



# Inclusive work-based learning environments

## Problem statement

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### Addressed problem: Finding a welcoming work environment

For many young people, an apprenticeship or work-based training as part of a vocational programme, is their first experience in the world of work. Finding a welcoming and supportive work environment, where there are good learning opportunities, can be very motivating and contribute to attaining a qualification.

However, work-based training can also be discouraging and lead to drop-out. This may be due to a mismatch between the learners' expectations and the reality of the profession, or to a lack of work readiness. For instance, some learners struggle to cope with tough working conditions such as long working hours, having to work on weekends, hard manual labour, or high levels of pressure and stress. Others are disappointed to have to do less motivating tasks (e.g. cleaning) in the beginning of their placement.

It can also be due to the low quality of the work-based placement and even an abuse of the situation of trainees by employers. Conflictual relationships at the workplace either with trainers, other students, or other workers can also lead to demotivation and drop-out. In some cases, learners can be the victims of discrimination and bullying.

## Beneficiaries

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- ↳ **Learners with low self-confidence and self-esteem**
- ↳ **Young people with complex needs (e.g. health issues, in poverty, with caring responsibilities)**
- ↳ **VET students (in work based learning schemes)**

All apprentices and other vocational education and training students participating in work-based training.

## Addressing the problem

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### What makes a work-based learning environment inclusive and supportive?

The following tips are given as advice to policy-makers and practitioners involved in the design and delivery of vocational programmes. The information is based on Cedefop research into successful measures.

 **Tip 1: Ensure the learner, the company and the training provider share a common**

## understanding of the roles, responsibilities and rights of the learner

Learners' roles, responsibilities and rights should be clear for the company and the learner (and his/her family in the case of minors). There can be a written agreement between the training provider, the company and the learner specifying the training programme, the activities and the working conditions (including working hours). Also, there is the possibility of using a code of conduct or similar document.

### **Tip 2: Establish quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that employers comply with their training responsibilities**

There should be mechanisms in place to ensure that employers comply with their duties in relation to training. The type of mechanisms can vary significantly across countries and type of training scheme. While in some cases there could be an external agency in charge of quality assurance, in others trade unions might be involved in such quality checks. Also, training providers can have an important role in monitoring the development of the in-company training of their students.

Such mechanisms should also detect if the in-company trainer(s) need additional training or support to be able to adequately perform their role.

### **Tip 3: Establish feedback mechanisms to monitor whether the learner is facing difficulties in work-based learning**

When the programme combines school-based and work-based learning, there is often a tutor or supervisor at the VET school. This professional can:

- be in charge of periodic discussions with the learner to assess the development of the work-based training,
- accompany the learner to the workplace on the first day, and/or
- visit the learner at the work place on a periodic basis.

There should also be a tutor or person responsible for each trainee at the workplace. This professional should also engage in discussions with the learner about the development of the apprenticeship or traineeship. There can also be a mentor or coach independent of the learning provider or the company.

### **Tip 4: Establish processes for mediating conflicts between trainees / apprentices and in-company trainer / employer**

As part of the feedback processes, learners can refer to conflicts with the in-company trainer. It is important that there is an impartial mediator to help solve such conflicts. This person can be the tutor or supervisor at the training provider, or a coach or mentor independent of the training provider or the company.

## **Tip 5: Promote the development of a professional identity**

Even under tough work conditions, learners can succeed in finalising their training programme if they develop a sense of professional identity. This requires an engaging and motivating process which enables young people to perceive the training as meaningful. Work-based learning offers a good context for the development of a professional identity through the authentic interaction between the young person, his/her co-workers, as well as the trainer and the company leadership. Trainers who express that they are proud of their profession act as role models. Through 'role models' young people gain an idea of the profession and incorporate its culture.

## **Tip 6: Provide professional development opportunities and support to in-company trainers**

Knowing how to practise a profession is not a synonym of knowing how to teach it. Also, employers are often not used to working with young people and they expect them to behave like adults and workers from day one.

Trainers at the workplace should receive some training and support to help them:

- manage their expectations about learners' performance
- adapt the training to the skills and knowledge of learners
- support learners facing disadvantages (e.g. physical handicaps, disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds)
- identify distress signals from learners and support, in a timely manner, apprentices or trainees at risk of dropping out
- manage conflicts and deal with situations of discrimination and bullying at the workplace

## **Tip 7: Avoid discrimination and promote inclusive learning environments**

Discrimination should be avoided at entry and during the development of work-based learning. At entry, the standardisation of application procedures for apprentices / trainees, in particular in small and medium size firms, helps prevent discrimination against minority groups.

During the development of the work-based learning the tutor or supervisor at the company, and at the training provider, need to be alert to detect any discrimination or bullying situations as early as

possible and act against these. People with physical handicaps should be given the opportunity to develop their work-based training in a fully accessible workplace.

Making learning environments more inclusive also implies using learner-centred pedagogies to adequately respond to the needs of the diverse learner population.

## **Tip 8: Facilitate flexible arrangements for the learner to combine school-based training and work-based training**




In cases where learners combine school-based and work-based training, there is a need for flexible arrangements. Training providers may need to adapt the training hours to the business working hours. For instance, if a business undertakes most of the work in the morning, the training provider can move its training hours to the afternoon, or organise the training on alternate days (e.g. two days a week at the training provider and three at the company).

Another aspect that needs to be taken into account is the transport of learners to the company. It is possible that there is no public transport and learners do not have their own means to travel there. Training providers or companies can establish agreements with other entities, including local authorities to facilitate learners' transportation.

## **Expected outcomes**

Positive relationships at the workplace help develop a professional identity and promote good work habits and social skills. When learners' achievements are recognised and valued by colleagues, this contributes to an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence.

The following outcomes can be expected at different levels:

 <b>INDIVIDUAL</b>	 <b>INSTITUTIONAL</b>	 <b>SYSTEM</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a professional identity</li><li>• Foster a positive attitude to learning and education and training</li><li>• Improved work habits / social skills</li><li>• Promote a positive vision of oneself</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved quality of provision</li><li>• Improved satisfaction with programmes</li><li>• Reduced absenteeism</li><li>• Lower drop-out</li><li>• Programmes better meet the needs of learners and employers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discrimination reduced</li><li>• Increased completion rates</li><li>• Decreased drop-out rates</li><li>• Improved links between workplace and VET provider-based learning</li></ul>

## **Related protective factors**



**Health and well-being**



**Inclusive environment**



**Positive relationships in the workplace and in the classroom**



**Work readiness**

## Related resources

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### Statistics and data

 [Statistics and data](#)

#### **Work-based learning reduces unemployment rate**

**In most EU countries the unemployment rate for people aged 15-34 is lower for those who have had work-based learning than for those with no work experience.**

 Austria  Belgium  Bulgaria  Croatia  Cyprus  Czechia  Denmark

 Estonia  EU level  Finland  France  Germany  Greece  Hungary

 Iceland  Ireland  Italy  Latvia  Lithuania  Luxembourg  Malta

 Netherlands  Norway  Poland  Portugal  Romania  Slovakia  Slovenia

 Spain  Sweden  Switzerland  Turkey  United Kingdom

### Good practices

 Good practice

## Coaching and counseling for apprentices and training companies - Apprenticeship coaching

Apprenticeship coaching in Austria aims to avoid drop outs due to misunderstanding or conflict between apprentices and in company trainers. The latter may also receive coaching or counselling as required, in order to ensure the success of the mediation.

 Austria

 Good practice

## Orienta4YEL

Supporting educational and social inclusion of young early leavers and those at risk of early leaving through mechanisms of orientation and tutorial action.

 Germany  Portugal  Romania

 Spain  United Kingdom

## Tools

 Tools

## Capacity building for students, companies and vocational schools involved in apprenticeship-training (QUABB)

*Qualifizierte Ausbildungsbegleitung in Betrieb und Berufsschule (QuABB)*

The project QuABB (Capacity building for students, companies and vocational schools involved in apprenticeship-training) provides a collection of tools for the identification of apprentices at risk of early leaving, and guidance to trainers, VET teachers and parents to deal with this situation.

 Germany

## Publications

 Publications

## **Making apprenticeships work for young women**

**In 2015, in the UK, there were more female than there were male apprentices. However, gender discrimination persisted within the individual apprenticeship tracks, with those in the care sector remaining overwhelmingly female as opposed to the traditional sectors such as construction.**

**Download the report  [here](#).**

 **United Kingdom**

 Publications

## **Immigrant background and expected early school leaving in Europe: evidence from PISA**

**This technical brief analyses the relationship between immigrant status and educational expectations in PISA. Migration flows from outside and within the EU have increased in recent years, and this has raised the attention of policy makers and the general public, with special interests on the implications that those flows can have on, among other, the education system and the labour markets.**

 **EU level**