Qualitative Evaluation of VET Partner Schools

SUMMARY OF 6 REPORTS

Aim of the Study

This report presents the main findings of the qualitative evaluation conducted at 6 VET partner schools aiming to explore and understand in depth the opinions, feelings and behaviors of the beneficiaries of the S4J Project and to have a clear view on the outcomes of the interventions of S4J.

Schools and Participants

To achieve the objectives of this research, the detailed information was provided by ***536*** various stakeholders who benefit from S4J project.

Table 1. Schools and participants

School	Students	Teachers/managers	Business	Parents	Total
Kristo Isak	70	7	6		83
Kolin Gjoka	80	7	6	8	101
Hamdi Bushati	56	9	5	10	80
Tregetare	52	8	6	9	75
SHIP	83	11	6	7	107
Gjergj Canco	76	9	N/A	5	90
TOTAL	**417**	**51**	**29**	**39**	**536**

➢ STAKEHOLDERS DYNAMICS

As far as they are concerned, stakeholders expose different perspectives about teaching methods, infrastructure, apprenticeships, etc.. Some of them are more motivated and proactive, contrary to others identified as reactive and apathetic.
The stakeholder dynamics is based on the following elements:

- **Contribution:** Do the observed stakeholders have an expertise and/or an important information related to the issue that can be useful for the success of the project?
- **Legitimacy:** How legitimate is the demand of stakeholders interested in being engaged?
- **Willingness to Engage:** How willing are the stakeholders to engage? Are they proactive, apathetic, or sceptical?
- **Influence:** How much influence do the stakeholders have?
- **Necessity of involvement:** How high is the risk of harming the process in the case of non-engagement of stakeholders?

Table 2. Stakeholders and their dynamism

Stakeholders	Contribution	Legitimacy	Readiness	Influence	Need to be involved
Management	High	High	High	High	High
Teachers	High	High	Medium	High	High
DU	High	High	Medium	Medium	High
Students	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
Parents	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
Businesses	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Representatives of S4J	High	High	High	High	High

Main Interventions

➢ APPRENTICESHIP SCHEME

a) Students

The majority of students look very motivated and very active during the professional practices. The opportunity to be engaged in apprenticeships is perceived by the students as one of the school's strengths and the main reasons why they chose the school. The exchange of experiences and discussions in classroom help them to identify problems and worries, but also to share success cases where students i.e. are rewarded or employed by businesses. Students seem to be optimistic for the opportunities to get employed in the future, especially during the summer time.

There is a clear difference among students, depending on the possibility of carrying out an apprenticeship. Two vast groups might be configured:

a. *Students participating in apprenticeship*, feel more confident in their knowledge and skills, considering themselves more prepared to face labour market challenges.

"We talk very often with each-other about the apprenticeship, we compare the situations and we get to know how everyone is doing. Our advantage is the chance to have an early work experience. The mentors are teaching us and if they like us, they might offer us to work for them in the future."

b. *Students not participating in apprenticeship*, are visibly less motivated, considering themselves disadvantaged compared to the others and being less confident in terms of their future inclusion in the labour market.

> *"We want to have the opportunity to be part of the apprenticeship schemes in companies. We want to take a closer look to the labour market and get to know it before finishing the school, so we won't be scared of it."*

b) Businesses and Mentors

The mentors' opinions and attitudes differ considerably from one another, ranging from the most sceptics ones to the most enthusiastic and optimistic. Two business categories could be defined:

- Small scale businesses, with a lower work load, having difficulties in integrating the students.
- Large scale businesses, with a large staff and a proportional distribution of the tasks, which allows the mentor to have more time to spend next to the student.

> "*Practice is not only about receipts. The students need to learn the profession through a program and then apply it in companies.*"

Although businesses are not entirely clear about this process, they have given these reasons for explaining why they started this cooperation:

a) To provide something valuable for their community.
b) To contribute in creating a labor force more prepared for the labor market.
c) To follow the same procedures and to give students the same possibilities as in European countries.
d) To help students in need.
e) To provide skills for potential future employees.

Even though businesses express their difficulties in the management of the apprentices, in general this collaboration is welcome and appreciated, and it is expected to continue in the future.

> "*This is one of the best thing that you are doing for the whole country. We hope that after 4-5 years we get the gains from this, we see this as an investment for the future."*

c) Teachers

Apprenticeships are regarded as very important for the professional growth of the students and as a "bridge" that connects the school to the labour market. However, teachers report *difficulties to attract the appropriate businesses* in the apprenticeship scheme. Those companies that are offered do not truly have the size and internal organizational structure that makes them a suitable training environment

SOME CONCERNS

a) Businesses

- Many businesses think that the apprentices lack work attitude and commitment.
- They suggest that it is problematic that students wants to begin cooking right away, "*they all want the frying pen's handle the first day*" and refuse tasks of a lower level of importance like peeling, cleaning, etc..
- They also claim that schools have to improve the image and the teaching programs in order to prepare better apprentices.
- Time management, lack of experience and the very young age of students entering the apprenticeship are considered also as factors that influence negatively the process.
- A more significant engagement and monitoring by the school in organizing and following the apprenticeship process is required.

b) Students

- The key issues for students were the long hours and hard work, as well as, the over engagement in menial tasks.
- Most of the students do not see the business as their future employer.
- Students complain about the organized hours for "sharing knowledge", since they don't take place frequently.
- Rotation doesn't allow students to specialize in their preferred sector.
- Students engaged in small scale businesses complain that after a short time of working at the business, there is not much left to be learned.
- Students claim that they encounter difficulties to share their concerns with the teachers.
- The pupils are not well-informed about their professional role and the specialties of their profile.

c) Teachers

- Teachers complain about the small number of businesses available for the apprenticeship.
- In many occasions, involvement of businesses in the apprenticeship scheme is done as a personal favour to teachers and/or school director.
- Teachers are worried about the risk of exploitation and use of apprenticeships as unpaid work.
- Teachers are worried about the absence of professional mentors' and the lack of assessment of apprentices' performance in businesses.
- The lack of written criteria for businesses to qualify for apprenticeship scheme is also a concern.
- The preparatory phase for the students-to-be-apprentices is vague.
- The lack of a plan, or a form for keeping track of competences learned in the business. The mentor is eventually the business owner, untrained for the role.
- Other teachers' concerns relate to the seasonal character of a part of the businesses engaged in the schemes.
- Issues related to students' transportation were also suggested.

➢ TECHNOLOGY AND BLENDED LEARNING

a) Students

- Technology application and particularly electronic platform use are perceived by students as very efficient. The combination of oral explanation with visual demonstration, the use of interactive elements (quizzes, tests, games, etc.) makes the classes more interesting (even those perceived as "difficult" or "boring").
- The virtual materials compensate the lack of textbooks in some of the subjects, the knowledge is absorbed more quickly, and the students' involvement rate is higher, which also leads to a better and quieter environment.
- The rate of their application though is still low. Only a part of the subjects is based on these platforms.
- Overall, all the students would like a higher application of technology in teaching and learning process.

b) Teachers

- Some teachers constantly apply BL in their subjects, emphasizing their positive impact in class. Other teachers are sceptic regarding the efficiency of technology-based teaching, thinking that technology should not be used in an imposed way but only when it's suitable or necessary.
- Regarding the IMPRO system, a part of the teachers supports it, believing that it makes the teachers' tasks easier and provides a better organization and monitoring of the teaching and the administrative process. The other part of teachers find it difficult to use it in parallel to the usual register, especially when they have difficulties in dealing with technology in general.
- Teachers express interest in using the blended classrooms, which are perceived as more efficient in terms of teaching, learning, cooperation and students' involvement.

➢ DEVELOPMENT UNIT

- DU is one of the main structures through which the school operates. It serves as a point of reference for the apprenticeship process by acting as an interlocutor between mentors and students.
- The DU members also follow closely the apprenticeship experience in each business.
- In general, the DU teachers are motivated and ready to accomplish all the tasks.

SOME CONCERNS

- For most of the DU staff, it is difficult to continue serving at the DU without a reduction of the teaching load.
- Meanwhile, the role of the DU in informing and orienting the students on their professional career is still weak.
- Students don't have a clear idea about the role of the DU.

➢ TEACHERS' TRAINING

- Teachers' training is perceived to be very valuable by all teachers, especially by young teachers, ICT teachers and apprenticeship instructors who have no academic degree.
- The involved teachers feel more motivated and professionally improved.
- Teachers are satisfied with the training opportunities, which are also helping them to strengthen their skills in technology and to acquire new ones, which are reflected in more technology-based and more interactive teaching methods.
- There is a need of continuous trainings in order to bring all teachers closer to technology.
- There is an expressed need for more training in certain fields/subjects/issues.

SOME CONCERNS

- Some teachers feel exhausted by the many uncoordinated trainings that happen.
- Trainings should be planned according to needs, more structured around professions (specialties), and instrumental in terms of teachers' qualification.

➢ INFRASTRUCTURE

- Infrastructure seems to be one of the key elements for students' and teachers' satisfaction.
- The fulfilment of infrastructural needs and the constant improvement of the infrastructure is mentioned as one of the main factors that lead students to choose these schools and as one of the strengths of institutional marketing.
- Blended classrooms are particularly appreciated, thanks to the opportunity to use technology. The way tables are arranged, the presence of modern equipment etc., contribute to a more pleasant and comfortable environment and enhance students' involvement and participation in class. Nevertheless, access in blended classrooms differs among directions, favouring more the ICT and Hospitality-Tourism students, which further deepens the differentiation between students in general.
- All the interviewed students think that the number of blended classrooms and laboratories should increase.

➢ GENDER BASED DIFFERENCES

- There is no report of any gender difference in all aspects of education. Students receive equal treatment, as reported also by other actors in the school context.
- Girls and boys are equally accessing school infrastructure and perceive no distinction on teaching methods.
- Girls are reported to be "class senators" in many ocassions and their participation in interviews is as vivid as that of boys.
- They do not report any problem with apprenticeships, either.
- As far as ICT students are concerned, boys practice in the field and thus, have the opportunity to learn more from the problems faced by technicians, while girls carry out their internship at administrative offices, where there is little space to practice and learn.

➢ PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE / RECOMMANDATIONS

a) The school

- The need to review the curricula, aiming the reduction of classes in general subjects and the reviewing of their content;
- Increasing the number of blended classrooms and laboratories;
- Enhancing the use of electronic platforms;
- Increasing the number of extra-curricular and competitive activities. This would enable students to express their talents and passions, to be more active, to spend the time more efficiently, etc..;
- Extending investment in infrastructure and laboratories in profiles other than ICT and T&H;
- Integrating new teaching methods in all profiles;
- Inducing selective criteria for students willing to enrol, in order to improve the quality;
- Inducing changes in the teaching load of apprenticeship tutors and the DU representatives;
- Providing more trainings on IMPRO platform for teachers encountering difficulties to use it;
- Considering possibilities of infrastructure investments especially for laboratories;
- Increasing the number of thematic trainings;
- Enhancing mentoring and support of school directors (especially in Berat);
- Highlighting the importance of regulating the teaching process through the application of rules and penalizations in case of misbehaviours. This could contribute in attracting better students.;
- Enhancing the use of platforms, as one of the methods that raises students' attention and their level of involvement during classes. This would have a positive effect also on minimizing noise and inappropriate behaviour of certain students, which represents one of the major concerns for all school actors.;
- Finding a solution to substitute teachers that participate in trainings in order to avoid knowledge gaps and the phenomenon of students leaving the class and sometimes the school area when the teacher is missing, which represents one of the biggest concerns for parents.

b) The apprenticeship

- Providing the opportunity of carrying out apprenticeship modules even for the higher grades in ICT and Economy profiles;
- Reviewing the apprenticeship schedule, in order to get the most out of the hours spent in apprenticeship;
- Consolidating the apprenticeship scheme;
- Involving business mentors in the evaluation process of the apprenticeship;
- Enhancing cooperation between business mentors and instructors for designing apprenticeship programs;
- Providing further support for talented students;
- Consolidating the network of businesses for more apprenticeship opportunities;
- Raising the effectiveness of the monitoring process of the students by engaging dedicated individuals, rather than teachers. It is impossible for teachers accomplish their teaching duty and follow students' practices at the same time, since also the distance between the school and the businesses is considerable;
- Standardizing the starting procedures of apprenticeships;

- Improving the rotation system by applying a formula that helps students to benefit more from their preferred sector, e.g. 50% of the time in the chosen profile, for example kitchen, and the rest of the time divided between other profiles (reception, bar, etc.). Such a solution would contribute in boosting the students' professional skills in a certain domain and in giving the mentors the possibility to detect the students' vocation in order to mentor them better, aiming to make them part of the staff in the future.;
- Reviewing the apprenticeship schedule, so that time spent by students in the business, suits the work peak, in order to get the most out of the apprenticeship hours;
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences between students who have had professional practices in businesses with students who will start professional practices for the first time;
- Facilitating the exchange of experiences between businesses which are involved in the apprenticeship scheme. This exchange would be of interest, as this initiative is seen as a new perspective in the labor market and different entrepreneurs have different approaches to it.;
- Increasing compatibility between apprenticeship positions and students' technical profile.

c) S4J

- The Project needs to be gradual in what offers in terms of new knowledge, realistically considering the given level of teachers and instructors at school and the steps they have to walk to the Project's objectives.
- Clear definition and prioritization of teacher assignments (included project's requests).
- The implementation of new teaching methodologies needs to be done with small and gradual steps. There is a need for continuing teacher mentoring to avoid the fictitious manifestations of teachers in changing the teaching method.
- The presentation of the S4J project aims with all school stakeholders, to help the acquisition of change.
- The need to review the curricula making it more labor market oriented
- The increase of the number of blended classrooms - one of the most frequently mentioned components by the students.
- Extension and harmonization of investment in infrastructure and technology, and in other school profiles
- Higher opportunities for investment maintenance
- Rehabilitation of school's dormitory (when available) with the purpose to serve other communities outside of the school region