

REFRAME

REGIONAL NETWORK FOR WORK BASED LEARNING

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Lessons Learnt and Policy Recommendations

FREREF
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Foreword

The REFRAME project took place between January 2017 and December 2019.

It gathered partners from 4 Regions in Europe – Emilia-Romagna, Catalonia, the Netherlands and the Rhône-Alpes Region – with the aim of promoting, facilitating and sustaining Work Based Learning and students' mobility.

A platform was developed enabling and supporting the exchanges between schools, companies, students, and other actors involved in the process. It provides with a full process to establish and formalise a "contract" between a school, a company and a student to support the student's mobility accordingly to Work Based Learning schemes.

The possibility for actors in different Regions / Countries to register on the platform enables to develop further the school → work mobility by extending it to a cross borders mobility. Thus, the project also produced documents and recommendations towards the professionals to help them introduce the European concepts in the Learning programmes: the use of learning objectives, the ECVet system of credits for vocational training, for example.

Several pilot actions and local stakeholders' meetings were held in the different Regions that served at:

- disseminating the work done in the project;
- testing the platform and the interaction process between schools and companies;
- collecting the reactions and advisement of the practitioners and decision makers;

During the project, a process of participatory appreciative evaluation was deployed to ensure the quality of the work done.

The work done during the project, at theoretical and practical level is explained in a set of deliverables.

This document presents a synthetic view of what was learned during the project and the key recommendations that can be addressed from there to decision and policy makers at local, Regional, and European level.

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WBL as an model for Excellence

WBL benefits

WBL is an educational strategy that provides students with real-life work experiences through partnerships with schools, vet-providers and companies where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills.

One essential aspect of the WBL experience is to place the student in a real-work setting.

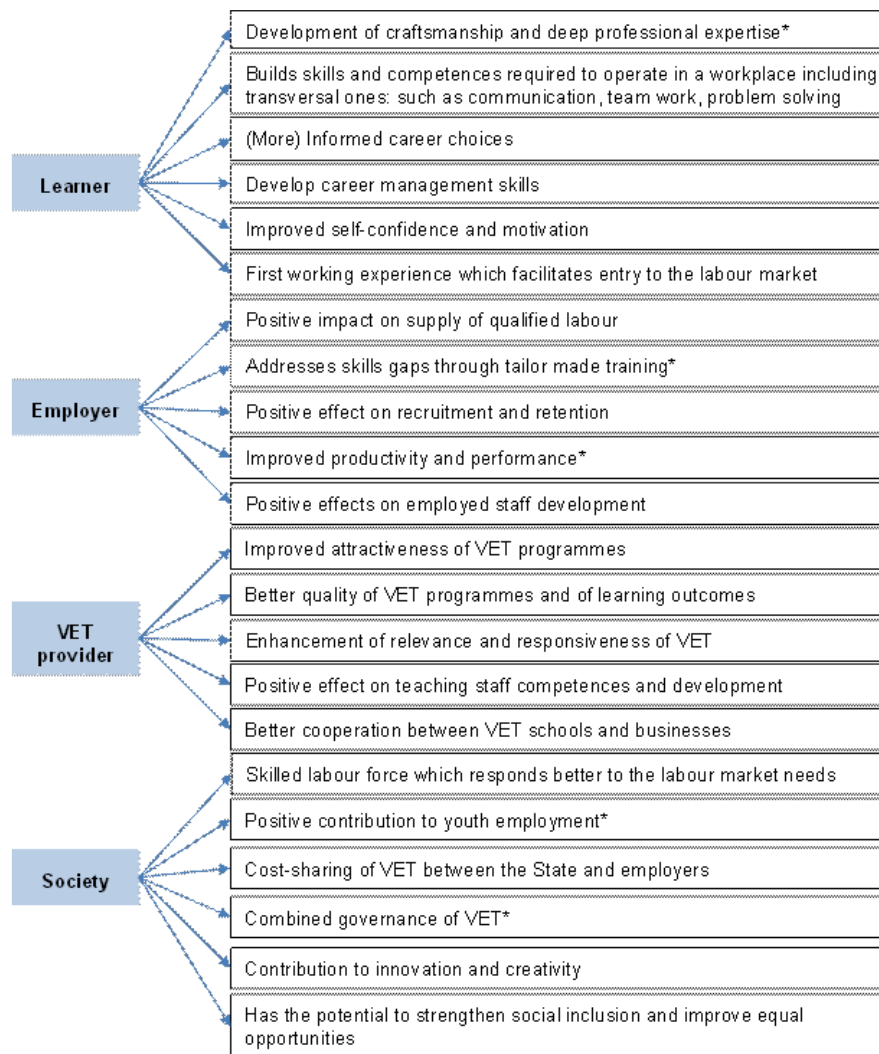
The activity realized within the working contexts by students provides many advantages from different perspectives:

- it facilitates the guidance enabling each student, through concrete experiences directly on the workplace, to identify the inner attitudes, for the forthcoming educational and professionals choices;
- it offers the possibility to progressively gain professional competences
- it fosters the integration of the student in an organizational context, such as the working place, and the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- it is the prerequisite for the acknowledgement of credits for their school career and for entering into the working world. Many countries in Europe combine these three general models of WBL. Terminology and definitions vary, and even a single term such as "apprenticeship" may have different connotations and underlying concepts. Clear statistical data on WBL is therefore not easy to locate. In general, terms, VET at upper-secondary level is mainly school-based. Apprenticeship programmes often coexist with school-based systems.

The following table illustrates the benefit of WBL for the whole set of actors implied in it.

Benefits of workplace / in-company learning
(From Work-Based Learning in Europe - Practices and Policy Pointers)





European VET providers and their counterparts in the European Business Community are well aware of the drive to improve and extend the opportunities provided through Apprenticeships and Work Based Learning pathways, especially for young people seeking to enter the labour market of today and in to the future. Indeed many providers are working closely with local, regional and national businesses to extend these pathways to develop the skills necessary to meet the challenges within a global marketplace. In many Member States the shift toward Work Based Learning and Apprenticeships in particular are well developed and operating within a National framework in terms of skills development and curriculum design and delivery. Both VET Institutions and Businesses are working together to arm young people with the skills necessary to meet the needs of companies for a highly skilled workforce. However some are further ahead than others in terms of delivering such training within National frameworks. More can be done – a particular challenge is that of meeting the needs of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME's). It is a key focus of European VET policy to promote high quality skills through these pathways. Moreover the policy debate recognises that these pathways offer a valuable opportunity to address the perception of VET as an inferior route to success compared to the traditional academic pathway from school to University. These policy drivers alongside efforts by VET institutions to work closely in partnership with Business seek to change this perception to ensure VET is seen as a 'first choice option for young people as they strive to succeed in the real world of work (<http://www.promotewbl.eu/?p=5393>)

REFRAME Quality Approach to Work Based Learning in Vocational Education and training

In order to provide a contribution to quality approaches within work based learning, the team of the project analysed the existing experiences as well as the European literature and the main conclusion in the existing studies is that the link between the world of education and training and the world of work is of paramount importance for VET quality and attractiveness. Vet business cooperation covers a broad variety of topics and dimension:

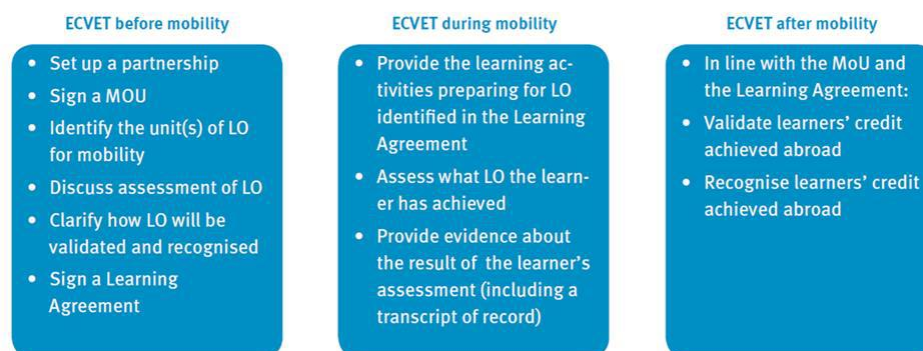
- the Vet process (curriculum development; Vet delivery, feedback loop)
- the topics of cooperation (matching supply and demand, work – based learning, digital skills, innovation, entrepreneurial skills, Mobility, social inclusion raising awareness)
- the level of cooperation (individual, local/regional, sectoral, national, European, global)

The Quality core principles of the REFRAME framework are the following:

- Learning programme development: Integration of dual learning in outcome oriented curricula
- Feasibility analysis of the learning programme.
- Reaching shared awareness of Dual Learning aims and Learning Outcomes at the beginning of the process, Reframe platform.
- Collaboration in all phases between VET provider, employer and student
- Professional development of teachers, trainers and tutor

The following pages illustrate: how to apply these basic principles by suggesting

Figure 2 | Key issues to be taken into account before, during and after mobility when using ECVET



Legend: LO: Learning Outcomes; MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

Policies to improve the quality of work-based learning can be thought of in several ways. A fairly common way to look at all quality frameworks is in terms of:

- ensuring that inputs are of a high quality;
- putting in place processes that can result in quality outcomes;
- assessing outcomes to judge whether they are of a high quality.

Examples in this case could include ensuring that enterprises have trained and qualified trainers (inputs); ensuring that the links between enterprises and schools are close ones (processes); and putting in place regulations requiring national practical tests to be held the end of apprenticeships (outcomes). These three dimensions of quality assurance are not exclusive: all can be adopted together, and in many of the best VET systems all are used.

An alternative framework that is somewhat more directly related to work-based learning contains three broad approaches to the quality of work-based learning, the first two of which are closely related:

- working with enterprises to strengthen their capacity to provide and take part in work-based learning programmes;
- developing practical tools that can assist enterprises and students;
- formal approaches that focus on regulations and supervision by external organisations.

These three approaches to quality assurance in work-based learning are not exclusive: all can be adopted together.

In practice, of course, the two ways of looking at quality overlap a great deal. TABLE 4.1 illustrates this overlap. Whichever approach to policies for improving the quality of work-based learning is adopted, policy makers and social partners need to keep in mind two questions.

- Is there a trade-off between quality and what can be afforded?
- Is there a risk that measures to improve the quality of work-based learning will be seen as burdensome, will interfere with the ongoing business of enterprises, and will discourage participation? This question in particular applies to measures that try to impose legal obligations or requirements on employers.

(From: Does work-based learning facilitate transitions to decent work? - Employment Policy Department - Paul Comyn and Laura Brewer - INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE – GENEVA)



Continue promoting actively WBL as a pathway to excellence, with benefits for all the community of actors engaged: Learners, Teachers, trainers, Education and Companies, and the Economy in general.



Enable, Support and Sustain European, National and Regional Networks of Excellency in WBL, based on the recommendations and tools developed within the REFRAME project.



Recognise and sustain WBL as the most qualitative way to develop fusion skills

Mobility of VET Students: an opportunity to acquire competences of all sorts

For VET student, the idea of mobility covers a broader meaning. It refers to – at least - two kinds of typical situations: first, the mobility between school and company, whether it be during internship or in more alternate forms of learning, such as in apprenticeship; then the international mobility, when the students spend a time abroad, be it for going in another school or for a stay in a company. We summarize these different situations in the following schema

Mobility = school ↔ company / home ↔ abroad

Mobilities are moments when students experience different ways of working, of living, of learning, different situations in different environments, different kinds of relationship, or work organisation, of school organisation. They meet new people, they are more than often out of their "comfort zones"; they develop a great capacity to solve all these issues. This why so many actors of the education community recognise the important impact of mobility periods of time on their students. Maybe, one remark that could "summarize" all others is that they come back "with a greater maturity".

Learning context: the mobility situation

The Learning context is a complex element that includes (among others):

- the place of learning
- the mode of learning
- the institutional / organisational environment
- the cultural / social environment
- the standards, both "local" and European
- the level of qualification (starting and to be achieved)
- the personal context of the learner

The learning context greatly influences the way something is learnt, and thus, may be appreciated.

The mobility time periods in the learning life of VET students create learning situations that are different and richer than "usual" ones; the learning is happening:

- in different places: school, company, real life in a foreign context;
- in different cultural environments, with different languages;
- in different work situations, when the learner is experiencing works situations both at home and abroad;
- in different school organisations, when the learner is following school hours both at home and abroad;
- etc.

As reported by the quasi totality of students going abroad, the mobility is, first of all, a great self-satisfying experience.

It has also been largely reported that the realisation of mobilities by the students (and also by staff members) are huge opportunities to increase the efficiency of learning processes and learning programmes.

In order to benefit from that, it is important to be able to develop agreements between the actors of the mobility (school at home, company at home, school abroad, company abroad, and the student) despite the diversity of situations in different countries. The European Institutions have put a lot of efforts on that, has have all the institutions implied in organising and facilitating mobilities for their students.

Though REFRAME was more focussed on technical competences (Mechatronic and Automation), it is important to recognise the very important part taken by mobility experiences to develop transversal competences among students

Learning modalities: focus on mobility

Formal vs less formal learning

Competences, or more generally, abilities, may be gained through several different learning channels:

- by undertaking a programme in a school, which is the most typical form of "formal learning";
- by reflecting actively on activities made at the workplace
- by taking part in project-based activities
- by reflecting actively on activities taking place in the social, family, day-to-day, life
- by undertaking personal, collaborative, team, work activities

all these ones being part of what is called non-formal or unformal learning (we are not here interested in discussing the differences – if any – between these two modes, but rather in examining how such less-formal learning – used as a more general expression – is relevant in our problematic).

In WBL, two important learning modalities are experienced: learning by experiencing and learning from each other.

Learning by experiencing

Learning by experiencing is especially important when dealing with students in VET programmes, and more especially for those enrolled in alternate learning programmes (apprenticeship), because experiencing is a large part of their learning situations.

Learning by experiencing may include formal and semi-formal modalities such as Project-based learning, and less formal learning modalities, such as learning at workplace in general.

Learning from each other

Learning from each other is also a mix of semi-formal modalities such as team work and group work (more generally collaborative work) and less formal situation such as companionship, or event relationship with other people.

Rationale for using Learning Outcomes

European standards vs local diversity

European context

European Institutions have worked during several multi-years programmes to produce elements that can be used to support the work of institutional actors in Education in designing and implementing learning programmes.

The key elements that frame our reflexion in REFRAME are the following

- the definition of the Key Competences framework;
- the European Qualification Framework (EQF);

- the European Credit System for VET (ECVet).

One important consequence of the will to comply to these standards is the use of **Learning Outcomes** to describe the achievements of Learners.

if one wants to put in place educational programmes that will enable students to be involved in mobility programmes, it is important to take these standards into account.

Local (National / Regional) context

At the "local level" ("local" here means the policy level that is relevant when dealing with the VRT Education system in one hand and the Institutional / organisational concrete elements that influence the design and implementation of the programmes, modules, contents, modalities, assessments, etc.).

At local level, one has to take into account:

- the National Qualification Framework;
- the organisation of VET programmes (policy making, organisation, criteria, etc.);
- the institutional context (how things happen in one school);
- the historical elements (how things have been done so far) and the change management elements (how to foster and support changes);

Reconciling European Standards and local diversity

It is sometimes not that easy to be able to combine the will to comply with European recommendations and the possibility to influence the local conditions and constraints.

Organising the mobility for VET Students

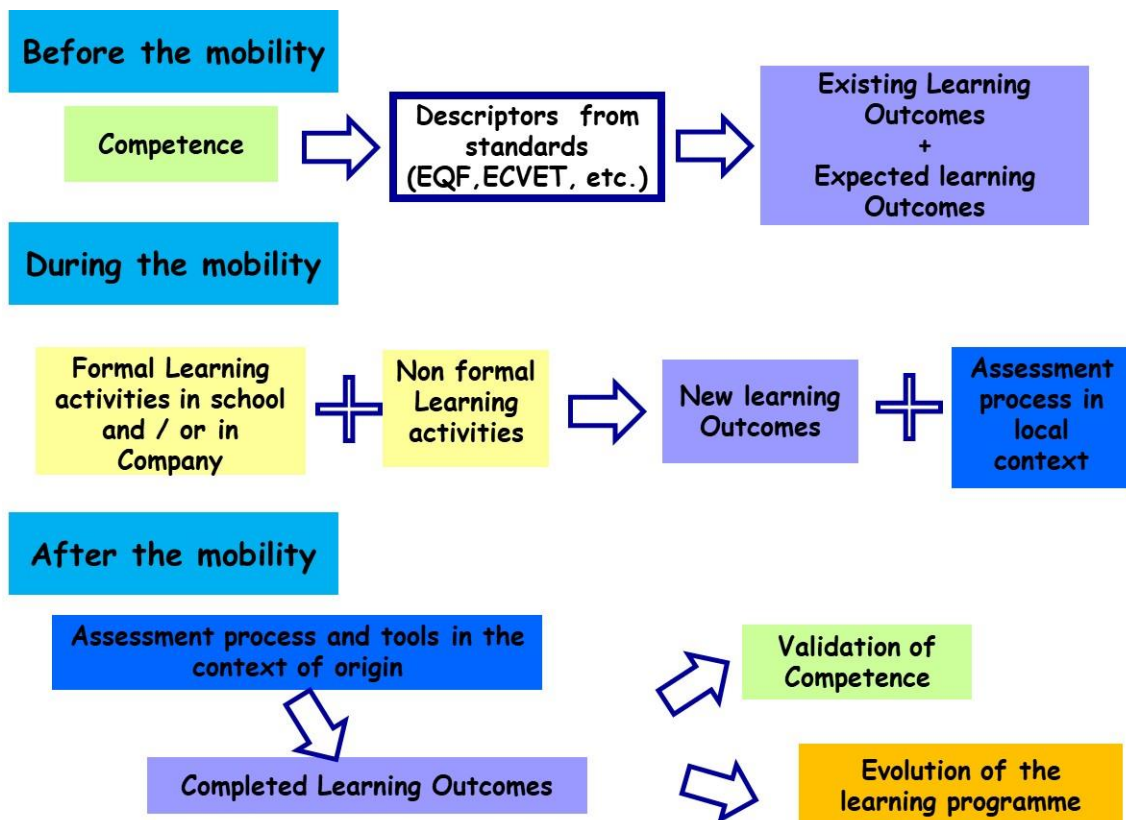
The mobility does not only consist of the time spent abroad or in company. It is a larger process, now well documented. It is commonly agreed to consider three different stages:

- Before mobility: preparation, anticipation
- During mobility: enjoy!
- After mobility: time for assessment and appraisal, time for improvement of the process

Recognition and valorisation / validation of competences acquired in in less formal or hybrid learning situations (e.g. mobility)

The issue of recognising and valuing competences acquired through less formal learning processes has been discussed and documented since several year (see all the work done for recognition of prior learning).

It is slightly different to speak of recognition and valorisation (which are; in themselves, less formal valorisation processes) and to speak of validation (which is necessary a more formal process).



REFRAME is dealing with some key element of mobility for VET students in WBL. That is why it is very important to take as much as possible into account the European standards and the way they influence our way of designing and implementing Learning Outcomes. This is the only way to hope having some elements of comparison (if not transferability) between what will happen in two different environments (school \leftrightarrow company, at home \leftrightarrow abroad).



Promote the use of Learning Outcomes to write down the Learning Programmes and Learning Units - Encourage school heads, programmes responsible, teachers and trainers in VET Schools to use the Learning Outcomes framework as their "ordinary" way to conceive, design and implement learning programmes and units.



Encourage school heads, programmes responsible, teachers and trainers in VET Schools to use the tools developed in REFRAME to organise, prepare, accompany and valorise mobility of VET students



Promote the use of the European Qualification Framework, rather than the National Ones, to facilitate the correspondence between qualification levels and processes when students go abroad during WBL.



Promote the use of ECVET credits to qualify and quantify the learning outcomes and their assessment process within the VET actor's community.

REFRAME Platform: a European backbone to support high quality WBL mobility

Developing and supporting WBL requires to establish strong trustworthy relationship between all actors of the process, and mainly Schools, Companies and Students.

On line platforms are, by excellence, the tools to enable and sustain these kinds of relationships. The REFRAME platform (<https://www.reframe-wbl.eu/en/project>) provides the means for schools , companies and students to:

- to register on the platform and gain access
- learn about a successful framework to ensure a high level quality for WBL experiences, locally and internationally ;
- find out lists of schools and companies in different Regions as possible partners to establish a relationship ;
- find out a full documented and supported process to built a contractual relationship between the actors to set up a WBL mobility ;
- find out specific tools, self-learning modules, recommendations and guidelines to develop a sustainable, high quality and trustworthy WBL experience
- etc.

This Platform is a first step towards a European network of Regional Laboratories for WBL and aiming at:

- support and facilitate the adoption of WBL and Dual Learning into the schools and businesses involved;
- create opportunities to share strategies and practices and promote the exchange of good practice among the regions and the key actors participating in the project;
- improve and consolidate the collaboration among the policy makers in charge of WBL at local and regional level;
- develop opportunities for training and sharing of practices and tools for VET providers and companies (teachers, trainers, tutors and mentors);
- increase the knowledge of the educational system about business innovation trends;
- increase the participation of businesses in the regional area about the use of work-based learning, fostering a new cultural approach
- get young people involved through the promotion of work-based learning experiences at European level.



Foster the use of REFRAME Platform within a large set of Regional Bodies to develop awareness and promotion of WBL mobilities in VET, for the utmost benefit of all parties involved



Encourage initiatives to enlarge the span of the Platform towards new Regions, new Schools and new Companies across Europe



Encourage partners to undertake new initiatives to further develop the first productions of REFRAME

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