

National Focus Group Meeting – Portugal

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Overview

The University of Aveiro's ApprEnt Focus Group (FG) took place on the 12th of July of 2018 in the University premises. The late timing was due to different circumstances, amongst which the professional activity of the participants (organiser included) were the most conditioning ones.

Also, the FG had a regional incidence as it was not possible to meet at national level, due to professional schedules, lack of mobility and budget management.

At least 15 participants were expected but last-minute professional activities prevented some of them from attending, so the FG went on with 9 participants: 2 students, 2 company supervisors, 2 teachers, 2 school supervisors, 1 university teacher that is also an employer, and lasted for 2h 30 min (from 17:00 to 19:30).

Introduction to ApprEnt

Besides the information previously sent to the participants, ApprEnt was contextualized within the VET and Academic Education (AE) European panorama, which raised some discussion regarding the access of non-traditional students (NTS) to the University. It was a smooth transition to the questions.

Questions under discussion

1. Experience of different stakeholders (students, schools, and employers)

From the stakeholders experience it was clear that there are good and bad examples identifiable in the three profiles [students/apprentices, teachers/trainers (school supervisors) and employers/tutors (company supervisors)].

- i. Students referred good examples of cooperation regarding the companies support;
- ii. Schools identified good and bad examples of academic support, namely on the supervision being concentrated in short periods of time instead of in a continuous support throughout the internship;
- iii. In most cases the work plan is elaborated in cooperation between supervisors, and face-to-face interviews are previously made regarding the assignment of the apprenticeship to a particular student.
- iv. In the interview all stakeholders are under mutual assessment.

2. What are the positive aspects of the model/programme?

- i. The quality and commitment of the stakeholders;
- ii. Cultural attitudes;
- iii. Matching the purpose of the apprenticeship between schools, student and company;
- iv. Mutual feedback produces medium time effects that also allows for mutual evolution.

3. What are the main challenges of the model/programme?

- i. Lack of guidance on the selection of the apprenticeships: some students refuse work offers because they want to keep studying and others do not finish the degree/training, because they have employment offers;
- ii. Universities are not always well-connected to companies, but for Polytechnic schools the situation is different. By fostering such relationships with companies, the schools' research achievement increase. Interpersonal relationships are very important, especially to students in academic environment where it is known that arrogant (and sometimes rude) attitudes from some teachers can be identified. It is a random situation;
- iii. When it comes to tutors and apprentices it also happens, but also often the meeting take place 'with coffee and cooks';
- iv. Micro companies often tend to refuse apprenticeships because they realise they do not have neither the time it takes to design a work plan and support the apprentices nor the capabilities to promote the students' self-confidence on their performance as they should.

- v. Those who do it refer good experiences: co-supervision was very much productive because the students' behaviour was exemplary.
- vi. The main goal of an apprenticeship is to design a plan and research on the subject, in order to create a product. So the profiles of the students and the companies' goals need to be taken into consideration. It is a self-feeding process.
- vii. Particular situations identified: where does the co-supervision take place? Which level of confidentiality is involved? What timings are on the table?

What are the main policy suggestions?

Can we settle periodical focus groups to discuss apprenticeships issues? How?

- i. There is a renewed public demand for HE, also due to the HE short-cycle programmes (CTeSP), and they look for continuity in studying, but there are very few places open for wide public access. More NTS places at HE are needed, so political education and training strategies should be put to practice. Maybe to shorten that number in areas where a 'dead-end' employability exists, but to get an overview of the market needs and guidance in order to greatly improve the skills - employment mismatch.
- ii. Scholarships to study in continuity (following a degree that is in line with an initial VET training) are needed to cope with part-time work options and the consequent income loss.
- iii. To effectively promote possibilities to study and work at the same time.
- iv. From the companies' perspective, the cost-benefit relation often prevents the company to encourage or even allow/promote the workers further education, as it is identified that, after acquiring a higher qualification, the workers move to another company. The suggestion is to include in the work contract a "permanence clause" that commits the worker to a given time period in the company if parallel education is carried out with the job. Some companies finance the qualification and allow for study periods during working hour's schedules, and the worker commits to work for the company for a time period at least equal to the qualification time.
- v. On the other hand, it is mandatory by law that companies promote at least 35h per year for education and training-up, skilling, and reskilling. However, they often do not comply with this. Social dialogue and different customized work profiles contracts are needed to overcome these situations.
- vi. It is essential to clarify, in written form if possible, the role of each supervisor (school and company) and to acknowledge it explicitly. In the case of school supervisors this can be done attributing more teaching time to the supervision activity and take into account the supervision hours when the teaching load is assigned. In the case of company supervisors supervisors/tutors/mentors need to have supervision training.
- vii. Supervisors (company, school) must be assessed at least qualitatively, but also quantitatively, as is the practice in UA. Different types of supervision are at stake and face-to-face interviews with the Course Director (CD) are not valued, although the CD promote them in their very few available time to do it.
- viii. Company supervisors should also be validated as such.
- ix. Students'/apprentice's cultural and behavioural profiles should also be available.

- x. Need of a Central Office that runs a pool of companies and their offer, and matches it with the school/student needs, similarly to what was done in UA with in-service teacher training. The UA' Apprenticeships Office is job-oriented and helps the students to integrate with the labour market.
- xi. Need for a periodical common reflection on the experience in order to improve it and move forward.

More Information on the Focus Group

Because we could foresee that availability to attend the FG would not be as good as we would like, a survey was sent to other stakeholders with the same profile as these ones. The statistics of the profiles that answered are as follows.

E-mail answers	Polytechnic school 1	Polytechnic school 2	University Engineer degree	
HE supervisors	4	3	1	8
Company supervisors	1	3	2	6
Students/apprentices	5	3	2	10
Total	10 (42%)	9 (37,5%)	5 (20,8%)	24

Non-financed Apprenticeship	18 (75%)	Some No Answers registered
Curricular Apprenticeship	17 (70,8%)	
Company-environment Apprenticeship	4 (16,7%)	

So, 79,7% of the answers came from Polytechnic Schools, as expected, 41,2% from students and 58,3% from supervisors, mainly from HE (57,1%).

The Apprenticeship model is non-financed, curricular and mostly within academic environments. These numbers relate to the answers collected. In this cases we refer to Internships, as it is mostly understood in VET areas.

It is our personal feeling that some students do receive some per diem allowances or other forms of financial support (transport, meals, etc.), which places the model, again in the Apprenticeship kind.

The survey sent follows below. It is not translated, but the questions were the same as in the FG. Answers were received and are under treatment in order to sort out common perspectives.

Focus Group Survey Template

Name:		Date: ___/___/2018	
Instituição/Company:			
Professional Place:		Academic qualification:	
Relação com os estágios	Supervisor na Empresa _____	Supervisor do Ensino Superior _____	Formando/Estudante _____
	Formador em empresa e/ou instituição de ensino e formação profissional _____	Professor de EFP/Ensino Vocacional não superior _____	Docente do ensino superior __
	Trabalhador, gestor, empregador de PME _____	Formador de formadores (professor/supervisor/tutor/mentor) _____	Estagiário/formando _____
1. Em que modelo de estágio/formação profissional participa?	Remunerado_____ Não remunerado_____	Curricular_____ Profissionalizante_____ Em empresa_____ Em estabelecimento de ensino_____	Outro____ Qual?
2. Qual/ais a(s) situação/ões/matéria(s) que, na sua prática, considera mais positivas e mais desafiante(s)?			
3. Que medidas políticas implementaria para melhorar a formação em contexto de trabalho?			