



Integrating Companies in a Sustainable Apprenticeship System

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ICSAS Position Paper on Work Based Learning (WBL) in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

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ICSAS Position Paper on Work Based Learning (WBL) in Vocational Education and Training (VET) for the implementation of the results of the EU-funded “Integrating Companies in a Sustainable Apprenticeship System (ICSAS)”

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to policy-making in the European industrial shoe production sector and beyond with respect to curricula-driven work-based learning (WBL) within Vocational Education and Training (VET). The European industrial shoe production sector is mainly focussed on high quality products. Key factors are innovative design, quality, quick reaction to fashion trends as well as a wide range of styles and colours. Some companies also focus on small but demanding markets, such as safety shoes or shoes for healthcare e.g. orthopaedic shoes.

However, the competitiveness of the sector is highly depending on knowledge, skills and competences (KSC) of the staff gained through Vocational Education and Training. These competences are needed to design, produce, operate and maintain cutting-edge products and manufacturing systems.

In the last decade, however, industrial shoe producers have seen a shortage of skilled workers and innovative mind-sets, hampering the competitiveness of EU shoe production industry and the employability of workers. WBL within VET helps to maintain the quality standards of products and provides new opportunities for industry and its staff.

With that in mind, this position paper aims to help decision-makers all over the EU to recognise the importance of curricula-driven WBL within VET in the European industrial shoe production sector and to provide them with a series of recommendations to support the development of competences and skills in this area. The ICSAS project mainly aimed at developing the existing Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems of Romania and Portugal towards work-based learning and to improve the tutor’s performance in Spain and Germany based on mutual learning from the German apprenticeship system. Furthermore, project partners developed a Sector Qualification Framework (SQF) and referenced the national qualifications of Germany, Portugal, Romania, and Spain.

In this position paper, we would like to highlight the project recommendations for further developing curricula-driven WBL as an apprenticeship scheme in Portugal and Romania and all other EU countries.

- Due to rapidly changing technological developments as well as altering trends in fashion, WBL becomes more and more crucial for today’s learners in industrial shoe production industry. The competitiveness of manufacturing companies depends on the skills possessed by its workforce. In order to cope with the market, VET providers and companies should focus on combining learning in education or training institutions with substantial work-based learning in companies and other workplaces. We call on VET regulatory bodies across Europe to integrate substantial curricula-driven WBL as part of all VET programmes.



- It is necessary for VET-systems of any country that all stakeholders work together in order to define comprehensive learning outcomes in accordance with national legislation. Therefore a modernization of a VET-curricula should be executed jointly by responsible regional or national authorities, employers, vocational education and training institutions, chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, professional and sectorial organisations, trade unions and youth and parent organisations to ensure a fair balance between work, job specific skills, knowledge and key competences of the apprentices.
- In order to attract more young people for an apprenticeship in industrial shoe production in Portugal, the sector needs to become more competitive. Therefore, all national recognised qualifications in this field should be updated and elevated above level 2 of the SQF.
- Educational reforms cannot be imported from one EU member state to another or implemented “top-down”. Thus we recommend that stakeholders from any country reflect on approaches from various different VET-systems – and adopt respective develop their system with respect to national traditions and beliefs.
- In-company trainers are essential for WBL. They should cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance for apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feedback. Therefor they need to be supported in gaining sector-specific and general (didactical) skills. For instance, this could be done by promoting the use of the ICSAS train the trainer manuals as well as the feedback matrices, which were developed and launched by this EU project.
- Trainers need to be supported by industry and authorities to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs. We recommend that countries develop and provide adult education courses for trainers and mentors and offer those via Continuous VET (CVET) providers.
- The developed SQF is a guiding document for transparency and mobility within industrial shoe production. It includes a comparison of qualifications in industrial shoe production sector in Germany, Portugal, Romania and Spain based on a common understanding of what defines competences and taking into account the diversity and traditions of vocational education, training systems and policy priorities in the partner countries. It offers an overview on competences and skills of qualified staff in all partner countries. We recommend that any new or updated profile in the sector from partner countries as well as qualifications from other EU countries should be levelled in this SQF.

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