

National Focus Group Meeting – Spain

Author: Lucila Finkel
P8 Complutense University of Madrid
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Overview and List of Participants

The Spanish national focus group took place in the Complutense University of Madrid, in the Student's Rectorate Building, from 12:30 to 14:30 h. Not taking into account four members of the ApprEnt team (3 UCM, 1 AEDHE), the following participants attended, adding up to a total number of 15 people.

	Name	Institution/organization	Position
1	Juan José Juárez	Fundación Bertelsmann	Senior Project Manager
2	Juan Carlos Lauder	Fundación Bankia para la FP dual	Project Director
3	Carlos Ruano	Alianza para la FP Dual	Consultant for educational institutions
4	Eva García Cívico	Cámara de Comercio de Madrid	Responsible of VET and dual training programs
5	Javier Rayo	Universidad Politécnica de Madrid	Director of the continuing education area
6	Jorge Ortega	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	Secretary of the Permanente Education Center
7	Víctor Sardá	Technical School of Construction of the Politechnic University of Madrid	Director of student's and Institucional affairs
8	Ubaldo Cuesta	Universidad Complutense de Madrid	Director of the Master in Advertising Management
9	Carolina Gómez	Vía Célere	Worker
10	M ^a del Val Fuerte	AEDHE	Training Director
11	Daniel Cuervo	ASPRIMA (Asociación Española de Promotores Inmobiliarios)	Managing Director

We had three types of participants:

- Academic managers: 4;
- Workers: 1;
- Managers in institutions devoted to the promotion of VET and dual-training programs: 4;
- SME managers/workers: 2.

The main objective of the focus group was to find ways of improving the apprenticeships system and the University-Business collaboration.

The agenda of the meeting was the following:

Introduction to ApprEnt

We used a PowerPoint presentation in Spanish, which covered the main features of the project: institutions involved, main objectives, tasks that had already been accomplished, future steps, presentation of the definition of Apprenticeship, and the results of the preliminary national report on Spain on the different experiences of HE apprenticeships.

Overview of the four case studies

We briefly presented our case studies, highlighting its main features. Some of the participants in the focus group were part of the case studies, so they were familiar with some of them.

Questions for discussion

The following issues were tackled during the rest of the session. It is important to take into account that the translation into Spanish of the term “Apprenticeship” is not always very clear, since “aprendizaje” has a similar meaning than the term “learning”, and does not necessarily refers to a model in which learning takes place outside the education institution. Therefore, we chose to explain the term and use instead “dual-learning experiences” or “dual-vet programmes”.

1) Is it really interesting to promote the experiences of dual training or learning? Positive aspects and main challenges.

There was a clear agreement that it is not only interesting, but also strategic, to promote apprenticeships schemes. These are some of the aspects that were identified as necessary for the successful implementation of these programmes: clear regulation, involvement of the business sector (need for changes of the Spanish business culture) and a clear involvement of business associations.

One of the issues addressed throughout the meeting was the need to continue improving the definition of dual training, as well as to identify if the practices carried out in companies are appropriate to the specific type of practice that corresponds to the dual system.

2) How can we improve collaboration between universities or educational centers and companies?

Regulatory level

Two aspects are acting at the same time in opposite directions:

a) On the one hand, a regulatory framework is necessary to guarantee the adequate learning process in companies, paying special attention to the contractual nature of the relationship and the adequate remuneration of the students.

b) On the other hand, flexibility is requested regarding the contractual relationship of the internship contract, taking into account that there is a great diversity of companies (SMEs, large corporations, etc.). In some cases, an agreement could be a better option. Flexibility is also suggested in order to promote innovation in the business world and achieve a better match between the degrees that are offered and the needs of the market.

Adequate planning of training programmes

Participants addressed the need for a greater relationship between training programmes and business practice and the necessity to include these dual programmes in their strategic business plans. These plans should involve:

- Awareness strategies in companies and training centers, especially if they take into account cultural aspects such as lack of professional training offered through university programmes.
- Introduce training cycles of lower level into the university in order to better adapt the needs of the market and training.

Tutoring

This topic was the focus of most of the debate; there were different contributions:

- There is a need to recognise the work performed by tutors in companies and therefore, tutors should be trained and their work must be certified, since they do not receive any financial consideration.
- 16-hour courses are proposed. These courses could be organized as partially face-to-face or totally online, given the potential problems due the absence of tutors from their jobs, especially with regards to SMEs.
- There is also a strong need for coordination with academic tutors.
- It is crucial the universities establish a system of accreditation of the tutors in order to guarantee a quality system of apprenticeship. For the tutors it is also very interesting, since they can develop formative capacities beyond their professional knowledge.
- Business strategies should include continuous training as a key factor.

- The success of the tutoring resides in the fact that their direct relationship with students must be integrated in their daily tasks at the company.
- It is fundamental, in order to achieve an effective and successful apprenticeship system, that the communication between academic and business tutors must be fully fluid.
- Possibly the best trainer of a business tutor is the academic tutor themselves.
- It is essential to sensitise companies about the relevance that trained tutors in their staff guarantee the success of student internships and apprenticeships.
- Training courses for tutors demand a great effort for SMEs (the on-line option would prove helpful)
- It is emphasized the necessity of a supervision coordinated between the educational center and the workplace. Currently the only contacts happen while formalising and initiating the training, and in case of any incident throughout its course.
- Another option that arises is to encourage academic activities by companies: reference to the involvement of company personnel in formal training.

3) Is the dual-VET model exportable to the university context?

The higher level of VET must have its own space within the education system: either within the universities or in integrated dual-VET centres offering teachings and qualifications of the education system and the national employment system. However, at the university level there are important constraints:

- Public university structures in Spain are very rigid and do not facilitate the inclusion of these dual-VET studies; on the other hand, private universities have a faster adaptation capacity and they have already begun offering these types of studies. However, there are interesting experiences in the public university sector in northern Spain. It is imperative to change the statutes of the universities for the teaching of dual-VET studies and increase the investments in material and human resources in Spanish universities for this purpose.
- Since some type of VET studies that includes industrial training and contents require heavy investments, universities should focus in the areas for which they are already prepared (such as the health or medical areas).
- A change of mentality in the public university is essential: training for employment has a low evaluation in the university environment. Universities need to allow for a greater cooperation with the companies since the development of technical education obliges to it.
- Associate professors with experience in the private sector are necessary (breaking with the current exclusive dedication) and University Knowledge Transfer Offices (OTRIs) must be supported further.
- Increase public-private collaboration, sensitising both parties to break mutual distrust. Business associations should be involved in the design of curricula and support the selection of professionals with the necessary skills to become trainers.
- Improve the system of tax incentives and change financing mechanisms of the workers' system of continuous training.
- Territorial RIS3 (Research and Innovation Strategies for smart specialisation) must become the axis to define the future needs of professionals and the studies required to train them.
- The success stories prove to be those of quality training oriented to employment.

4) How could the learning system be promoted in Spain/Europe? Suggestions for the formulation of public policies.

Participants came up with some interesting ideas:

- Publicise success stories;
- Teachers must have experience in the private sector;
- Legislators (both national and territorial) must generate more flexible educational laws that provide a solution to the needs of better trained human resources (apprenticeships are essential);
- Change the funding model of universities by increasing the participation of the private sector.