

The agenda for the Spanish workshop for mentor training consisted of three parts:

1) INTRODUCTION TO APPRENT

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

2) 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.

3) QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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 programs”. We started with three main preliminary questions:

1. Is it necessary to consider the training of company mentors and academic mentors?

There was a unanimous response confirming that need, and participants insisted in the importance of valuing the work done by company mentors.

The Apprent’ team coordinator explains that there are some interesting initiatives that are taking place: first, the Rector’s Conference of Spanish Universities is working, through the internship subgroup, in developing guidelines for mentor’s training. In the future, they are considering the possibility of giving an official certification. Second, The Alliance for the Dual VET (Alianza para la Formación Profesional Dual) has published a book and is offering training courses to company mentors.

Some preliminary and more general issues were discussed:

- They pointed out the importance of a regulation that clearly sets the costs of practical training within the company, thus avoiding the

dependence on the mentors' will. Their mentoring should be recognized both in terms of the time involved and economically.

- According to the opinion of the teachers present in the discussion group, one crucial aspect that facilitates the success of the apprenticeship is their previous knowledge of the student and the company. Therefore, selection and accompaniment are considered key issues to assure that the learning and work experiences are satisfactory for both parties.

Some of the obstacles they must face are:

- Dual training in Spain has a short history. More information is required both for students (who do not choose it due to their ignorance) and for companies in the sectors in which it is implemented.
- Participants are worried about the different formats that dual training has adopted in Spain and the legislation under which it was launched.
- Companies do not always understand the language used in education (such as competences, required qualifications, regulations, etc.)

2. Is there a specificity in the mentoring of dual training or learning?

In general, all the agents present in the discussion group recognized that they have thought about this issue. They agree in the idea that mentoring for dual training is different than mentoring regular internships, and although the contents of the training for academic and business mentors might be different, but they find enriching and interesting that they can coincide at some point.

The representative of the Alliance for the Dual VET indicates that they prefer to offer a generic training not directly linked to the specific workplace, since one might find different situations: a student who stays in several companies or another one who rotates in different departments of the same company. They think it is better to have one single person of reference responsible for the follow-up and accompaniment to the student' complete trajectory.

As a proposal, participants find important to inform the company clearly about the reason for the need to train its workers as mentors, explain the advantages and listen to the main concerns, especially taking into account that most Spanish companies are micro or small enterprises.

3. What do we need to consider when designing a mentor' training course?

Above all, it must be taken into account that there have to be short courses that can be easily integrated into the dynamics of the company, combining both face-to-face and online training. The representative of the Alliance for dual VET recommends 16 hours in part time sessions. Online is interesting but it depends more on voluntariness.

As important as the training is the monitoring of the training to verify its effectiveness, which must be taken into account to revise its original design.

Training for company mentors and academic mentors must be different, since the roles that both play are different. Some aspects may coincide, and some common training is also recommended, not forgetting that each one requires specific contents. Perhaps the best option is to pilot several training courses and adapt them according to the results.

They insist in the importance of welcoming and accompanying the students: the first interview helped them a lot.

On company mentors:

In the experience of the Alliance for the Dual VET, company mentors do not know what they have to do and how the training in itself needs to be accomplished taking into account the “education language” (competences, etc.) Therefore, in their own course proposal (see last slide of the PPT: proposal of the Alliance for Dual VET), they start explaining the context of the apprenticeship and explain the actors, regulations, procedures and steps involved in the process.

They point out that in small firms the person who assumes the role of mentor takes on several jobs (training and work) with no release on his regular responsibilities. In this context, the recognition of the work is very important (economic, respect) and the support from the educational center is necessary.

If possible, it is always a good idea to count on former students that were hired in the company as mentors, because they are closer in age to the apprentice and have gone through the same experience.

On academic mentors:

They have the responsibility to ensure that the training adequately covers all the curricula. Sometimes they have to transfer students because the work of the company has nothing to do with their training curriculum.

A program cannot depend on the person's willingness. The administration should regulate the role of the mentor, including issues such as the working time, its role and functions, and what the rewards are.

It is important to count on specific protocols for each stage of the process, (reception, selection, training, evaluation...), and these stages need to be included in the training course. It might be interesting considering the creation of virtual support communities for mentor training and learning.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the mentor and the apprenticeship coordinator. The first one is closest to students and requires specific skills: emotional intelligence, for example.

There are some organizational problems in the apprenticeship: one student might have different mentors if he works in different departments of the company or rotate through different companies. Hence, it is important to define an internal protocol in each company that implements the role of the coordinator in each company or the academic coordinator between companies.

There is the perception that although certain academic institutions are willing to participate in an apprenticeship program, some academic mentors are not. Besides compensation and recognition of their activity, participants point out the fact that it would be necessary for the academic mentor to be trained in companies and viceversa, facilitating the interchange of perspectives and environments.

4. What should be the minimum content of the course? (thematic blocks).

The Apprent' team presented a possible structure for the course, considering the following subjects or thematic blocks (see PPT):

- 1) The apprentice' learning process, analysis of the training needs of individuals and organizations
- 2) Planning the learning strategy in the company's context.
- 3) Supporting the learning process
- 4) Using digital tools to support the learning process
- 5) Evaluation and documentation of learning processes
- 6) Quality and evaluation
- 7) Promotion, defense and communication of dual training
- 8) Professional development of the mentor

During the rest of the session, participants made the following comments in relation to the different blocks of the course:

All the contents for a mentors' course seem interesting and appropriate, and one participant agreed on the proposal because it resembles "a quality process".

Participants added these ideas:

- The promotion, defense and communication of dual training is crucial for other potential academic or company mentors. It is also necessary for those involved in the design training programs, but it the responsibility of employers, unions, etc, there has to be a public strategy to communicate and it is not the responsibility of the mentor.
- It is important to include conflict resolution abilities that might support the learning process. It is not about giving you the manual but being able to solve the conflicts so that basic problems (schedules, work peaks...) are properly tackled: it is necessary to talk about before serious problem arise.
- Proper use of terms is important: we should avoid talking about interns ("becarios") because it has precariousness connotations.
- Monitoring of mentor training is an important aspect not to forget. Pre-assigned tasks and qualitative measures to evaluate and assess mentor's performance are good ideas to implement.
- Administrators might consider developing a national mobility program for mentors, instead of only counting on international mobility.