

National Focus Group Meeting - Finland

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List of Participants

1. Eeva Savela (ES), employer, pharmacy owner in the city of Lohja (online);
2. Mona Bischoff (MB), former student in the training programme of work supervision and process consultation (online);
3. Rauni Jaskari (RJ), lecturer and case provider, Turku University of Applied Sciences (online);
4. Esa Anttila (EA), education inspector, Turku Apprenticeship Office;
5. Joonas Saari (JS), student of the Master's Degree in Humanistics, University of Turku;
6. Kia Lundqvist (KL), Education coordinator of specialization programme and case provider, University of Turku;
7. Heli Trapp (HT), Development manager, University of Turku;
8. Timo Halttunen (TH), Head of department, University of Turku;
9. Tiina Anttila (TA), Project manager, University of Turku.

The case studies collected by University of Turku and Federation of Finnish Enterprises, Southwest Region (4 pc) were distributed in advance.

Introduction to the ApprEnt project and the focus group session (TA)

TA welcomed all the participants and introduced the objective, participants and target group of the ApprEnt project as well as the nature and aim of the focus group session. The main question for the workshop was *“What should be done to develop the work-based learning in HE more actively and efficiently?”*

Introduction to the Finnish system of apprenticeship and work-based learning in HEI (TH)

TH gave a brief summary of the national situation of apprenticeship in Finnish higher education institutions. It focussed on introducing the new concept of specialization studies in HE.

Overview of the four case studies

University of Turku:

- Interculturally Competent Working Practices with Immigrants/University of Turku (KL);
- BTA Business Talent Academy/University of Turku, Turku School of Economics (TA).

Federation of Finnish Enterprises, Southwest Region:

- Engine model/Radical/Turku University of Applied Sciences (RJ);
- Anders Inno (TA).

Discussion of experiences with different stakeholders, and of positive and challenging aspects of the Finnish system in general and in presented cases

There was a lively discussion about the positive and challenging aspects of the national system of apprenticeship in general as well as the pros and cons of the case studies presented. The culture of the discipline and the line of business considerably define the attitude towards learning and the willingness to pay for the training. For example, with regards to social work both employers and employees are used to training periods paid by public bodies; in many other disciplines there is no tradition for ‘free’ training. In VET apprenticeships, the workplace tutor is usually compensated for their mentoring periods. This is not usual practice in HE apprenticeships, despite some discussions about it have been initiated within certain training programmes. Clearly, this depends also on the discipline.

The significance of the tutoring cannot be overplayed in respect of the apprenticeship system. There should constant cooperation between the HE institution and the workplace in order to facilitate tutoring (e.g. the goals of the apprenticeship should be agreed together with the learner, HE tutor, and the workplace tutor). It is also essential that the achievement of the goals are verified together. In some specialization programmes there has been a practice to arrange a visit in every workplace during the training. It improved the cooperation between the university and the workplaces but demanded an excessive amount of work and time. The importance of personal contacts between the HE institution and the workplace was pointed out as well; in this regard, in the beginning of VET apprenticeship it is common to organise a few hours training for the workplace tutors.

It was also pointed out that when cooperating with the employers, the representatives of HE institutions should be wary of the language and jargon used. The meetings should be equal and render the cooperation the most genuine possible. It is also important to consider new ways of recognising learning in place of academic writing, so to make implicit knowledge visible as well as taking into account prior learning. The contract agreements between the learner, HE institution, and the workplace remain an issue. They are one way to ensure that the students do not abruptly leave the training throughout the workplace-learning period.

Peer tutoring came out as a way to promote learning while saving the resources of the trainer or workplace tutor. The employer can also encourage the staff to train or teach each other at work. Peer tutoring cannot anyhow be the only way of tutoring because deep learning requires reflection guided by a more experienced tutor or trainer. From the employers' and businesses' points of view, the culture of the workplace significantly determines the opportunities for learning and the role of the employer: this can act as an enabler but also as a retarder of the learner's progresses. In whichever case, the most important element remains the learner's own interest and inherent motivation for learning and development.

Main suggestions

1. To start up and ensure the continuity of apprenticeship in HE, the focus should be on the needs and targets of the organizations involved. If the organization does not receive any benefit from the apprenticeship, it will probably not be interested in hosting new learners in the future.
2. It should be pointed out to the employers that training one person is at the same time an opportunity for development for the whole work community. It would also be useful to find out what kind of training or tutoring could be useful to arrange for business managers and employers in order to make them benefit from the apprenticeship system.
3. There should be obligatory and regular practical training periods in real-working life situations for the person in charge of the apprenticeships within HE institutions. In fact, the curricula of training institutions have often proven outdated and useless for employers and organizations.
4. The curricula are often overloaded. There should be more critical reflection on the contents of the programme established by HE institutions.
5. The culture of the workplace is essential in creating learning opportunities. The employer is the key element in facilitating the learning by defining the duties of the learners, challenging them enough and encouraging the staff to teach one another.
6. The quality, continuity, and cooperation in tutoring are the key elements for real learning at work. The tutoring in the workplace should be carried out in close association with the tutor in HE institution in order to achieve the agreed-upon learning targets.
7. Structured reflection opportunities guided by a more experienced tutor/mentor/counsellor are essential for deepening the workplace learning. Also a wide array of different learning forums are also important.

8. The key element for profound learning and genuine professional development is the inherent motivation of the learner. For some learners gaining concrete occupational advantages (e.g. in the form of new positions offered following the completion of the training) is, in fact, highly motivating.
9. It has proved to be very handy that the HE institution provides the students with a workbook during the learning periods at work. The workbook can serve as an additional learning channel and reinforce the learning in the workplace. It also serves as a tool for the evaluation of the work-based learning period.