Workplace representatives' perceptions of work-based learning –the NextSteps@TechVET project's interview data

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The purpose was
to gain information of the
current state of school-
work connection, guidance,
and the skill needs from the
perspective of companies

Data

- Written summarizations of thematic interviews
- Conducted by the VET experts participating in the NextSteps@TechVET project in each participating country
- The interview framework was planned and prepared by the Häme University of Applied Sciences project group
- Workplace representatives were interviewed about themes related to work-based learning (WBL) such as
  - company's current state regarding co-operation
  - goal definitions
  - practical implementations
  - understandings, expectations and future needs regarding WBL

Interview respondents

- 17 participants
- From the four European countries participating in the project
- Companies from the field of technology
- Most of the participants were in a managerial position in the company, but also employee level positions were represented

Overview of the findings; everything does not apply to all companies

Current state in co-operation

- **All companies had collaboration with VET providers through WBL**
- **Variation in the extent of the collaboration**
- **Established collaboration included**
  - **a position as a training company; close involvement in the training of students**
  - **different types of training for different needs**
  - **sharing experiences and information, co-planning and development with VET providers**
  - **variety of practical collaboration with VET providers such as: information days, visitations to the company, job shadowing and project work.**
- **For some, the co-operation goals (e.g., education and training for the company's needs; students' competence development) were defined in written form in training contracts or agreed or described through discussions**

NextSteps
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Benefits of WBL

	WBL benefits for the company	Why is WBL important for students
Future perspectives and possibilities	• company can provide possibilities for students (introducing the future work) • company gets to know a student and a possible future employee (recognising the competence, tailoring the WBL) • company can create new contacts	• students can get help for their future planning • students can make career choices based on their learning • possibility to become an employee
Knowledge and competence development	• a student's competence development for the company's needs • company can learn from WBL-students (innovative ideas)	• increased knowledge (e.g. work tasks, professional field, company's ways of operating, work culture) • development of professional and generic skills • share experiences with employees
Practicality	• company can fulfil task and employment needs • company is aware of a student's competence development	• working in a real work environment and with real tasks; right tools and materials • apply theoretical knowledge into practice • see the effects of own work

Important in the implementation of WBL

Practicality
- students learn in practice and in real environments; can put the theory into practice
- seeing the whole process not just simple tasks, learning company's practices, duties, different employees' roles, work ethics
- build professional relationships
- possibility to learn fast in real environments
- students' contributions to the company's real needs and seeing results

Appropriate tasks and resources
- the company offers time and effort
- meaningful, diverse, multidisciplinary, broad tasks with matching resources

Student's role
- open mind, good attitude, motivation, interest, and willingness to learn
- prior knowledge
- social skills (for discussing with workers)

Encouragement and guidance
- encouraging students
- promoting enthusiastic, inspiring, and open atmosphere
- planning the WBL (goals, considering the student's needs) active guiding and monitoring activities, mentoring
- open discussion, friendly relationship between instructors and students
- clear outlines for work
- paying attention and no hurry

Instructors' and teachers' role
- adequate competence and knowledge
- co-operation with instructors and teachers

Requirements
- understanding requirements (security requirements, regulations, needs for certificates, age regulations)
- understanding costs of the WBL to the company

Respondents' expectations

- educational institutions
- teachers
- students

Respondents' expectations for educational institutions

Communication and collaboration

- good communication and co-operation
- providing information about the students' competence
- easy contacting
- collaboration to understand the company's needs
- matching needs and expectations (understanding the limitation of job possibilities for certain degrees, different kind of education and training options)
- organization of student recruitments
- participation in the administrative duties in relation to WBL

Quality of education

- newest tools and theoretical approach
- well-trained students (basic information, social skills, working life rules)
- ensuring quality teaching

Teachers' competence

- training of vocational teachers
- optimising the workload for vocational teachers
- competent and qualified teachers

Respondents' expectations for teachers

Communication and collaboration

- open, active interaction
- open-minded and co-operative attitudes
- sharing information with company
- knowing the company (more presence in the company, getting to know the methods, materials etc.)
- providing information what is expected of students (company can plan work tasks accordingly)
- a bridge between the company and a student

Student guidance

- support student learning and assessment
- following the students' progress (visitations at the workplace)
- support students' positive attitudes

Teachers' competence

- knowledge about the company
- up-to-date knowledge (e.g. technologies, methods)
- offering basic knowledge to students
- knowledge about working life needs

Respondents' expectations for students

Motivation and attitudes
- a student wants to learn and is committed
- open-minded and active attitude
- a student wants to develop themselves and is ready to work

Prior knowledge
- Basic skills and knowledge

Following working life and company guidelines
- is responsible and accepts the rules of the working life
- gets to work on time and follows the schedules
- follows safety instructions
- accepts the work tasks

Students' guidance and company's involvement in students' career planning

Students are guided at the workplace by instructors or employees alongside of practical work

Ways of working:

weekly or daily meetings, working together or independently, working together on the learning goals, a student can independently acquire information, from small tasks to broader tasks, processual nature of guidance, open discussion, co-operation with teachers, advising, informing, HR co-operation in the company, open atmosphere, specified persons for the orientation in safety requirements, several instructors, guidance in general issues, day to day guidance)

Learning content:

variety of tasks, according to the student's own development, introduction or orientation, identification of the degree contents, work tasks based on what is available in the company at the moment, requirements based on the student's skills and needs

How can the company be involved in students' career planning?

Information and possibilities in the company

- company presents itself to students
- company provides information about its ways of operating
- possibilities within the company for students' development
- providing tasks
- possibly providing a job

WBL implementation and guidance

- exchange of information
- sharing experiences with employees
- influencing WBL design during the implementation
- student guidance through assessment
- open discussion
- mentoring
- regular meetings concerning students' future plans (with HR)

Development needs in relation to workplace instructor's competence

Guidance and training skills (4)	**Understanding learning and teaching processes (4)**	**Co-operation and communication competence (3)**
Curriculum/degree/study program knowledge (2)	**Training plan and job planning knowledge (2)**	**Encouraging students to work independently (1)**
ICT skills (1)	**No mentions of development needs (4)**	

Summary of what training should be provided

In-service training as well as training of new instructors	**Courses about workplace instructor training; a training of how a student should be guided; preparation to mentor students; training to motivate students**	**Training related to assessment and feedback; how to set goals; methods of adult education**
Opening the basics of the curriculum / degree to workplace instructors	**Meeting the school's teachers and discussing the needs of the WBL**	**Communicative skills, job planning, targeted management, ICT skills.**

- Some of the participants did not specify the needs, or no needs occurred according to them
- Already planned future development activities had mostly to do **with increasing co-operation between educational institutions and increasing vocational training competence**

Important in vocational training so that the skill needs of future are met

| shared understanding | **up-to-date** training, information of skill needs, curriculum | acknowledgment of different parties' needs | **Increasing co-operation and co-operation development** |

"Co-operation with vocational institution is important and it will be more important that vocational school will hear company needs. It is important to understand the value of networks … Everybody needs to get know new students and interns. When you know person, then you can teach him and give something new for him/her"

"Skilled employees, learning the right things. Training for the right needs and anticipation for vocational education"

"A good education that is "up to date" with the right ingredients from school"

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