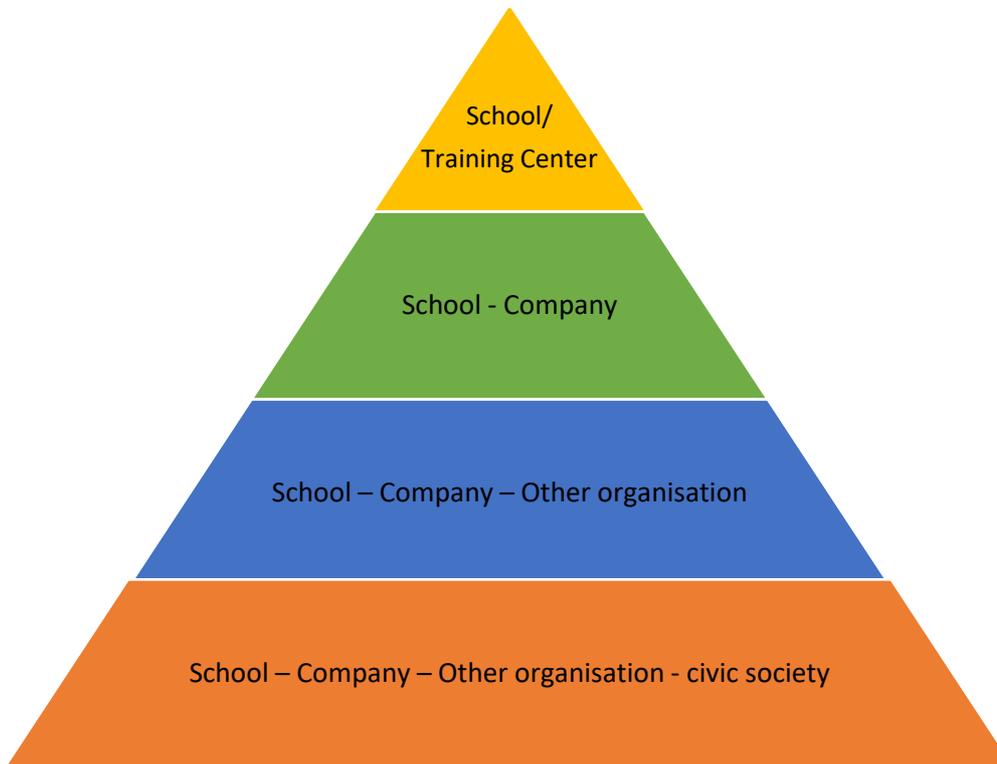


<sup>16</sup> European centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2011). Vocational education and training is good for you – The social benefits of VET individuals. Research paper. P. 32. Accessed on 19th April 2019, available [here](#)

<sup>17</sup> <http://invet-project.eu/>



All these actors can have a major or minor role. More precisely we can divide the VET-Cooperation in 4 main levels:



VET schools and/or training centres represent the first actor in place since they are in direct contact with the trainee and get to know the needs of the students/trainees and their strengths and weaknesses. A second level of cooperation is represented by the interaction by VET schools and companies. This is the most important aspect of the VET-Business cooperation because it is where companies and VET schools work together through different programmes (such as the traineeships in companies) through which students/trainees can acquire and improve their knowledge and competences.

Finally the last two levels regard cooperation among VET providers and companies with the help of other organisations and the civic society that can be families, municipalities and experts in the education and job field.

All these interconnected relations, should work as a network to be involved in innovative economic and social initiatives, based on shared values and objectives to specific national and local situations. In this network of cooperation, the second level is the most important one, where VET providers and companies work together in order to develop the right training path for a trainee. The last two levels take in account experts and civic society in general where effective and accountable civic associations could well work together with



governments and employers' and workers' organizations in promoting rights at work, fostering job creation, and enhancing social protection<sup>18</sup>.

An example which brings up this cooperation among different actors is well explained in the Apprenticeship Collaboration Scheme developed by the Dundee & Angus College for the DELTA project<sup>19</sup>. Shared Apprentice Ltd (SAL) was created to provide a framework for a shared apprenticeship programme for the construction sector in order to train apprentices to fill the local skills gap, whilst addressing the youth unemployment issue and with the key element of providing opportunities for small companies to take an apprentice without the multi-year commitment that is problematic for smaller businesses.

SAL was set up as a non-profit company with a board of Directors from four operational groups:

- Dundee and Angus College - the vocational training provider
- Angus Council - the local government authority
- Local businesses - the on-site training provider
- Industry groups such as CITB (Construction Industry Training Board), SDS (Skills Development Scotland), SBF (Scottish Building Federation) and SBATC (Scottish Building Apprenticeship and Training Council)

The split of governance ensures that all key stakeholders have an active voice at a strategic board level of the company, allowing the company to respond rapidly to requirements.

The company started in November 2015 and provided 11 modern apprenticeships in the first cohort of 2015/16, increasing this to 13 in 2016/17. The main target group are small businesses employing less than 25 people and a number of the 20+ companies involved in the programme had either never had an apprentice, or not taken one for over 5 years.

### How do national policies contribute to VET-Business cooperation?

The document named “Bruges Communiqué<sup>20</sup>” released by the European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, the European Social Partners and the European Commission for the period 2011-2020 deals with the issue of policies implementation in the VET sector.

In the document great importance is given to the Copenhagen process having played a crucial role in raising awareness of the importance of VET at both national and European level. The impact of the Copenhagen process on countries' VET policies has been both quick and strong: it has triggered profound reforms, amongst others the development of national qualifications frameworks with a view to implement the European Qualifications Framework. In order to keep going towards this direction, comprehensive approaches are required which link VET to other policies, in particular employment and social policies.

<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organisation – International Institute for Labour Studies. (2000). The role of civil society in promoting decent work: Lessons from innovative partnerships in Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa. Accessed on the 02<sup>nd</sup> September 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>19</sup> <http://deltaproject.eu/>

<sup>20</sup> European Ministers for Vocational Education and Training, European Social Partners & European Commission. (2010). The Bruges Communiqué on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training for the period 2011-2020. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019, available [here](#).



VET should play its part in achieving the two Europe 2020 headline targets set in the education field: to reduce the rate of early leavers from education to less than 10% and to increase the share of 30-34 years old having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%.

Taking into account the priorities and overall objectives of the above-mentioned European Strategy and Framework, and respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the following is adopted:

A global vision for VET in 2020

11 strategic objectives for the period 2011-2020 based on that vision

22 short-term deliverables at national level for the first 4 years (2011-2014), with indication of the support at EU level

General principles underlying the governance and ownership of the Copenhagen Process

Relevant for VET-Business cooperation, the Document highlights the importance of the enhancement of several measures regarding the labour market and the employability of VET learners. More specifically, authorities in the participating countries - at national, regional, or local level - should create opportunities for enhanced cooperation between schools and enterprises in order to improve teachers' knowledge of work practices on the one hand and trainers' general pedagogical skills and competences on the other. Moreover, participating countries should promote partnerships between social partners, enterprises, education and training providers, employment services, public authorities, research organisations and other relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure a better transfer of information on labour market needs and to provide a better match between those needs and the development of knowledge, skills and competences. Furthermore, VET curricula should be outcome-oriented and more responsive to labour market needs. For this reason, work-based learning carried out in partnership with businesses and non-profit organisations should become a feature of all initial VET courses and participating countries should support the development of apprenticeship-type training and raise awareness of this.



## How to promote VET-Business cooperation?

### Which conditions are needed to promote and maintain VET-Business cooperation?

Throughout the years, skills have become more and more an ever increasing concern for public and private actors.

In this situation, education systems in general and more specifically vocational and training systems are expected to play a major role, as they equip individuals with the skills needed to succeed in today's labour markets; supporting therefore, high-skilled knowledge economies and minimising individuals' risks of unemployment and social exclusion, as a result of low skills<sup>21</sup>.

Most labour markets in the EU will be heavily affected by the phenomenon of 'replacement demand', namely the filling up of vacancies left by a large number of people who will be retiring in the next years. In this context, skills shortages are likely to emerge if education and training systems do not provide the skills needed in the labour market. In this respect there is strong evidence that VET is better placed than general education in providing the skills needed in the labour market if VET programmes are well-aligned with labour market needs<sup>22</sup>. Systems with heavy employer involvement, such as those in Austria, Germany and Denmark, tend to perform better in terms of supplying the skills needed by the economy<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, with skills shortages promising to be a major challenge for the years to come, VET-business cooperation appears to be the main strategy to pursue.

Considering the aforementioned issue, ensuring quality and attractiveness of VET education is important both in terms of providing the right competencies for the labour market, but also as a means of securing the quantity and the quality of VET graduates. Again, one of the key aspects in securing VET-quality and attractiveness is related to VET-business cooperation<sup>24</sup>.

In support to this matter, a study by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute underlines that the main features of VET in top performing countries include the fact that employers are involved in several features, such as setting qualification standards, deciding when an update is needed, and setting the examination form. In these systems, students spend most of their time in the workplace instead of the classroom, having the possibility to develop those skills required by the job market in a faster and practical way<sup>25</sup>.

In 2011, Business Europe<sup>26</sup> released a document listing 12 recommendations on how to improve quality and image of apprenticeships. The paper refers to three levels: the

<sup>21</sup> European Commission. (2017). Business cooperating with vocational education and training providers for quality skills and attractive futures. Accessed on the 05<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>22</sup> Idem

<sup>23</sup> Buechtemann, C. F., Schupp, J., & Soloff, D. (1993). Roads to work: school-to-work transition patterns in Germany and the United States. *Industrial relations journal*, 24(2), 97-111 in European Commission. (2017). Business cooperating with vocational education and training providers for quality skills and attractive futures. Accessed on the 05<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#)

<sup>24</sup> European Commission. (2017). Business cooperating with vocational education and training providers for quality skills and attractive futures. Accessed on the 05<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>25</sup> KOF Swiss Economic Institute. (2016). Feasibility Study for a Curriculum Comparison in Vocational Education and Training Intermediary Report II: Education-Employment Linkage Index (DRAFT). Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>26</sup> Business Europe. (2012). Creating Opportunities for Youth: How to improve the Quality and Image of Apprenticeships. Accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).



European Union, the Member States and employers' organisations through cooperation. The purpose of the collaborations should be to improve quality by facilitating exchange of curricula. In fact, in all EU countries, access to a sufficient and skilled workforce is one of the main challenges facing European businesses and countries for the next years. They must be able to count on the skills that are acquired by young people, in the general school system as well as in the apprenticeship system. This requires putting in place adequate framework conditions for the development of vocational education and training. Apprenticeships cannot resolve problems arising from failure to achieve basic skills or choose the right direction at school.

Companies compete for talent and will always look for the best candidates, therefore education providers and businesses need to work together to develop effective programmes that will allow those with poor skills to take up training opportunities<sup>27</sup>.

### Which professionals need to be involved and how?

The main experts in the field for a qualified cooperation between VET and business are teachers and trainers. This is because both work together throughout the learning process<sup>28</sup>.

Teachers and trainers have different roles and responsibilities in the learning process. It is possible to distinguish between them according to their function and place of employment: Teachers are typically based in VET schools or related institutions, where they teach either general subjects or vocational theoretical subjects. Teaching professionals in VET institutions are experts in vocational competence, guidance of learners and assessment<sup>29</sup>. In on-the-job learning, they ensure that the learner has an opportunity to perform the work tasks that enable him or she to acquire the vocational skills defined in the vocational upper secondary qualification requirements. Moreover, professionals in VET schools familiarise the learner and the workplace instructors with the vocational skills requirements in the qualification requirements as well as the assessment targets and criteria<sup>30</sup>.

On the other hand, trainers are based in and employed by companies. They are nominated by their employer to take up the position of work-based learning trainer in the company, while continuing their own function as well<sup>31</sup>. Formal frameworks that define the knowledge, skills and attitudes that trainers should possess are often a suggestion to companies and are not binding. This does not mean that such frameworks for training competences are completely absent, in fact skills and competences for trainers can also be included as part of the competences defined for their occupational profiles, instead of finding them in a separate occupational profile for trainers<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Idem.

<sup>28</sup> ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training. (2018). Teachers and Trainers Matter - How to support them in high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning. Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>29</sup> The denominations may vary from country to country. In some European countries, such as in Portugal, "Teachers" as described in this document are "Trainers" and "trainers", as described in this document are "Tutors".

<sup>30</sup> S.D. Broek, M. Cino Pagliarello, R. de Vreede-Van Noort, P. Vroonhof. (2017). Teachers and trainers in work-based learning/apprenticeships - of models and practices Final report Request for Services VT/2015/075 In the Context of EAC-47-2014-4. Accessed on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>31</sup> Idem.

<sup>32</sup> Idem.



The European Commission released a document presenting 12 policy pointers which aims at helping and supporting teachers and trainers. More precisely, these policy pointers were gathered in four main areas of action (which for each of them a case study is provided to have a practical example):

- Specifying the roles and responsibilities of teachers and trainers in VET systems
- Strengthening the professional development of teachers and trainers
- Equipping teachers and trainers for key challenges
- Fostering collaboration to support their work

### Specifying role and responsibilities

The first group underlines the importance of ensuring that companies have qualified trainers and effectively cooperate with VET providers and other stakeholders.

This group is connected to two policy pointers:

- *Involve teachers and trainers and their representative bodies in all relevant regulatory, cooperation and quality arrangements*
- *Ensure continuous dialogue with companies, particularly SMEs, to stimulate the provision of apprenticeships and work-based learning<sup>33</sup>.*

Country	Case study
Austria	<p>In Austria<sup>34</sup>, teachers and trainers and their representative bodies are involved in all relevant regulatory, cooperation and quality arrangements, having therefore important tasks when it comes to apprenticeship training. They are involved in the entire life cycle of apprenticeship-based education, ranging from the needs analysis to the review of the training programme.</p> <p>In particular, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead on creating or modernising apprenticeships;</li> <li>• Prepare the draft training regulations with the help of VET research institutes;</li> <li>• Define the training standards, i.e. they formulate the job profile and the activity description;</li> <li>• Are involved in examination boards;</li> <li>• Are entitled to comment on drafts of school-related acts, curricula and other regulations</li> </ul>

<sup>33</sup> ET 2020 Working Group on Vocational Education and Training. (2018). Teachers and Trainers Matter - How to support them in high-performance apprenticeships and work-based learning. Accessed on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>34</sup> Idem.





### Strengthening professional development

Policy pointers in this section focus on the need to provide teachers and trainers with high-quality initial training and continuous professional development opportunities and comprehend:

- *Set incentives for all players in the system to invest in teachers' and trainers' professional development*
- *Improve professional development opportunities for teachers*
- *Ensure trainers are valued by providing opportunities for professional development and clear quality standards*

These policy pointers reflect the importance of high quality apprenticeships and work-based learning which require investment in the initial training and continuous professional development of teachers and trainers. Different stakeholders, including the government, teachers and trainers themselves, schools and companies, can make these investments.

Country	Case study
Austria	<p>Another example from Austria<sup>35</sup> shows how this cooperation is doable. Indeed, incentives are assessed by the National Funding Committee for the Funding of the Dual System and are listed by the Apprenticeship Offices. These funding opportunities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial incentives for additional training of trainers</li> <li>• Incentives for companies whose apprentices take part in training alliances:</li> </ul> <p>The establishment of a training alliance is compulsory if a company cannot fully deliver the knowledge and skills stated in the training regulation but It is also possible to enter into training alliances on a voluntary basis, if training companies aim to deliver specific skills to apprentices.</p>

### Equipping for key challenges

This group highlights how teachers and trainers can be supported in the development of the skills they need to accomplish these tasks and includes the following policy pointers:

- *Support teachers and trainers in their capacity to play an important role in the content of teaching*
- *Support teachers and trainers in their capacity to play an important role in the assessment of learning outcomes*
- *Help teachers and trainers to obtain the competences they need in relation to innovation and digitalisation*
- *Equip teachers and trainers with the right competences and means for supporting disadvantaged learners*
- *Equip teachers and trainers with the knowledge they need to direct learners towards career guidance and other professional support networks*

In order to help VET providers and companies, governance systems need to be able to react to and accommodate changes in education and training content. Teachers and trainers have

<sup>35</sup> Idem.





an important potential role to play in this regard, being those in charge of suggesting and checking learning outcomes. The latter can serve as a shared reference point to coordinate the work of teachers and trainers providing and assessing apprenticeships and work-based learning. Moreover, the assessment of learning outcomes should involve both teachers and trainers, in order to ensure fairness and consistency between assessment in school-based and work-based contexts. Therefore, teachers and trainers need to be equipped not just to meet these challenges, but also to be part of a change process which requires new knowledge, skills and competences for them<sup>36</sup>.

Country	Case study
Romania	<p>In Romania, where VET has traditionally been school-based, the programme “Together we build bridges – Practical internship trainings in vocational and technical education” has been implemented in the framework of an Erasmus+ KA3 project, Development of Apprenticeship Learning in initial VET (DALIVET). In this training programme, teachers who teach technical VET subjects and tutors who provide work-based learning programmes in enterprises train in pairs.</p> <p>They work together to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design, evaluate and monitor practical training in technical and vocational education;</li> <li>• Analyse and properly use the training standards to design and complete specialised modules of the local development curriculum;</li> <li>• Link the requirements of the training standards to curricula;</li> <li>• Coordinate the work-based learning process.</li> </ul>

### Fostering collaboration

The last group concerns the collaboration between teachers and trainers, given their complementary roles and responsibilities, in order to collaborate to improve the performance of apprenticeships and work-based learning. Collaboration can take place at different levels, including between individual teachers and trainers and between their representative bodies. Furthermore, collaboration involving other stakeholders can also be effective, not least with higher education institutions increasing innovation and opening up flexible learning pathways.

This group includes the last two policy pointers:

- Ensure teachers’ and trainers’ representative and professional bodies are partners in structured continuous dialogue based on mutual trust;
- Support the development of partnerships and networks that promote excellence, innovation and flexible learning pathways.

In the document<sup>37</sup> great importance is given to the benefits that cooperation among partnerships and networks at the level of institutions, such as schools, companies and universities can offer. They can develop and promote new, innovative practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and they can also foster the creation of learning pathways.

Partnerships between schools and companies can enable teachers from VET schools and VET centres to keep their technical knowledge relevant and up-to-date while enabling company-based trainers to develop their pedagogical skills. This double cooperation

<sup>36</sup> Idem.

<sup>37</sup> Idem.





between VET providers and companies, not only helps teachers and trainers' collaboration and readiness towards trainees, but it gives them the opportunity to participate in traineeships to gain the chance to develop both broad skills for their aspired profession and company-specific skills in line with the needs of the training company. This allows them to contribute effectively to the business of their training company, but also ensures their wider employability, which has positive effects for the flexibility of labour markets.<sup>38</sup>

To conclude, involving teachers, trainers and providers as equal partners in decision-making and implementation is important as it can help foster their ownership of the delivery of high-quality apprenticeships and work-based learning. This can take the form of social dialogue, where teachers' and trainers' representative bodies, along with VET provider associations, are involved alongside responsible ministries, employer organisations and industrial sector organisations, depending on the institutional set-up in the respective Member State<sup>39</sup>.

Country	Case study
<p><b>Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania</b></p>	<p>Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, all of which have mainly school-based VET systems, are working together to test approaches to collaborative learning between teachers at VET institutions and in-company trainers. The approach is tested within the Erasmus+ policy experimentation project 'Testing New Approaches to Training VET and Workplace Tutors for Work Based Learning - TTT4WBL'<sup>40</sup> (2017-2020) and is based on the assumption that during joint training (tandem training), the co-creation of knowledge amongst teachers and trainers will provide solutions to key challenges in apprenticeships and work-based learning, as well as improve the overall quality of teachers' and in-company trainers' competence development.</p> <p>The training is focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the ability of teachers and trainers to supervise work-based learning;</li> <li>• Ensuring trainers have the pedagogical and relevant soft skills needed to guide apprentices;</li> <li>• Ensuring VET teachers have practical skills that are up-to-date in the context of modern labour markets</li> <li>• Improving cooperation and communication between VET institutions and enterprises, and encouraging the involvement of SMEs;</li> <li>• Improving the quality of work-based learning curricula;</li> <li>• Providing higher-quality apprenticeships for VET students.</li> </ul>

<sup>38</sup> Idem.

<sup>39</sup> S.D. Broek, M. Cino Pagliarello, R. de Vreede-Van Noort, P. Vroonhof. (2017). Teachers and trainers in work-based learning/apprenticeships - of models and practices Final report Request for Services VT/2015/075 In the Context of EAC-47-2014-4. Accessed on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>40</sup> [www.ttt4wbl-project.eu](http://www.ttt4wbl-project.eu)





## Which strategies and initiatives need to be implemented for establishing or strengthen VET-Business cooperation?

Generally, it is difficult to object that the contact of young people with the world of work is useless or even harmful: different transversal skills, in addition to the specific ones and to the knowledge of production systems and services, are developed more easily in contexts of working conditions than in the school environment. Another issue regards the didactic quality of the experiences of work-based learning and apprenticeship: a period in company that is not adequately designed, implemented and evaluated in order to integrate into the educational path, it risks to produce disappointing results and to discredit the entire model of work-based learning<sup>41</sup>.

The first point to check is the mutual interest in taking part in collaboration: if the company is in a difficult situation and has no interest in engaging in collaboration has the right to not take part in it. The school, on the other side, must engage itself in a collaborative project not for administrative duty, but after a reflection on its own purpose, which also takes into account the path the institution set for itself<sup>42</sup>.

With this said, making contact with different terminologies and concepts helps to enter the order of ideas of collaboration, to understand the culture and the way the other party operates and to reflect on the potential collaboration. Above all, it allows clarity on sharing educational goals, which can be different not only in function of the students involved, but also for the training capacity of the company. Furthermore, for a successful collaborative experience between VET schools and companies, the student must be involved in the definition of the educational objectives and teaching methods of the traineeship, thus taking into account his/her personal inclinations and skills<sup>43</sup>.

Today's professional world is too fast and too specialized for the school to constantly update itself according to company needs. Therefore the impulses should come from the companies themselves, not only from schools' environment. For this reason, it is essential that the entrepreneurial world gets in touch effectively with the school system to make present their needs and to actively participate in an ongoing improvement of programmes and skills. On the other hand, the school has to worry about giving a training which is spendable in the job market, overcoming the preconception that the only goal of the school is to train individuals and not workers. The two objectives are not in opposition and what should be asked to VET schools is to add to their programmes also a formation oriented to work practice without neglecting human formation<sup>44</sup>.

Cooperation between companies and schools cannot be improvised and without a strategy and a structured plan it is not possible to achieve the goal of integrating traditional teaching and periods of training practice. Schools has to move in time to find companies to work with, as well as companies need to find out which schools make the most useful profiles for them. Both actors must actively seek out the counterpart with whom it is most useful to collaborate, taking into consideration the training needs of trainers.

<sup>41</sup> CET – Centre for European Trainees. (2018). SCUOLA E IMPRESA: Come instaurare una collaborazione efficace. Accessed on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>42</sup> Idem.

<sup>43</sup> Idem.

<sup>44</sup> Idem.



Once the contact is created, the following must be established:

- **The modalities of the collaboration:** not to be exhausted in a school year but that should become organic and long lasting, with the signing of an agreement;
- **The roles of the people involved:** who does what and when, both at school and in the company, making clear who are the people who keep in touch between the two actors;
- **The number of children involved** and the most useful profiles;
- **The criteria for choosing candidates:** the best option for companies is to play an active role in the choice;
- **Intermediate and final evaluation criteria.**

In order to plan a fruitful traineeship, it is compulsory to base it on the skills that both the VET institution and the company want to be transmitted to the trainee. This action comprises two aspects together: that of orientation and that of learning, guaranteeing a subsequent facilitated access into the job market of the trainee, with greater awareness and satisfaction of new employees and consequently shorter insertion times and higher productivity.

Country	Case study
Germany	In Baden-Württemberg there is a useful tool for assessing the indicative capacity of a high school: Boris - Berufswahl-Siegel für berufsorientierte Schulen (Quality seal for orientation in schools). It is not only the basis of a performed evaluation from the Ministerium für Kultus, Jugend und Sport (Ministry of Regional Education), but also a ready support for schools that intend to carry out orientation and can control its activity through a ministerial checklist.

The aforementioned Baden-Württemberg case study represents an interesting example for schools and even for companies to create a similar tool to clearly write down what they must do in order to organize a traineeship correctly and effectively and having the possibility to evaluate their activity in order to improve it<sup>45</sup>.

The strength of the VET-Business cooperation is to put together two ways of thinking, two models, two approaches that are rightly different, but that need to be more integrated. Such collaboration cannot be improvised and needs resources and development of staff: for teachers who work with the company, for the company tutor and for the person who has to keep in contact with school and company.

The following are several case studies regarding VET-Business cooperation in Europe which is worth to be taken into consideration as examples<sup>46</sup>:

<sup>45</sup> Idem.

<sup>46</sup> S.D. Broek, M. Cino Pagliarello, R. de Vreede-Van Noort, P. Vroonhof. (2017). Teachers and trainers in work-based learning/apprenticeships - of models and practices Final report Request for Services VT/2015/075 In the Context of EAC-47-2014-4. Accessed on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).



Country	Case study
Austria	<p>In Austria cooperation takes place at all level. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BWF) is responsible for coordinating and promoting cooperation between the authorities and institutions involved in vocational education and training.</p> <p>The administration of VET institutions and the specific design of the curricula are the responsibility of the provinces. At the level of the Provinces, the administration of the company-based part of training is carried out by the Apprenticeship Offices of the economic chambers. They check the suitability of the training company, make a record of the apprenticeship contracts and deal with the apprenticeship-leave examinations.</p> <p>At the local level, authorised apprenticeship trainers act as responsible agents of company-based training and in cooperation with the VET institutions.</p> <p>Cooperation takes place directly between teachers in schools and trainers in enterprises which is sometimes challenging given that schools and enterprises may not have the same objectives. The extent of cooperation is affected by several factors, namely the specific occupation, the structure of the enterprises and the conditions in vocational school. Indeed, large companies have their own training department and wide resources which help the cooperation process; meanwhile, small companies rely more on decisions and initiatives of VET schools.</p>
Finland	<p>In Finland, cooperation arrangements are implemented at institutional and at individual level by the VET teachers. The Development Plan for Education and Research states that cooperation between vocational education and training and working life forms an integral part of education and encourages teaching staff in vocational education and training to participate regularly in work placement periods. Following the guidelines of the legislation, both the National Board of Education and education providers have drawn up policies or practices for the professional development of VET staff.</p> <p>These work placements are regarded as an opportunity for teachers to develop and update their professional competences, increase work motivation, improve self-esteem and support coping at work. VET teachers are responsible for drafting a workplace training plan for the students in cooperation with the workplace instructor. Within the decentralisation of the Finnish VET system, the cooperation between teachers and trainers is a regular practice being done on an ongoing basis with guidelines available at the level of individual VET providers. While encouraged by law, the cooperation arrangements are in practice flexible; indeed, education institutions are responsible for ensuring contacts between VET institutions and trainers but teachers can arrange the cooperation rather freely within the framework of national curricula for the different VET programmes.</p>
Germany	<p>Germany is characterised by the particular role of the social partnership, namely the economic and socio-political cooperation between interest groups (employers, employees, government representatives); therefore, cooperation takes place at all levels. Indeed, training regulations are determined by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy in agreement with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The Länder have responsibility for the VET institutions of the dual system (Länder school legislation) while in company training is under the authority of the Federal State.</p> <p>Experts work together with the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and with social partners to create drafts of the new training regulations. In particular, BIBB coordinates a number of boards in which stakeholders cooperate at different level. At regional level, the competent chambers are required to establish a vocational training committee where representatives of trade unions, employers and teachers have to be informed and consulted regarding vocational training. These chambers act as intermediaries</p>

Country	Case study
	<p>for vocational schools and small companies and support direct cooperation. Thus, these aspects are all evidence of a close cooperation and dialogue between providers of VET, employers and social partners<sup>47</sup>.</p>
<p>Sweden</p>	<p>Since 2012, the National Agency for Education in Sweden delivers the State fund, a financial incentive available for teachers to undertake workplace training and gain work specific competence in the practical subject they teach. This fund is an example of a financial instrument used by the government to stimulate educational development and encourage dialogue and cooperation between teachers and workplace trainers. School managers and school principals are the central actors who ensure, stimulate and strengthen cooperation and exchange among teachers and trainers. School managers are responsible for organising the education and work for the teachers such that teachers have the possibility to engage in cooperation and have contact with trainers.</p> <p>For the school to receive the fund, the in-workplace training must take place with regularity during at least a two-week period. Schools that can apply for the fund are Upper secondary schools, Upper secondary special schools, Municipality adult education and Special education for adults with development disabilities. The exchange practice gives teachers an opportunity to explain to trainers and workplaces how the education outside of WBL is arranged. This increases teachers' and trainers' mutual understanding for each other's work and role in the VET.</p>

<sup>47</sup> Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training - BIBB. (2010). Fachglossar – Betriebliche Ausbildung Glossary of Vocational Training Terms. Accessed on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 2019, available [here](#).



### Case studies on VET-Business cooperation

The following are some further case studies<sup>48</sup> of VET-Business cooperation implemented around EU countries:

#### AQUA - Austria

- AQUA (workplace-oriented qualification for unemployed) targets unemployed persons with an above average distance to the labour market for CVET and life-long learning education. It sets up education plans that are customised to the unemployed individual in cooperation with the participating company and VET institute. It provides dual (work-based) learning in which a third of the time is spent on theoretical training and two thirds on practical, in-company training. A related challenge in this case study is the issue of a substantial proportion of employers not investing sufficiently in the learning aspect of WBL.

#### Valkeakoski Campus - Finland

- Real company problems and projects were brought into the curricula of the different study programmes – especially through project based learning. The reasoning was that by giving students/trainees better possibilities to work with real company problems it would improve the innovation and entrepreneurial skills among the students/trainees and give them a better understanding of labour market needs. Furthermore the rationale was that the presence of companies on the local campus could improve the possibilities for collaboration between students/trainees and companies.

#### Dual Study Programmes - Germany

- The initiative is strongly geared towards work-based learning: the student / apprentice is under contract with a firm and he/ she spends part of his/her time at a university studying towards a Bachelor degree and part of the time in-company learning practical skills on the job.

#### Techwise Twente – The Netherlands

- Techwise uses so-called Field Labs at companies and education institutes, in which students/trainees can practice working with machines and new technologies in a 'real' environment, while mistakes are still allowed.

Figure 1 – Brief description of case studies on VET-Business cooperation implemented in European countries.

<sup>48</sup> European Commission. (2017). Business cooperating with vocational education and training providers for quality skills and attractive futures. Accessed on the 05<sup>th</sup> April 2019, available [here](#).



## Which good practices exist?

Examples of successful VET systems in Europe (OECD 2011)

Country	VET system
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The dual system has many commendable features, with well-structured apprenticeships that integrate learning in schools and workplace training.</li> <li>- Youth unemployment rates are low and the transition from education to first employment is smooth by international standards.</li> <li>- Social partner involvement at all levels, in VET policy design and delivery, is strong, with effective co-operation between different stakeholders.</li> <li>- The VET system caters for a broad range of needs, providing safety nets for those with weak school results or from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also offering five-year VET college programmes providing high level technical training.</li> <li>- The VET system offers different progress routes at various levels, avoiding dead-ends and linking VET to general tertiary education through the Berufsreifeprüfung (professional baccalaureate).</li> <li>- The current teacher workforce in VET schools seems to be well prepared and industry experience is mandatory; many schools have flexible arrangements, with teachers working part-time in industry. Recent reforms have changed the requirements on VET teachers, but the effects are not yet apparent.</li> <li>- Completion rates in upper secondary education are high by international standards.</li> </ul>
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a good range of vocational options at different levels. Initial secondary education offers full-time and part-time programmes, while continuing VET provides further learning and second chance opportunities in centres for adult education, and training centres of the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency (VDAB) and the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training (Syntra Vlaanderen).</li> <li>- The average performance of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science is very strong by international standards, as indicated by PISA assessments, in which Flanders has been consistently among the best performing countries.</li> <li>- A commitment to universal upper secondary education is embedded in compulsory education up to age 18, with the possibility of part-time education from age 16.</li> <li>- Policy development is dynamic, as illustrated by the recent green paper entitled “Quality and opportunities for every pupil”, the “Competence Agenda” and the “Pact 2020” agreement concluded between the government and social partners. Evidence is used extensively in reforms.</li> <li>- The Flemish VET system gives commendable attention to entrepreneurial training through Syntra Vlaanderen, which offers flexible routes to acquire entrepreneurial competences.</li> </ul>
England and Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- England and Wales are committed to a step improvement in the level of workplace skills.</li> <li>- Substantial resources have been made available for this task.</li> <li>- The conscious attempt to engage employers is commendable.</li> <li>- VET policy making in England and Wales is self-evidently dynamic and innovative.</li> <li>- The system is flexible and allows for tailor-made training solutions for employers.</li> </ul>





<p><b>Germany</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocational education and training is deeply embedded and widely respected in German society. The system offers qualifications in a broad spectrum of professions and flexibly adapts to the changing needs of the labour market.</li> <li>- The dual system is especially well-developed in Germany, integrating work-based and school-based learning to prepare apprentices for a successful transition to full-time employment.</li> <li>- A major strength of the dual system is the high degree of engagement and ownership on the part of employers and other social partners. But the system is also characterised by an intricate web of checks and balances at the national, state, municipal, and company levels that ensures that the short-term needs of employers do not distort broader educational and economic goals.</li> <li>- The VET system as a whole is well-resourced, combining public and private funding. Germany has maintained strong financial support and maintained the apprenticeship offer for the VET system even during the crisis.</li> <li>- Germany has a well-developed and institutionalised VET research capacity, including the Federal Institute for VET, (BIBB), and a national network of research centres that study different aspects of the system to support continuous innovation and improvement in the VET system.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ireland</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a good range of provision of different types of VET at post-secondary level, targeted at a wide range of different client groups, including those in and out of work and with second chance opportunities.</li> <li>- The national qualifications framework is comprehensive, integrating both vocational and general qualifications and includes a strong commitment to the avoidance of dead-ends and pathways of progression.</li> <li>- Collaboration with social partners is well-established and takes place at most relevant levels.</li> <li>- The apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on and off-the-job elements.</li> <li>- At high level there is good co-operation between the two lead departments, with little sense of rivalry. The National Skills Strategy (<a href="http://www.skillsstrategy.ie">www.skillsstrategy.ie</a>) provides for common objectives.</li> <li>- There are some innovative ways of engaging employers in a bottom-up approach to provision, such as Skillnets – an initiative widely supported by employers.</li> </ul>

Table 1 – Examples of successful VET systems in Europe (OECD 2011).





## Soft Skills implementation in Europe

Soft Skills are becoming more and more important, indeed SMEs and companies are looking for employees that have these types of skills more than technical or academic skills that can be learnt during apprenticeships or job experience. For these reasons VET centres, VET schools and universities as well, are implementing different typologies of cooperation programmes with companies in order to better take advantage of this request throughout Europe.

The following are just some examples of implementation and improvement programmes for Soft Skills in different EU countries that the European project “eLene4work<sup>49</sup>” carried out through a comparative analysis:

Country	Examples of how Soft Skills are approached
Belgium	<p>A very interesting initiative is the U2ES - University to Enterprise and Society “Boost your skills” (University of Namur). It presents additional courses (14 credits ECTS in all) focused on soft skills that enrich bachelor/master/PhD students’ university curriculum. Courses focus mainly on organisation skills, communication, personal development. They can last from 6 months to 2/3 years.</p> <p>Another initiative is the HoGent - Centre for Entrepreneurship (University of Gent). The Centre carries out practical-oriented research and services for entrepreneurs. Students/trainees engaging in the Centre’s activities acquire knowledge about entrepreneurship and receive a certificate as proof of their skills and (first) relevant practical experience. There are also trainings, like the training on Soft Skills for PhD students (University of Liège). Considered that not all PhD students will have academic positions, the University of Liège provides them additional courses on soft skills to make them more prepared to enter the labour market.</p> <p>Another initiative is “Logistics in Wallonia - Soft Skills Certificate”. Trainings focus on flexibility, leadership, team-working, self-development, interpersonal skills, ability to work in multicultural groups and problem-solving capacities. The program is the result of an agreement among the above-mentioned universities, the Centre for Long-Life Learning of the University of Liege and “Logistics in Wallonia”, an association of 265 members from different fields (industries, infrastructures management services, research centres).</p>
France	<p>In France, the Career Center is an initiative with the aim of developing soft skills. On the website of the Career Center there is help to find a job and it suggests several transversal skills to develop: leadership, teamwork, problem solving, organization, communication, self-knowledge, motivation and enthusiasm, decision-making and flexibility.</p> <p>Another initiative is the CEDEFI, an association of the directors of French Engineering Schools, which offers a course to help future PHD students to improve their competences to join a company (80% of PhDs in scientific disciplines are working in enterprises). The curricula includes a part called ‘autonomy and project management’ where some soft skills are taken into account, such as learning skills, adaptability to changes, project management, leadership or communication.</p> <p>Finally, the Reflex Soft Skills Academy is a website with videos to learn to develop soft skills in relation with the book Reflex soft skills</p>

<sup>49</sup> <http://elene4work.eu/>



Country	Examples of how Soft Skills are approached
	<p>(Conscientiousness, entrepreneurship, confidence and synergy).</p> <p>A further initiative in the field of soft-skills development is the TalentCampus project which is one of the programmes supported by the Centre for Research and Higher Education (PRES) Bourgogne Franche-Comté via its Foundation for Scientific Cooperation. TalentCampus is an innovative education programme designed for the development of social competences using soft skills. Proposed in the format of Summer, Winter and Spring schools, TalentCampus aims to develop competences complementary to academic ones: leadership, behaviour in society, emotional intelligence, stress management.</p>
Spain	<p>Soft skills and digital skills are also very important in Spain, as it is reflected by the debates and amount of research on this issue recently. There is a lot of research coming from Spanish universities, which has treated the topic of how to introduce soft skills in the academic curriculums. However, according to some sources, it is believed that these actions have been taken without having generated enough debate on the issue in order to clarify the concepts around it and to analyse the most appropriate models. The initiatives are not only appearing in the academic context, but also in companies, where there are trainings on soft skills.</p>

Table 2 – Examples of initiatives and strategies to approach Soft Skills.



## Perception of VET education in Europe

The European Centre for Development of Vocational Training<sup>50</sup> has carried out a survey at European level in order to understand and analyse the situation of the perception of VET education among European citizens. The results show that in Europe VET education is widely considered as relevant when it comes to the readiness toward the job market and the learning and improvement of relevant skills. This helps to highlight the importance of VET education is being given, providing different reasons to SMEs and companies to become more and more interested hiring VET trainees and improving their cooperation with VET centres and VET schools.

There is a consensus across the various Member States that *‘people in vocational education learn skills that are needed by employers’* in their country. The European Commission<sup>51</sup> has emphasised the importance of VET in responding to employers’ needs and addressing skills shortages and at least three quarters of respondents in every country agree with this matter.

Moreover, in the EU as a whole, two in three citizens agree that *“VET education allows you to find a job quickly after obtaining a qualification or diploma”*. Generally, people agree with this statement, but it also depends on Member States since structural employment patterns play a role in these perceptions.

When comparing VET education with general education at the upper secondary stage, these views also hold. Most respondents say that people who complete vocational education are more likely to find a job than those who complete general education at upper secondary level. The fact that participants in VET are more likely to find a job than those who complete general education seems logical, as general education usually prepares students to continue to further education. However, when respondents were asked to compare the work prospects of people who complete VET education with those who go on to complete higher education, respondents still considered VET as providing better employment prospects than general education at a higher level.

When it comes to VET students and trainees and soft skills acquisition, they most likely say that they developed the ability to work with others, followed by the ability to pursue and organise their own learning and communication skills. Around two-thirds of respondents whose upper secondary education was primarily VET say that they developed the ability to think critically, mathematical skills, and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, VET students/trainees who had been on work-related training in the previous 12 months were asked about the last training they did. More than half (54%) of those whose upper secondary education was primarily VET, say that their last training was to acquire new skills, while just under half (46%) say that it was to update their existing skills.

This survey gives somehow a demonstration on how VET education is more and more helping students/trainees to develop and improve soft skills required by the job market.

<sup>50</sup> European centre for the Development of Vocational Training. (2011). Vocational education and training is good for you – The social benefits of VET individuals. Research paper. P. 31. Accessed on 19th April 2019, available [here](#).

<sup>51</sup> Idem.



Country	Case study
Italy	<p>An example of successful VET education comes from the city of Milan in Italy, where a survey was carried out by the Italian Chamber of Commerce of Milan, Monza-Brianza and Lodi analysing 360 SMEs and their opinion on the VET system. The results show that SMEs around the city of Milan consider the preparation of VET students/trainees positive in relation to their readiness to enter the job market. In particular, the survey analysed both hard and soft skills in order to understand companies and SMEs consider more important and how they consider VET students/trainees in relation to these skills.</p> <p>When it comes to the analysis of soft and hard skills, if we move on to a cross-sectional examination an important result appears. Usually companies give to trainees more executive tasks and therefore the importance assigned to transversal competences can be interpreted as the expression of a demand for a workforce. This becomes understandable if we think that no school, like the professional ones, will ever be able to train students/trainees, taking into account the specific needs of each individual company. Therefore, the possibility to improve a student's professional experience comes from the ability to transmit skills that can be spent in the market no matter how much you learn in the classroom, but from what you will experience in the workplace through long periods passed in the company as trainees.</p> <p>Overall, the companies in the city of Milan which participated to this survey have reported as more relevant are those of a cross-sectional nature, with grades almost at the bottom of the scale (8, 9 out of 10).</p>



## European Projects on Soft Skills

There are different European projects which aim at implementing soft skills and their importance throughout Europe. This section wants to share some examples of European projects related to this topic.

**KA 2 - Strategic Partnership for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices**  
**"Hard-Soft Skilling-Charting your Career Path"**  
[www.hardsoftskilling.charleslaugier.ro](http://www.hardsoftskilling.charleslaugier.ro) email: [hardsoftskills@gmail.com](mailto:hardsoftskills@gmail.com)  
 2014-1-RO01-KA201-002736 1

The Hard-Soft Skilling - Charting your Career Path aims at helping students to gain high transferable skills to help them in everyday life and labour market new challenges. The acquisition and interaction between hard and soft skills is imperative due to the socio-economic conditions nowadays. As a result, in accordance with the individual training needs, teachers should be endowed with didactic and pedagogical tools able to boost students' school-work transition and provide the learning environment with a more real life oriented approach.

## E-QUA project

The E-QUA project aims at mapping and analysing different models of mobility in Europe taking into consideration that students that take part in such mobility programmes should have the opportunity to experience the right mix between job oriented skills and soft skills in order to have a smooth transition from the school environment to the job market. To address these problems, the E-QUA Project proposes an 'Erasmus Quality Hosting Framework' that defines the criteria of a quality mobility programme, its fundamental principles and its minimum requirements in order to develop specific skills, such as operative skills, intellectual/ practical/relational/managerial skills, personal skills and thought skills.



The NESSIE project aims at connecting the importance of the acquisition of soft skills with the labour market problems. In particular the project wants to help the learner gain an understanding of what soft skills are and how they can develop their own to enhance their career prospects and difficulties, such as high staff turnover/difficulty recruiting (particularly in the young), lack of ability to compete, inability to cope with change, reasons for staff dismissal and problems in school.



The GRASS project aims at creating a mechanism to support monitor and assess the soft skills of learners of various ages and at different levels of education with the help of ICT tools. The project will develop pedagogical, technological, and administrative solutions for grading of soft skills in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.



ICARO project focus on the assessment and development of soft skills by unemployed adult learners and provides four main products: Soft skills assessment toolkit, training curriculum on soft skills for unemployed adult learners, Handbook for Adult Staff and Blending learning programme – “From home to work”.





## European projects on VET business cooperation



The Skills 4 Work project aims at creating a Work-Based Learning implementation model in order to help VET students. The focus is on learning from each other by involving local enterprises in the implementation and validation process of this WBL model through a real dialogue with employers in order to receive different approaches and feedbacks from experts engaged job market.



VETWORK is a network created through the Leonardo da Vinci programme that aims at gathering together different actors involved in VET, employment and territorial strategies in order to implement and strengthen the collaboration between VET providers and the business sector in line with the priorities and objectives of the Bruges Communiqué regarding the required skills for the job market.



The QualiTools project aims at strengthening the skills of VET teachers and trainers adapting their training for their development to the needs of VET students. The objective of the project is to train and enhance teachers' skills and knowledge in a work environment in order to develop new practical approaches which will help students to deal with the word of work.



The Introduction of Elements of Dual VET Slovak Republic is a project which aims at strengthening and reform the Vocational Education and Training system in Slovakia through the training of teachers in companies. This approach has the final goal of strengthening the cooperation between SMEs and VET providers taking into consideration best practices from other partner countries where this dual collaboration is well developed, such as Austria and Germany.





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### European projects websites

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<http://elene4work.eu/>

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<http://icaro-softskills.eu/>

<http://invet-project.eu/>

<https://qualitools.at/>

<https://sites.google.com/site/llpgrassproject/>

<http://skills4workproject.eu/>

[www.ttt4wbl-project.eu](http://www.ttt4wbl-project.eu)

<http://vetwork.eu/>

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<https://www.minedu.sk/national-authorities-for-apprenticeships-introduction-of-elements-dual-vet-slovak-republic/>





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