



**Embedding entrepreneurship
competence in vocational
education and training
in Europe**

28 September 2023
Online conference

#KeyCompetences
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Background paper for session

11.10 – 12.10 Interactive parallel sessions: navigating the paradoxes and solutions

4. The employability paradox: does entrepreneurship competence improve the employment prospects?

One of the selling points for developing entrepreneurship competence in VET is that it improves the employability prospects of learners, in addition to providing the skills to start up their own business. However, our field research hints that employers, particularly in sectors with labour shortages, may give priority to technical skills when hiring VET graduates. The employability paradox invites us to look closely at what employers across Europe really want when they ask for entrepreneurship competence.

The link between entrepreneurship competence development and employability is taken for granted but the insights from field research prompt some caution. Comments from VET teachers put into question the real demand for entrepreneurship competence by employers, who are primarily perceived to be more interested in the development of a skilled labour force – particularly in areas, occupations and sectors with significant labour shortages. In such a scenario, the promotion of entrepreneurship could be even considered as a threat to the interests of employers (the idea of encouraging potential hires to opt for self-employment), a concern raised by some apprenticeship providers in the interviews.

This is not to say that employers ignore or undervalue the entrepreneurship competence of potential candidates. Yet, the employers interviewed during the field research failed to clearly articulate the exact components of the entrepreneurship competence they were looking for in job candidates.

The integration of school and workplace learning is one of the most prominent features of VET systems across Europe. The close connection of VET with the world of work puts employers in an advantageous position to support the development of entrepreneurship competence of VET learners. Although cooperation with businesses has a longstanding tradition in the VET sector, it is important to note that not every instance of school-business collaboration contributes to developing entrepreneurship competence.

VET teachers and employers interviewed often saw work-based learning as a fertile ground for spontaneous generation of entrepreneurship competence in VET learners, but there are few clues on how exactly this happens. Work-based learning tends to be primarily focused on developing occupation-specific competences and entrepreneurship competence is not explicitly discussed, let alone assessed, during apprenticeships or company placements.

Unlocking the untapped potential of work-based learning would require modifying assessment protocols; training and equipping apprenticeship trainers and company tutors with appropriate tools to observe, support and track students' development of entrepreneurship competence at work.

Key discussion points

- Is entrepreneurship truly important for employability?
- What do employers really want when they ask for entrepreneurship competence?