



Work-based learning and simulations

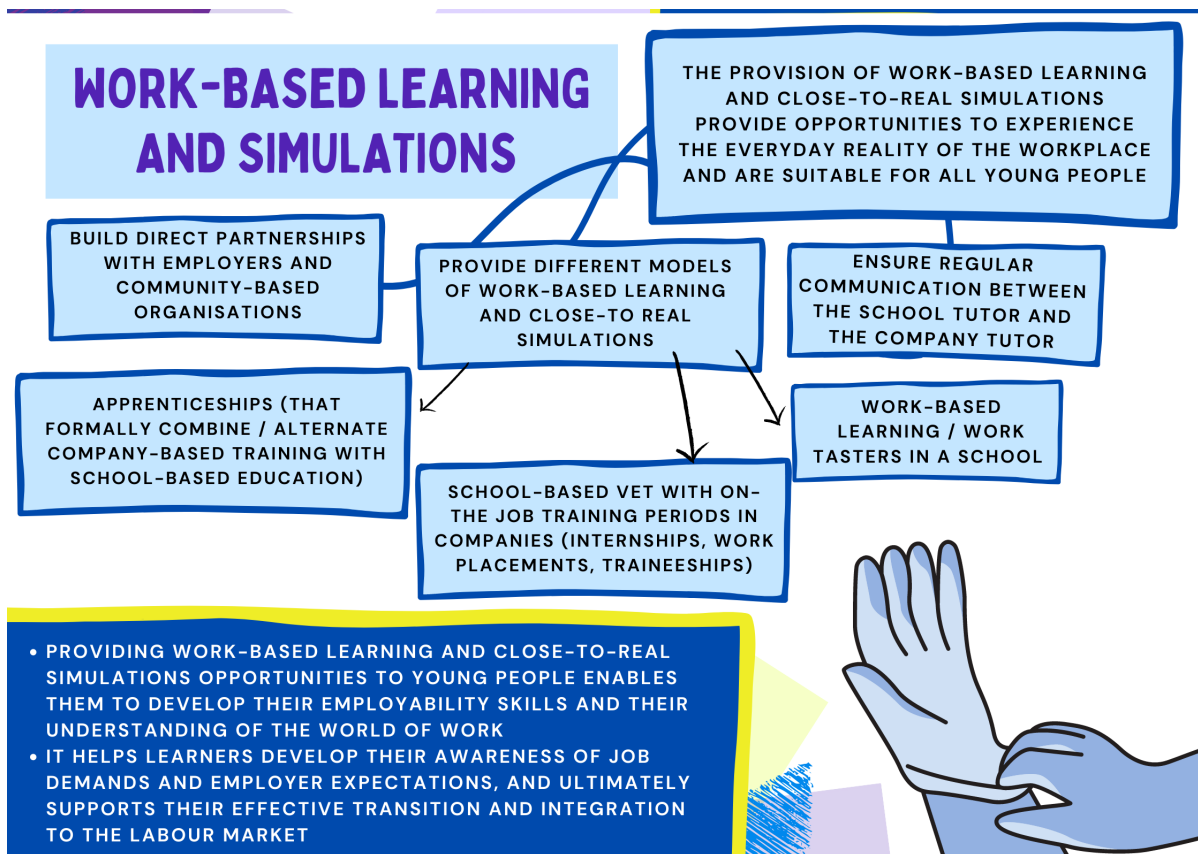
Problem statement

Addressed problem: Limited exposure to authentic work environments and insufficient work readiness

All young people require structured support to facilitate a successful transition from education to employment. Participation in work-based learning and high-quality workplace simulations enables learners to develop informed career aspirations, while strengthening the behaviours, attitudes and competences required in professional settings.

Young people often show strong engagement with work-based and simulation-based approaches, as these align with preferences for vocational, practice-oriented learning, and provide hands-on experience of workplace environments. Such approaches can contribute to increased self-esteem, motivation and learner confidence.

Employers frequently identify limited work experience and insufficient work readiness as key challenges when young people enter the labour market. Learning activities that replicate or provide access to real working contexts support the [development of employability skills](#), which are essential for effective workplace integration and for sustained participation and retention in vocational education and training (VET).



Beneficiaries

- 📁 Early leavers from education and training
- 📁 Learners at risk of early leaving from education and training
- 📁 Learners who lack employability skills
- 📁 VET students (school-based learning)
- 📁 Migrants / refugees
- 📁 Low-performing learners
- 📁 VET students (work-based learning)

The provision of work-based learning and high-quality workplace simulations offers young people opportunities to experience the realities of everyday working life and is relevant to all learners. These approaches are particularly beneficial for:

- Young people at risk of early leaving from education and training, or those who have already disengaged;
- Young people with low motivation to continue learning and limited awareness of the value of education;
- Young people with low self-esteem and limited longer-term aspirations;
- Young people requiring support to develop the behaviours, attitudes and social competences necessary for the workplace.

Addressing the problem

Tips: What should be the key features of work-based learning?

The following recommendations are intended for policy-makers and practitioners involved in the design and delivery of work-based learning measures. They draw on evidence from

Tip 1: Ensure access to high-quality career guidance and practical information

High-quality [career guidance](#) and counselling should be accessible to all young people. Such support enables learners to develop an understanding of the labour market and to explore a range of career pathways and employment opportunities.

Young people entering the workplace for the first time may experience uncertainty or feel unprepared for workplace expectations. They should therefore be supported through targeted guidance that clarifies their roles, responsibilities and rights, including compliance with employment terms and conditions.

Providing clear and practical information - such as working hours, dress code, supervisory arrangements, travel logistics, remuneration, and workplace health and safety - can help reduce uncertainty and facilitate a smoother transition into the workplace environment.

Tip 2: Offer diverse models of work-based learning and high-quality workplace simulations

A range of work-based learning models and workplace simulation approaches should be made available to accommodate different learning needs and system contexts. These include:

- Apprenticeships that combine or alternate company-based training with school-based education;
- School-based VET programmes that include structured periods of on-the-job training in companies (e.g. internships, work placements, traineeships);
- School-based work-based learning activities and “work tasters” (e.g. on-site laboratories, workshops, training restaurants, junior or practice firms, and simulated or real industry projects).

Work tasters are particularly valuable, as they allow young people to explore different occupational fields prior to transition into employment. Such measures support the development of employability skills and provide early exposure to workplace cultures, enabling more informed career decisions.

Where apprenticeship opportunities are limited, work-based learning or work tasters in a school can also serve as a bridging mechanism for learners unable to access placements.

Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, virtual reality and augmented reality, can further enhance work-based learning and simulation-based approaches by enabling more personalised learning experiences, strengthening skills development and enriching traditional school-based provision with immersive, workplace-relevant environments.

Opportunities to explore different occupational areas should be tailored to the interests, needs and capabilities of each learner. They should include preparatory

activities - such as completing application forms, participating in interviews and attending briefing sessions - as well as structured reflection on the learning experience. This reflection may cover tasks performed, skills developed, and individual strengths and aptitudes demonstrated.

Tip 3: Establish strong and sustainable partnerships with employers

Close cooperation between education and training providers and employers is essential to ensure the availability of high-quality in-company learning opportunities for learners. Such partnerships are also critical to ensuring that workplace experiences are meaningful, relevant and aligned with learners' needs.

Collaboration with employers can enhance the labour market relevance of curricula and increase its attractiveness to young people. It also enables the development of a diverse range of work-readiness activities, including career talks, work tasters and job shadowing opportunities.

Education and training providers should [adopt flexible approaches](#) to organising workplace learning opportunities in partnership with employers, taking into account varying levels of employer capacity. Delivery models may include regular placements (e.g. one day per week over a term), block placements of longer duration, or rotational placements across different departments, allowing learners to gain broader exposure to organisational functions.

Partnerships can also be developed through digital platforms, significantly expanding access to employers and broadening the range of available learning opportunities.

Employers likewise benefit from sustained engagement with education providers. Such partnerships offer opportunities to showcase sectors and workplaces, strengthen their visibility within local communities, and support the development of future talent pipelines.

Tip 4: Strengthen partnerships with community-based organisations

Community-based organisations can play a significant role in supporting young people in their transition from education to employment. In addition to providing opportunities for work-based learning and high-quality workplace simulations, many such organisations offer complementary services and activities that foster self-esteem, motivation and the development of essential life skills.

These forms of engagement may be particularly effective in reaching young people at risk of early leaving from education and training, including those facing academic challenges or disengagement from formal learning.

Digital tools - such as mentoring platforms and e-portfolios - can further enhance support mechanisms by enabling case coordinators and workplace supervisors to monitor learner progress in real time. This facilitates timely intervention where challenges arise during placements and supports more personalised guidance.

Tip 5: Ensure structured and regular communication between school and company tutors

Where [work-based training](#) is delivered in a company or another external training entity, a designated workplace tutor or mentor should be appointed to oversee the learner's training. This role is essential for ensuring structured coordination and ongoing dialogue between education and training providers and employers, enabling coherent delivery across school-based and workplace learning components.

Such coordination can be further strengthened through the assignment of a key contact person (e.g. a case worker or learner coordinator), who supports the learner throughout the learning pathway. This helps ensure that learners feel adequately supported, while also providing clarity for employers regarding the relationship between on-the-job and off-the-job learning components.

In addition, digital recognition tools - such as digital badges and micro-credentials - can provide an effective mechanism for validating and recording skills and technical competences acquired through workplace learning or simulations.

These portable, digital credentials enhance transparency and can strengthen the learner's evidence of work-readiness.

Tip 6: Ensure quality assurance and clear learning outcomes for workplace learning

Clear learning outcomes and structured quality assurance mechanisms should underpin all forms of work-based learning. Training content, roles and expectations should be formally defined and jointly agreed by schools and employers.

Regular assessment and feedback should be integrated into the learning process to ensure that workplace experiences contribute meaningfully to competence development and progression.

Tip 7: Provide incentives and support for employer participation

Employers should be supported to participate in work-based learning through appropriate incentives and enabling conditions. These may include financial compensation, administrative support, training for workplace mentors, or recognition schemes for participating companies.

Such measures help reduce barriers to participation, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and contribute to sustained employer engagement.

Tip 8: Monitor, evaluate and improve work-based learning systems

Work-based learning systems should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure effectiveness, equity and quality. Monitoring frameworks should include learner outcomes, employer satisfaction, progression into employment, and inclusiveness of participation.

Findings from evaluation should be used to continuously improve programme design, strengthen partnerships, and adapt provision to evolving labour market needs.

For more information on monitoring and evaluation see [here](#).

Expected outcomes

Providing work-based learning and/or high-quality workplace simulations enables young people to develop overall work readiness and a deeper understanding of the world of work. It strengthens their awareness of job demands and employer expectations and supports a smoother transition into and integration within the labour market.

The following outcomes can be expected at different levels:



 INDIVIDUAL	 INSTITUTIONAL	 SYSTEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulated interest in occupations and increased curiosity about career pathways • Improved work habits and professional behaviours • Improved technical and digital competences through exposure to technologies such as VR/AR and AI-supported learning environments • Development of a positive attitude towards learning, education and training • Higher engagement and motivation to learn due to interactive and realistic training • Increased engagement and motivation through interactive and practice-oriented learning • Better understanding of career options, job roles and workplace environments • More informed career decision-making • Improved self-awareness, including understanding of abilities, aptitudes and interests • Enhanced work readiness and employability skills • Increased confidence through structured exposure to real or simulated workplaces • Portable recognition of skills and competences through digital badges and micro-credentials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased availability and diversity of work-based learning opportunities for learners • Improved satisfaction of learners, employers and education providers with programmes • Better alignment of programmes with learner needs and labour market requirements • Enhanced curriculum relevance through sustained employer cooperation • Established and structured cooperation procedures between education and training providers and employers • Strengthened cooperation with community-based organisations to support vulnerable learners • More systematic use of digital platforms to facilitate collaboration between education providers, employers and support organisations • More flexible delivery models of work-based learning (e.g. block placements, rotational placements, school-based simulations) • Improved monitoring and support mechanisms through digital tools (e-portfolios, mentoring platforms) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved integration between workplace learning and VET provider-based learning • Increased participation in vocational education and training (VET) programmes • Stronger alignment between VET systems and digital transformation (including AI, VR and digital learning environments) • Reduced regional inequalities through expanded digital access to training and simulations • Stronger and more sustainable partnerships between education providers, employers and community-based organisations • Improved quality assurance and coherence of work-based learning systems • Increased employer engagement and contribution to skills development pipelines • Enhanced transparency and recognition of skills through digital credentials across systems

Related protective factors



Positive future vision for oneself and positive career choices



Work readiness

Related resources

Statistics and data

 Statistics and data

Apprenticeship schemes in EU supporting the school-to-work transition enhancing employability

24 Member States have apprenticeship schemes in which at least 50% of the training takes place on the company's premises. Apprenticeships are usually associated with a number of benefits for individual learners, for the companies that use them, and for the society overall.

 Austria  Belgium  Bulgaria  Croatia  Cyprus  Czechia  Denmark

 Estonia  EU level  Finland  France  Germany  Greece  Hungary

 Ireland  Italy  Latvia  Lithuania  Luxembourg  Malta

 Netherlands  Poland  Portugal  Romania  Slovakia  Slovenia

 Spain  Sweden  United Kingdom

Good practices

 Good practice

Supra-Company Training

Überbetriebliche Lehrausbildung (ÜBA)

In Austria, young adults finding it hard

 Good practice

Crafts Square

Piazza dei Mestieri

In Italy, 'Crafts Square' offers young

to obtain an apprenticeship are assisted by a nationwide program called “Supra-Company Training”. The measure provides apprenticeship training to help young people enter the labour market.

 **Austria**

people, unemployed young people and adults with an alternative educational offer with a good balance between practical and theoretical courses. The environment created by the ‘Craft Square’ aims to ensure learners feel understood, supported and valued.

 **Italy**

 **Good practice**

Introductory training (Einstiegsqualifizierung (EQ))

The “Introductory training” scheme has been running in Germany since 2004. The scheme funds apprenticeship-like training with a view to helping young people find a regular apprenticeship opportunity.

 **Germany**

Tools

 **Tools**

PES practices for the outreach and activation of NEETs

The PES handbook offers national examples of how the public employment services work in partnership with youth outreach workers and other key services to engage and support young people at risk of early leaving.

 **EU level**


Publications

 Publications

High-performance apprenticeships & work-based learning: 20 guiding principles

The European Commission has set out 20 guiding principles for stakeholders involved in work-based learning. These focus on four main themes:

1. Involving national governance and social partners;
2. Supporting companies;
3. Making apprenticeships attractive and improving career guidance; and
4. Quality Assurance.

Download the report  [here](#).

 **EU level**

 Publications

Intra-EU labour mobility

Annual report (Edition 2024)

The report highlights an increase in working-age EU movers in 2023, who generally have higher activity and employment rates compared to nationals and third-country nationals.

 **EU level**