SWOT analysis from HEIs | D1.2

Wednesday, 15 November 2017

ApprEnt
Refining HE Apprenticeships with Enterprises in Europe

STRENGTHS

- Awareness of reciprocal benefits
- Clustering
- Meetings/Seminars in SMEs/Association of SMEs
- Undergoing change of attitude/culture change
- Different internal structure
- Growing dissemination of results and good experiences
- Teaching experiences
- Curricula development
- Common need/interest
- Research results feeding into SMEs and vice versa
- Working in collaboration with representatives of companies
- Inclusive approach
- Connection between education and labour market
- Personal contacts and companionship
- HEIs providing access to solid knowledge, either theoretical or applied
- Reciprocal need to foster innovation, increase employability and contribute to regional development

WEAKNESSES	*How could things be improved?*
▲ Lack of human resources responsible ▲ University's awareness of usefulness of apprenticeship schemes. Apprenticeship scheme not well known and existing regional differences in implementation	*More awareness* *Dissemination of results and good experiences (tackle top levels)*
▲ Lack of financial support from the government ▲ Confusing regulation ▲ Competing with private universities that are more flexible (not subject to same internal rules). ▲ One SME is not big enough to cover all competences ▲ Both parts have problems trusting each other ▲ Both parts prefer not to share expertise	*Stimulating clustering. Organising informative meetings/seminars in the Chambers of Commerce or Associations of SMEs for SMEs*
▲ Rigidity of university structure ▲ HE and enterprises may not speak the same language ▲ Less connection existing with small enterprises, compared to medium and large ones	*Changing the attitude/cultural change in HEIs. Creating a different internal structure, more approachable from SMEs. Identifying a specific "trained" person for discussions with the SMEs as permanent liaison*

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OPPORTUNITIES

- To get trainers experience into companies via mentors' experience
- Educational offer becoming more targeted to learners and to society needs and thus becoming more attractive and sustainable
- To learn from each other, to share different types of expertise, to be aware of real market needs
- HE can evolve in knowledge development thanks to the support of companies "know-how"
- Universities staff could enlarge their world view
- Students could make real world experiences
- Blended learning experiences
- Common need/interest
- Student-centred teaching and learning
- ePortfolio (process and outcome)
- For universities, change of traditional teaching approaches and of ways of delivering courses
- For SMEs, introducing new ideas and benefiting from a well-trained workforce
- Facilitate access to higher education for new groups of people
- Use university resources to foster education in new areas
- Collaboration with industry may develop into collaboration in other areas R&D, innovation, …
- To develop strong programmes, offer useful courses and be proud of successful allocation of students in work places
- New educational opportunities for universities
- Creation of innovative study programmes as a result of the cooperation between SMEs and HEIs
- Better response to labour market changes and better fluidity of the triangle HEIs, SMEs and learners

THREATS

- Time coordination, lack of time, overlapping of duties
- Apprenticeship being strongly linked to low qualification level
- University rules for curricula and rigidity in changing procedures
- Cultural background attitude of "which knowledge is the best"
- Fear about intellectual/property rights and competition
- Business agenda dictating the direction of educational paths
- Training excessively oriented to a changing labour market
- Excess of bureaucratic procedures and obstacles

How could things be improved?

Can HEIs shorten their processes?
Can SMEs plan at mid-long term (to avoid emergencies) or be more patient?

How do we address issues for change? To do it in a way that HEIs accept to collaborate

Should we think about "multi-company" systems instead of the "dual" system? This multi-company concept would, for example:

- *Cluster thinking*
- *Produce collective evaluations*
- *Share intellectual/industrial property and rights*

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Keeping in mind that there are 3 main types of companies – large, medium and small – and that differences exist especially between small and large ones (time, resources, money constraints of small companies, so they need help and support from outside), the group spotted the following key points in the University-Business cooperation:

- Transfer of knowledge is not a one-way process: it needs to be both ways
- SMEs need from HEIs: knowhow, manpower, UCE
- A major problem are the different languages existing in the sectors.
- SMEs need contact persons and trust to bring about closer communication and cooperation
- SMEs need to know what kind of services HEIs can offer and how SMEs can approach universities if they don't know about it. Some sort of transparency is needed.
- Fluent communication flow is needed
- What type of formats are wished for by SMEs?
  - Long-term perspective

  What kind of competences are needed?
  - Entrepreneurship attitudes
  - Innovativeness
  - Flexibility
- Subjects? It is to be noted that enterprises tend to think in terms of problems, not in terms of disciplines … certainly digitalization and change management are two hot topics
- Degree level: it must be sort of applied knowledge, not important the level itself

Through the setting up of apprenticeships integrated in the curricula of HEIs as short or long term modules, prepared together by HE and business, SMEs can offer to HEIs:

- Experience-based formats
- Real-life problems
- Experience global business
- Work-place experience
- Knowledge on competences requirements
- Possible career perspectives
- Projects for thesis
- Applied R&D
- PROJECTS for needs strategy, solutions…

In order to bring about good cooperation between enterprises and universities, we should start from the bottom, from what can be done at university-level, starting from specific unities within universities.

The curricula must take into account both worlds and use language that everybody understands.

Universities think in a more strategic way. SMEs have urgent needs that need immediate solution. Can HEIs teach SMEs how to think strategically and at long-term as well?

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The session was quite fruitful, with lots of comments to share and discuss. Both, HEIs and SMEs, shown willingness to work together. However, small bridges (or concessions) have to be built (or accepted) for SMEs to be less wary of HEIs and HEIs more approachable and flexible with SMEs, especially when we talk about small (or even micro) companies. Each side needs to be more understanding with the other one because they need each other if apprenticeship programmes have to be a win-win-win situation for Enterprises, Universities and Students.

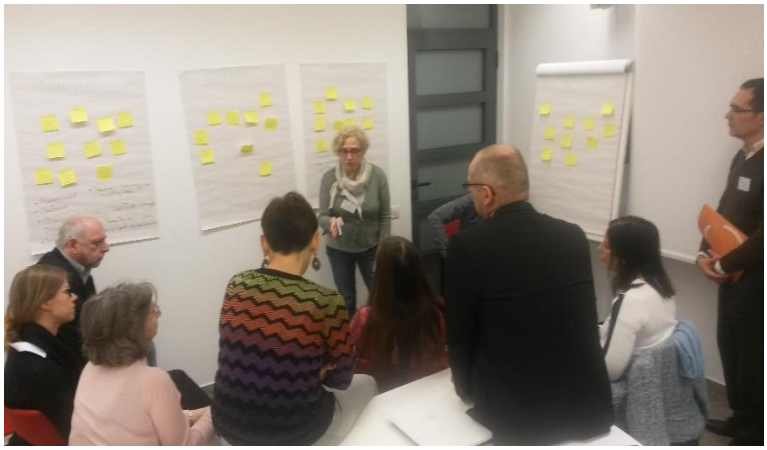
Photo 1 - HEI representatives during the SWOT analysis discussion

Comparing the comments and discussions in both groups, we can notice that there are a number of issues that need improving and are evident to both sides.

For example, both groups mentioned “trust” as a weakness. Maybe a different type of agreement in which all parties feel well represented and protected would solve this problem. The idea of developing “multi-company” systems, with cluster thinking spaces, collective evaluation and sharing of property rights, might solve this issue.

Both groups also highlighted that the cooperation is important and both sides need each other to excel.

Amongst the ideas raised by partners we can highlight the need:

- to establish a dedicated person or department in each HEI to deal with enterprises - someone that understands the enterprises’ needs and can speak their same language (academic language tends to keep SMEs away from HEIs)
- to give tools to enterprises to prepare themselves for long-term perspectives, which would be more suitable when establishing a solid collaboration with HEIs
- to help SMEs to get updated in the area of digitalisation and change management
- to initiate sustainable regional structures in order to support University-Business partnerships

Photo 2 - SMEs representatives collecting ideas for the SWOT analysis

A final crucial point was made about financial sustainability. SMEs (specially very small or micro enterprises) have an economic limitation when considering cooperation with HEIs. A possible solution in some cases can be if HEIs decide to help local small enterprises as part of their university social responsibility strategic plan.

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