

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Partnerships for Lifelong Learning in Engineering and Technology P4LLL-tec

The project is concerned with the investigation of two classes of 'partnerships for lifelong learning', which are to be studied in terms of their organisational structures as well as their impact on the learners' employability. The term 'partnership' refers to the cooperation of education and training stakeholders such as VET providers, higher education institutions and enterprises with a view to offering new or alternative learning pathways from initial training up to higher education. In general, such partnerships can be defined by three characteristics:

- (1) VET stakeholders participate in networks that support the permeability and progression of learners in education and training, allowing the learners to engage in flexible and individualised learning processes to accumulate learning outcomes and attain new qualifications and qualification levels;
- (2) these partnerships operate within existing systemic structures of education and training, utilising them for specific innovative solutions without changing the structures themselves;
- (3) the partnerships connect subsystems of education and training that are traditionally separate, e.g. by establishing pathways from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education (HE).

According to a Cedefop study (2012-0176/AO/ECVL/ILEMO-LZAH/PartnershipsForLifelongLearning/010/12), four core types of such partnerships can be distinguished, namely integrated learning opportunities, bridging programmes, validation mechanisms and counselling services. The first two are addressed in the project. In the case of 'integrated learning opportunities' or 'integrated programmes', educational opportunities offered by different providers are connected in such a way that from the learners' perspective one single, coherent programme or curriculum comes into being. Dual college programmes, which integrate apprenticeship training and a cognate bachelor's degree course, are a typical example. In the other type, the so-called 'bridging programmes', the autonomy of the partners is preserved to a larger extent. Instead of jointly building up a new training course, the partners involved recognise learning outcomes from each others' existing programmes on the basis of mutual trust and provide targeted provision and support for the transition from one programme to another.

The aim of the P4LLL-tec project is to study the organisational models (or 'design options') of integrated learning opportunities and bridging programmes in occupational areas of engineering and technology (ISCO Sub-Major Groups 31 and/or 35) in five countries (Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia and Spain), and to assess the performance and impact of these partnerships. On the basis of this analysis, the project will develop manuals or guidelines for education and training practitioners as well as policy makers

to provide information on which models of partnerships are suitable for the different national contexts.

Whereas the first part of the research programme deals with the organisation and functioning of partnerships for lifelong learning, the second part is concerned with their effects on the educational process. Besides the question to what extent learners are able to achieve a desired qualification and how well their skills meet the demands of the labour market, the issue of the consequences for the status of vocational learning will be addressed. In this regard it will be examined whether learners of these programmes differ from those in conventional VET programmes in terms of vocational identity and commitment, and whether the linkage with HE could lead to a 'marginalisation' of VET.

In brief: Context, objectives, activities and envisaged results

1 Context/background

The project “Partnerships for lifelong learning in engineering and technology” addresses two different models of cooperation between actors in vocational and higher education providing consistent and permeable educational pathways from initial training to higher educational levels. The schemes to be analysed are

- (1) integrated learning opportunities (for example dual study programmes) and
- (2) bridging programmes (for example programs, where one institution recognises the learning outcomes of another partner).

In Europe, both types of programs have become more and more popular and attract a growing number of learners. Meanwhile, there is only limited information on factors determining the success and/or side effects of such partnerships in the long run. Such evidence has to be based on information given by all parties concerned, i.e. those offering the programs (educational institutions), those involved in practical training components (enterprises) and finally those enrolled and seeking employment thereafter (learners/students). The envisaged study will take into account all stakeholders concerned and contribute in filling the knowledge gap in the domain of technical professions in five European countries (Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia and Spain).

2 Objectives

The aim of the project is to study the conditions and design of integrated education and bridging programs in technical occupations as well as their impact on a successful entry into the labour market as well as the development of vocational identity of learners. The project seeks for general conclusions in the respective national context and in a European perspective. Future programs can benefit from the experiences made and documented in cases of best practise which the study aims to identify.

3 Description of activities

The project builds on four major steps. In brief these are

- (A) Mapping the design options for integrated learning opportunities or bridging programs in five European countries (desk research, expert interviews)



(B) Case Studies

1-2 cases per country will be selected for in-depth studies. These will refer to the fundamental characteristics of the partnership, including a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.

(C) Commitment studies

Learners/students of partnership programs and learners of traditional programs will be interrogated with an online tool. Whether integrated learning opportunities and bridging programmes show any difference from conventional or traditional programmes will be examined.

(D) Employer survey

Human resource managers/company owners will be interrogated on the extent and nature of employment of graduates as well as on their knowledge, skills and competences acquired through the respective learning pathways and their relevance at work.

4 Envisaged results and impacts

Based on the analysis, the project team will develop manuals for educational providers and policy makers in Europe that provide information on which types or subtypes of cooperative educational partnerships/programs are suitable to the different educational systems in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia and Spain or in a similar environment.

The project will help setting up new educational programs successfully. Also, providers of existing programs will gain from the findings of this study in deriving further reform initiatives. In the long run learning from best practise cases will contribute to successfully addressing the needs of the labour market, providing learning pathways in a sense of permeability and progression without marginalising traditional apprenticeships.