



Developing Innovative Didactics for Workplace Training

**O7 INNOVATIVE DIDACTICS FOR
QUALITY WORKPLACE LEARNING
- POLICY PAPER**

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Introduction

The project DIDO-“Developing Innovative Didactics for Workplace Training” aims to offer a new and innovative contribution to the field of VET pedagogy that is not reflected in current initial teacher training or within the resources available for the continuous professional development of VET staff. In frame of the project DIDO, an innovative didactic model for a new continuous professional development intervention in workplace learning is developed and implemented.

The project is implemented by a consortium of institutions from seven European countries: Ireland (coordinator), Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Slovenia and Switzerland.

As targets and expectations for workplace learning are increasingly framed within overall lifelong learning objectives and policies of Member States the didactic model developed by DIDO will be relevant and applicable beyond the initial target group and indeed throughout the economy where up-skilling of the workforce is a prerequisite for competitiveness and inclusion.

The purpose of this document is to evaluate country specific schemes of work-based learning (WBL), describe their structure and explore needs that require a shift in policy.

Those needs were identified in prior analysis of national research conducted by the project partner organisations. They describe the concrete topics/challenges in their countries related to work-based learning for professionals who are involved, but also policy makers, who are concerned by the issue. National and international examples for good practices in WBL suggest innovative approaches from which can be learned.

The overall aim of this policy paper is to give recommendations for appropriate national and/or European policy developments in order to respond to current needs and thus, enhance quality of WBL, specifically:

- The cost-effective of apprenticeship schemes, *Austria*
- Active ageing at the workplace, *Ireland*
- Effective workplace training: meeting the workers’ needs, *Italy*
- Workplace learning: the costs and the benefits, *Romania*
- Impact of workplace learning: transferring into the daily work, *Slovenia*
- Innovative and tailored didactics for low skilled employees, *Switzerland*.



AUSTRIA - The cost-effective of apprenticeship schemes

Rationale	
<p>The focus of the selected topic is the evaluation of factors for improvement of work-based learning (WBL)/apprenticeship in Austria. Although the dual system has good international reputation, it currently has to face changes due to economic and demographic developments. In addition, there is an increasing tendency towards academic education. The lower formal education level makes the apprenticeship less attractive to young people which leads to a narrower range of apprenticeship companies and workforce shortage in certain sectors. These factors require re-thinking of the model in order to develop high-quality WBL that is successful for those involved.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<p>1. Due to school types, which include WBL combined with theoretical subjects and lead to the upper secondary school-leaving certificate, as well as academization, the apprenticeship threats to be at risk of depreciation and to be the main option for rather low-performing youths.</p> <p>2. Dynamic changes in economy and technology require to develop WBL structures by facing the challenge of creating and establishing apprenticeship occupations in new areas.</p> <p>3. SMEs often don't have internal training departments. Short in-house trainings are conducted by other employees and primarily focus on knowledge transfer, but less on the pedagogical preparation and systematic teaching, which leads to insufficient results regarding required skills.</p>	<p><i>"Developing Apprenticeship: In-Company Trainer Training and Apprenticeship Promotion"</i> is an Erasmus+ project (Lithuania, Finland, Belgium, Estonia and Latvia) that aims to promote workers for economic sectors suffering from workforce shortage and to match skills to labour market needs. The outputs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model for training programme to enhance skills of in-house trainers working with apprentices; - Model concept for organisations involved in WBL for more effective promotion of apprenticeships and WBL.
Policy Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To structure apprenticeships and further educational pathways more flexible in order to facilitate access to higher education for apprentices. - To involve more and new companies, i.e. start-ups, in apprenticeships' schemes in order to open up for new vocational areas. For this purpose, well trained staff and approaches that are suitable to meet the new requirements, as well as further promotion are needed. Deficits in basic and/or social skills of new apprentices are a tendency that should be more considered in political discussion. For example, it presents challenges for apprenticeship trainers regarding educational skills. Those could be strengthened in order to facilitate the appropriate integration of young people into the companies. - To equip WBL professionals with skills needed to face new requirements and to ensure quality in WBL in general, continuing education for professionals is required. It is recommended to promote initiatives like the <i>"Ausbilderakademie"</i> (trainers' college) that provides certified/diploma courses for professionals involved in WBL (primarily apprentice trainers). 	



IRELAND – Active ageing at the workplace

Rationale	
<p>In the next 20 years the proportion of the age group 55-64 will increase by over 16%. This is the back drop for a need for a focus on those who are reaching retirement age to be retained in the workplace. There are also many attributes of workers being retained in the workplace. The following are some of the qualities of older workers: experience in their job/role in the workplace; a loyalty to their employer; lower rate of absenteeism; positive role model for the younger members of staff.</p> <p>In relation to the role of workplace learning in the workplace it is clear from the above that older workers could have a very positive role to play. The first role is that of mentor/trainer in the workplace for the training of staff for certain roles. While they may have issues re technology they would support values, attitudes and motivation that would be conducive to a healthy and vibrant work environment. The second role the older workers may play is in the workplace itself if they receive appropriate age compatible workplace training. Any learning content must be made relevant to them and any workplace trainer must be supportive of lifelong learning. Any learning experience must be positive providing important feedback and learn how to improve on their performance.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Employers should provide a supportive environment for mature workers to include a clear policy on ageism in the workplace including age friendly policies. Any workplace training provided for older workers must take cognisance of issues and concerns of such workers as well as nurturing the strong work value and ethics such workers may have. The values and attitudes of workers in any workplace are very important for employers. Older workers can be harnessed to demonstrate positive attributes in the role as mentor and structured formal/informal trainer. 	<p>In an article titled “<i>Promoting active ageing in the workplace</i>” (Juhani, 2009) a positive strategy for promotion of older workers being retained in the workplace is presented. In this article a Work Ability House –model provides an important roadmap for developing practices that are conducive to retention of senior workers.</p> <p>A major component of this model is the need for on the job training along with special staff training courses with the aim of strengthening older workers capacities. Such workplace training such includes appropriate learning strategies, learning environment, and timetables that may vary from those utilised in mainstream training.</p>
Policy Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To launch an initiative foreseen a high level of support from key government department and agencies responsible targeting older workers and their employers. - To have a coordinated approach with relevant linkages to other national policy initiatives to support to the overwhelming call from employers and educators to improve the transferable skills and attributes of learners. - To review the current system to improve its efficiency and fairness in addressing the skills needs of the labour market. Make extensive use of workplace training in all VET programmes building on the existing types of provision. 	



- To encourage all categories of employees to prepare, plan and consider themselves for promotion or for work in other divisions and sections of a workplace will signal to staff that training and promotion is open to all suitably qualified candidates.



ITALY – Effective workplace training: meeting the workers’ needs

Rationale	
<p>Between 2011 and 2016 the professions that have grown are traceable to activities characterized by high technological intensity and organizational innovation. Marketing specialists, production engineers, software designers are some of the most demanded on the market. On the other hand, the professions due to low-tech activities show a decrease.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<p>1- Implement successfully the Italian Digital Agenda “<i>Programma Nazionale per la cultura, la formazione e le competenze digital</i>” (National Program for Culture, Training and Digital Skills), targeting all citizens.</p> <p>2 – Upskill citizens in six strategic areas: Infrastructure and security, egov/Open Data, eCommerce, digital skills, smart communities, research and innovation.</p> <p>3 - Ensure and promote the triggering of a virtuous circle between the demand for services, participation, the offer of public and private organisations and the development of innovative and appropriate professional skills for the digital revolution.</p>	<p>“On the Move” project is open educational resource for institutions and professionals in lifelong learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reaching people remote from education - improving participation in further education and providing low-threshold learning opportunities - 32 best practice outreach strategies throughout the European Union.
Policy Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting constant research aimed at understanding the skills and knowledge required by companies. – Encouraging cooperation in the study of contents, methods and places of training between companies and continuing education institutions. – Contextualizing the real and virtual environment of training to the specific target of trainees 	



ROMANIA – Workplace learning: the costs and the benefits

Rationale	
<p>Within organisations, it is necessary and beneficial to develop employees` skills and competences to adapt to the continuous change of technologies, to increase work productivity and to motivate employees at work. However, adult workplace training is seen as an obligation not as an opportunity. One of the main obstacles in learning is training programs` costs. The statistical data highlights the low share of investments made by Romanian organizations to vocational educational training of total labour costs. This is due to the lack of own funds for professional training courses, the lack of information, the difficulty in accessing funds, as well as costs related to the total or partial interruption of employees` activity.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The lack of an adequate system of tax incentive to meet the needs of adult employees. 2. The lack of tax incentives for economic agents to involve in initial vocational training. 3. Insufficient measures to stimulate adults able to work to participate in training programs. 	<p>In UK investment employers in apprenticeship and workplace learning have introduced clawback clauses in some of the training programs. Thus employees paid a percentage of their training cost if, at the end of the training they left their jobs in a given period.</p> <p>Similarly, employers have introduced a loan system for older employees to attend workplace learning courses, as these learners have tended to better understanding the value of competencies.</p>
Policy Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To simplify the procedure of accessing European funds, to reduce the organizations` percentage of co-financing, to facilitate the setup of the training programs providers. – To implement national projects to finance, totally or partially, the workplace training courses – To implement a loan system to attend workplace learning courses – To motivate adults to participate in training programs by promotion, salary increase, access to new technology, to develop new competences. 	



SLOVENIA – Impact of workplace learning: transferring into the daily work

Rationale	
<p>Workplace learning is implemented by companies mostly when they are introducing a new employee to the workplace. In that stage workplace learning is necessary in order for the new employee to begin with work and training is mostly job-specific. Later on workplace learning is still present, mostly when issues or problems occur and employees need to exchange knowledge in order to continue with work.</p> <p>That kind of informal workplace learning is easily transferred into daily work since it enables employees to continue working, especially if employees need to use new knowledge often, then it quickly becomes know-how they do not even need to think about to use it. On the other hand, informal workplace learning can be very unsystematic and unstructured, especially in smaller companies without an independent HR department for development of employees.</p> <p>Formal workplace can also take place and it is more structured; however sometimes not that easily transferred into daily work. Since it is not necessarily used during every day work, it can quickly be forgotten, or sometimes employees do not even realize the practical value of that knowledge. In that case transfer of knowledge into daily work is less probable and requires more effort by employees and also incentive from companies.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to provide incentives for employees and shape work environment to enable easier transfer of knowledge gained in formal workplace learning into daily work. 2. Pay more attention to skills and competences that are common to a wide range of jobs. Companies tend to focus on job specific skills and less on competences that can be transferred between different working environments or even occupations. 3. Make workplace learning more systematic and structured in order to increase the transfer of knowledge. 	<p>In Finland, the “<i>NOSTE</i>” programme (2003-09) aimed at improving poorly qualified adults’ key competences, career prospects and satisfaction at work, and was implemented in cooperation with the social partners to carry out practical learning processes in the workplace. The programme has shown that low-skilled adults expect training to have a close connection with their work tasks and take into consideration their earlier work history. Employer involvement in the training arrangements and social support from the learners’ peer group are factors in successful learning.</p>
Policy Recommendation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To implement formal training and make informal training structured and systematic. - To lead by example (enable contact between experienced and less experienced employees). - To take opportunity to learn from mistakes. When an employee makes a mistake take that opportunity to explain, why the failure occurred and what could be done better next time. - To form training in a way, that it will be similar to daily work environment and tasks. - To focus on general competences, not only job specific skills. 	



SWITZERLAND – Innovative and tailored didactics for low skilled employees

Rationale	
<p>To be always up to date in the labour market it is necessary continues to training. A research in Switzerland noticed that senior and the low skilled and low qualified people don't participate at the training. On the one hand, financial support is needed and, on the other hand, ad hoc training courses should be provided and organised for this target group. In the case of low skilled and low qualified people an innovative solution could be represented by the possibility to participate at internal courses or on-the-job training courses. In this case it is important that the training course will be tailored to the target group and that the contents are simply to transfer in the daily life.</p>	
Issues and Challenges for Practitioners and Policy Makers	Innovate Practice
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to reach the target group 2. Skill transfer to the training course to the work place and the daily life 3. How to recognise the low skilled workers and how to guide the target group. 	<p>The project MEET Change – Motivating Elderly Employees for Training and Change responds to the challenge of an ageing population by improving the accessibility of educational programmes for this target group at company level. By training HR managers and adult educators on how to motivate and empower elderly and low-skilled workers to accept change in their work environment and to participate in training and educational programmes, the MEET Change project will improve the attractiveness and accessibility of lifelong learning programmes for older and low-skilled people.</p>
Policy Recommendation	
<p>We recommend the following strategies and methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – economic support for the implementation of project for work based learning – economic support to the people who decided to participate in training programs – empowerment of the low skilled workers – focus on the basic skill (read, write, ICT, math) 	



Conclusion

In this document, country specific schemes of work-based learning (WBL) were evaluated, challenges and needs in the different countries were analysed and recommendations for appropriate national and/or European policy developments were given.

The demographic development has a major impact on WBL systems, factors as an increase in the ageing population has to be taken into account; and governmental support initiatives are recommended. Further, there is an increasing tendency towards academic education, which makes classical apprenticeship systems less attractive, leading to workforce shortages in certain sectors.

To improve the WBL system, it is also essential to take the workers' demand on the labour market into consideration. There is a growing demand in certain sectors, e.g. due to technological changes or innovation. A greater involvement of companies is recommended to understand the skills and knowledge required by them. Further, in daily work, formal training structures should be implemented and informal training is recommended to be more structured and systematic. Continuing education for WBL professionals is considered as beneficial to be able to deal with certain issues, i.e. skill shortage among low skilled workers, and to engage this group to participate in trainings.

In addition, financial support, e.g. the simplification of accessing European funds or the implementation of a loan system to attend workplace learning courses, is recommended. Further, in the UK, for example, investment employers in apprenticeship and workplace learning have introduced clawback clauses in some of the training programs. Thus employees paid a percentage of their training cost if, at the end of the training they left their jobs in a given period. Moreover, employers have introduced a loan system for older employees to attend workplace learning courses, as these learners have tended to better understanding the value of competencies.

Summary of key recommendations:

- Governmental support and link to related initiatives to support training for elder workforce
- Flexible educational pathways for apprenticeships to increase its attractiveness and face workforce shortages in certain sectors
- Design of training closely to work reality and in collaboration with enterprises to meet current labour market needs
- Promotion of digital knowledge among workforce
- Engagement of workforce, including elder and low skilled workers, to participate in trainings
- Promotion of continuing education for professionals involved in WBL, formal and systematic training structures, focus on transversal skills and or even basic skills, if necessary, instead of job-specific skills only
- Economic support of projects in WBL and facilitation of access to financial promotion



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Links

- http://egov.formez.it/sites/all/files/programma_nazionale_cultura_formazione_competenze_digitali_-_linee_guida.pdf [29.12.2017]
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