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# Apprenticeships Opening doors to a better future

## A Handbook for VET Students

An apprenticeship is a job with an accompanying skills development programme designed by employers in the sector. It allows you to gain knowledge and real practical experience, along with functional and personal skills, required for your immediate job and future career. These are acquired through a mixture of learning in the workplace and the opportunity to practise and embed new skills in a real work context.

***‘The key is to find the right people who inspire and motivate you – regardless of whether you meet them in your workplace or socially. Find the people who open the doors to new possibilities and dream big dreams with you but also work hard and can teach you a lot.’ - Anna, Poland***



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## Introduction

**Promote WBL project** is developing an On line programme to support effective Work Based Learning (WBL) to support the reduction of youth unemployment across the EU. It supports students to develop their skills to meet employer needs and find work.

The aim of this handbook is to provide you with practical advice and guidance from peers (VET students who have participated in WBL) to help you to prepare, build on your potential and make you aware of the benefits that WBL can offer. This document was developed based on the **views of 31 Students across Europe** (Spain, Italy, Poland, Greece) to show the challenges and experiences of young people undertaking Work Based Learning /Apprenticeships - this is to raise awareness of Students own experiences.

We asked students some open question to describe the biggest challenges and difficulties during the apprenticeship and how it was solved /managed. Also, if they had a chance to start the WBL apprenticeship again what would they do anything differently to prepare for it. We also asked them to give some practical tips.

Surveys were conducted in October and November 2017. Based on the answers we divided this handbook into 6 parts:

1. Work-based learning in VET- benefits from a peers point of view
2. How to plan and prepare for WBL
3. Effective communication with mentor
4. How to survive first weeks of the apprenticeship?
5. Advices to make the most of WBL in mobility
6. Five ways to make the most of your apprenticeship



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**Glossary of Terms** For purpose of this document we use this terminology:

***Work – based Learning (WBL)***

Formal training or learning that is provided during employment, at the place of work, not by a School, College or University

***WBL students***

Could be apprentices, interns, trainees or work experience students. For the purposes of this handbook we will refer to all WBL students as apprentices but this could cover any type of student relationship with an employer

***Learner***

Student/Trainee/Appentice

***Apprenticeship***

A job with an accompanying skills development programme designed by Employers in the sector. It allows you to gain technical knowledge and real practical experience, along with functional and personal skills, required for your immediate job and future career

***Employer***

The company/organisation where the Work Based Learning happens.

***Mentor***

Representative of the Employer. This is the person within your workplace who will supervise your work, support you through your training and give you guidance to help you achieve your apprenticeship

***Learning Centre Institution***

The organisation that arranges the educational part of the course. This could be School, College, Training Provider or other Institution.

***Educator***

Representative of the Learning Centre = Assesor/ Teacher/Tutor/Deliverer

***Individual Learning Plan (ILP)***

Apprenticeship program / Training Plan



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## 1. Work-based learning in VET- benefits from peers point of view

If you have ever wondered if it is better to go to work directly after school or maybe take part in apprenticeships – there are simple aspects to consider:

With an apprenticeship you will:

- Be more likely to secure a job following your chosen career
- Receive a recognised qualification
- Learn specific skills which employers really want
- Have the opportunity to learn completely new skills or study further in your chosen area
- Gain invaluable experience which will help you maximise your employability

**Almost 45 % of WBL students consider WBL as more affordable than full-time study**, one of the students we spoke to claimed that deciding to do an apprenticeship was one of the biggest decisions they had ever had to make but the most valuable decision in terms of vocational experience. Apprenticeships are recognised as a fantastic pathway into your chosen career.

*‘Do not be afraid to challenge yourself’ - Monika, Poland*

*‘You will learn to be more flexible and ready to deal with different situations and problems at the same time. You will also gain the ability to work under little supervision.’ - Samuele, Italy*

*‘I was able to observe the demeanour and procedures of a professional workplace’ - Alessandro, Italy*



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**Most WBL peers consider apprenticeships as something totally different compared to previous experiences from education:**

- WBL is the best way to learn is to put theory into practise
- WBL creates the opportunity to watch professionalist in the field, learn good practise in communication, solving problems and planning your time

*'The biggest challenge for me was the fact that I had to deal with new people and with a different way of managing the work to be done'* - Alesjo, Italy





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## 2. How to plan and prepare for WBL

### ***How to find a good apprenticeship offer and where to look for them?***

A good apprenticeship offer is first of all one that clearly defines the scope of duties of the apprentice. If the description is limited to tasks such as "support the IT department" do not be afraid to ask for more clarification. Doing this in the early stages of your communications is advisable to avoid unpleasant surprises! Organise a way to ask – by phone, email or even face-to-face – what your tasks/duties will be exactly and which department you will be working with.

If you are interested in working for a particular employer consider looking on their website for any apprenticeship job offered – search for the career/jobs/vacancies tab.

If you are interested in a given sector and not in a given company, you can check out various advertisements on the websites of Career Offices.

Many Learning centers closely cooperate with employers so you can also ask your VET teacher.

### ***How long will it take?***

The time frame differs on the type of apprenticeship you undertake. This will be discussed at the beginning of your apprenticeship when your **Learning Centre Institution and Employer** build you an individual learning plan (if your VET school cooperates with employers). Apprenticeships generally take between 3 and 24 months up to 3 years.



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### ***What hours will I work?***

Most apprenticeships are based on full time working hours and can be a mixture of time in the workplace and time at school. This is agreed with your employer before you start your apprenticeship programme and tailored to the individual employer and apprenticeship needs.

### ***Attendance***

If you are unable to attend work you must follow your employer's procedures for reporting your absence.

### ***Individual Learning Plan***

Before you will start your apprenticeship you will need to have an Individual Learning plan in place. This document is provided by Learning Centre Institution in cooperation with the mentor or only by the mentor.

What do you need to know about Individual Learning Plan?

- The mentor and the learner are actively engaged in developing this document
- The Individual Learning Plan is a living document that is used by all parties for the duration of the apprenticeship.
- The Individual Learning Plan outlines the training delivery and assessment strategy for the on the job training provided to the apprentice.



### ***Interview Process***

Often apprentices are interviewed by an employer recruitment team and sometimes by a member of a training provider as well. This is to ensure that you are



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placed with the right employer and at the right level and that any prior experience or knowledge is taken into account.

As part of the Interview, apprentices are required to undertake assessment tests. There is no 'pass' or 'fail' with these tests – the purpose is to highlight those learners who may need additional support to help them achieve the qualification.

It is also good opportunity to ask the employer about some organisational aspects of your apprenticeship:

- Who would you report to?
- What progression routes are there within the company?
- Could the interviewer see you fitting in with the current team?
- What will be your day to day responsibilities?
- Will there be any internal training other than the apprenticeship?
- What is the first project that you will be working on?

*'Be prepared with a list of skills you want to develop: it is a good idea to have this prepared and share with your coordinator/mentor so that you are both aware of exactly what you want to learn. This is also a great way of keeping track of what you have actually learned as it is easy to carry out tasks and develop a skill and forget about it, so by the time the internship is over you may not recognise the amount you have actually learned/developed. I found it very useful to have a list of capabilities and skills I wanted to learn (or that your mentor would like you to learn) and to go through updating this after I had carried out specific tasks.'* - Sarah, Spain

### 3. Effective Communication With Business Mentor

The main role of the business mentor is to support, advise and help you to achieve your work and learning goals. This is also person who will supervise your work.



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During the apprenticeship you will communicate with your mentor about your progress. Effective communication features regular contact between the mentor and you. The learning activities and resources should be tailored to your needs and learning styles. Sometimes you may find that a task can be difficult or unfamiliar to you - do not be afraid to ask for explanation or help.

There is nothing wrong with asking questions, in fact, asking questions also shows your commitment to the work and willingness to learn new skills. This is valued and recognised by employers.

Please remember how important the feedback is that you will receive from your mentor. Don't be afraid to be assessed - it makes you stronger and you will be aware of your strengths and weaknesses as well as areas of skills/knowledge that you have to improve on to become more professional .

*'Never feel embarrassed to ask a question you may think is "silly". Another key piece of advice would be to always ask questions if you are not sure on a particular task because this is the best way of learning. There is no point in wasting time carrying out a task incorrectly because you don't understand it, everyone is aware that you are learning and are always happy to help.'*

- Sarah, Spain

*'Try to see yourself applying what you are learning to helping your company or your employees. Be responsible about what you are studying but be conscious that you don't really know anything about working.'* Ane, Spain

### **Practical Tips Interaction With Your VET Teacher**

During the apprenticeship you may want to consult your VET teacher regarding a task or aspects of your learning process. They should support you and provide advice. How do you recognise if the teacher is providing adequate ongoing support to you to help make the learning process a good and useful experience for you both?



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Below you will find some characteristics of a supportive teacher:

- Active listening and empathising with the apprentice. Being alert to what the apprentice says, both explicitly and implicitly.
- Enables the trainee to step back and look at their experience.
- Not quick to judge and considers recommendations when needed – first listens, understands the problem/situation, asks reflective questions and then provides recommendations according to the situation.
- Starts discussions for further exploration of different approaches to problems/situations.
- Stimulates the apprentice to make links with theoretical learning and other experiences.
- Stimulates the apprentice to reflect on consequences of her/his behaviour and approach to problems/situations.
- Helps the apprentice get an insight in to their feelings and motivations.
- Gives feedback on the behaviour of the apprentice and the way others experience this behaviour.
- In the event of a problem/ situation, helps the apprentice become aware of the situation and focus on the real problem.
- Opens new horizons, developing hypotheses, stimulating reflection on alternatives in each problem/situation.
- Shares own experiences, tell stories, and shows own vulnerability by being open about feelings, doubts and lessons learnt from the past.
- Directs the discussion from problem to solution.
- Challenges the apprentice to investigate options when facing problems/situations.
- Looks for possibilities to put what apprentice have been learned into practice.
- Encourages the apprentice to experiment, to develop new insights and ways of acting.



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#### 4. How to Survive The First Few Weeks of the Apprenticeship?

The first days in a new place, with new people can be difficult even for the most experienced staff.



What to do to survive when you are WBL student?

First of all, **do not stress**. Nerves do not help show off your best side. To minimize stress, one day before you start, relax, sleep well, and on the first day eat a decent breakfast.

**Don't be late!** Appear at work on time (or earlier), come to the meetings before they start and do the tasks ahead of time. As a WBL student you are both: a guest in a new environment and a co-worker, show respect by being punctual.

**Dress code:** each apprenticeship has its own dress code. You will be given details of the clothes that you will be expected to wear by your mentor.

**Smile.** Even if you are stressed be cheerful and kind. Always try to be polite and helpful.

**Please always remember that you, as well as employer have some responsibilities established to make an apprenticeship successful.**

**You can expect your Employer to:**

- Support you in gaining your training qualifications
- Ensure you have appropriate on-the-job work experience and sufficient time to enable you to achieve your objectives
- Comply with all relevant Health & Safety legislation and provide a safe working environment
- Provide Health & Safety Induction Training



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- Hold current employers and public liability insurance and vehicle insurance where appropriate
- Provide personal protective equipment in accordance with law and good occupational practice
- Ensure adequate & competent supervision
- Record your workplace attendance and inform you of any unauthorised absences
- Ensure each apprentice is aware of the companies Equal Opportunities Policy
- Take part in the regular review of your progress
- Be involved and in agreement with the reviews, Individual Learning Plan and target setting

#### **You are required to:**

- Be committed to succeed with the apprenticeship
- Work hard and stick to the employer's rules and procedures
- Accept responsibility for your own learning and to ask for help when needed (from mentor)
- Attend regularly and punctually all required activities and to account for any absence
- Be honest and trustworthy and willing to learn how to do the job well
- Have cultural awareness and sensitivity
- Be motivated to progress and develop career skills
- Complete all required work
- Read, accept rules and regulations and maintain good standards of behaviour
- Understand about Health & Safety and Safeguarding
- Report promptly any absence from work that requires medical intervention
- Provide feedback on the quality of the service provided within the individual learning programme.

*'For me the main challenge was entering the work place environment for the first time, and added to this difficulty was the fact that I worked around people from different cultures. In the end this was a definite beneficial experience however at the beginning I found it difficult to adapt to new surroundings and communicate with new people in a different language.'*



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*I think I was able to overcome this obstacle over time through becoming more comfortable around the people I was working with and with living in the country I soon adapted more to the culture and different way of doing things, an example to demonstrate this would be different Greetings. For example, in the UK in a business environment the typical greeting used would be to shake somebodies hand, however in Spain it is much more common to do the Kiss on cheek greeting. The skill of intercultural communication is very important and although at first this was very new to me however after living and working in the country for a while I became used to this new way of doing things.’ - Sarah, Spain*

## 5. Advise to Make the Most of WBL in Mobility

International apprenticeships are getting more popular among learners. There are many EU programmes supporting WBL student mobilities. For you it can be a chance to get practical skills in an international environment.

To apply for this kind of apprenticeship you can do it on your own, or take part in Projects implemented in Learning Centres. Many EU programmes are financed from European funds. Some examples :

### **Global Talents AIESEC**

AIESEC is the world's largest independent youth organization, operating in 122 countries at local, national and global levels. You can go abroad up to 12 months

### **Erasmus + Programme**

To take part in this programme your Learning institution has to submit proposal. It offers apprenticeship abroad and working in EU companies.



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## Career in Diplomacy?

Why not. A great opportunity for young people seeking internships abroad is the application to EU institutions. Every year they are very keen to take students for three or four months. You can apply to almost any organization, each of which has its own requirements for recruitment.

## Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

If you are consider opening your own business there is no better way to learn how to run a bussines. This Programme allows you to work with foregin Entrepreneurs from the same branch. This is the Programme helps provide aspiring European entrepreneurs with the skills necessary to start and/or successfully run a small business in Europe. New entrepreneurs gather and exchange knowledge and business ideas with an experienced entrepreneur, with whom they stay and collaborate for a period of 1 to 6 months. The stay is partly financed by the European Commission. As a new entrepreneur, you will benefit from on-the-job training in a small or medium-sized enterprise in another EU Country.

## 6. Five Ways to Make the Most of Your Apprenticeship

**1. Before you decide to do apprenticeship** try to think about your future career. Ask yourself - Where am I now? Where do I want to be? How will I get there? Plan your next steps.

*'I would advise people to be ready to be flexible and open to chances and to share experiences and results in order to improve the effectiveness of apprenticeship' - Riccardo, Italy*

*'To prepare for it (apprientenship) I would attend more English courses to get a wider command of this language. In my opinion I should study English well in order to be able to communicate with others' - Aurora, Italy*

**2. Be punctual** - Arrive at work on time (or earlier), come to the meetings before they start, and do the tasks ahead of time. Show respect to your mentor and co-workers through good punctuality.



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**3. Make sure that all your tasks are completed successfully** - Complete your assigned tasks with unwavering commitment and determination in pursuit of excellence. Delivering the entrusted tasks with enthusiasm and to a high quality is the foundation upon which your success is based.

**4. Ask questions** - Be curious about your work and don't be afraid to ask - just learn as much as you can about your profession. You only have a few months to get as much information as you can. Most people will easily find time to resolve any doubts you may have.

*'I think I will do more research about the city where I work, I would visit the Randers library and I would be less shy.'* - Elisa, Italy

**5. Build a professional relationship** - Building a broad and deep relationship with your team and entire organization will help you meet current responsibilities while also contributing to your personal development. This way you will create a network of contacts that you can use when looking for another job. Watch and learn from people in your company who are good at building relationships.

*'If I had the chance to start again I would definitely extend the program to at least six months. Also I would look to gain more business connections in the Netherlands - finding new people with the same interests.'* - Karnoutsos, Greece

*'I would advise people to be flexible and open to opportunities and to share experiences and results in order to improve the effectiveness of apprenticeship.'* - Riccardo, Italy



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## **Annex 1**

*If you would like to know more about WBL in your country, please follow the link below:*

**SPAIN**      <http://www.todofp.es/sobre-fp/formacion-en-centros-de-trabajo.html>

**CROATIA**      <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/hr/news-and-press/news/croatia-vocational-education-and-training-focus>

**UK**      <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

**POLAND**      [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure-56\\_pl](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-education-system-and-its-structure-56_pl) and <http://stazeipraktyki.pl/program>

**ITALY**      <http://www.alternanza.miur.gov.it/normativa.html>.

**GREECE**      <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4160>

**BELGIUM (f)**      <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/belgium-flanders-taster-exercises-promote-dual-learning>  
<http://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/duaal-leren>

**BELGIUM (w)**      <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/belgium-new-coordination-hub-work-based-learning>  
<http://www.offa-oip.be/accueil/les-missions-de-loffice-francophone-de-la-formation-en-alternance/>