



Connect!

Handbook for SMEs on how to collaborate
with Centers of Vocational Excellence

**KATA
PULT**



Erasmus+

Preface by Nicolas Schmit

European Commissioner for jobs & social rights

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of our economy. They form around 90% of Europe's economy and the majority of Europeans is working in this kind of companies. Therefore, it is very important to involve SMEs in the green and digital transitions we are currently embarking on. Without SMEs, it will be impossible to move towards a sustainable, competitive and resilient economy that is fair to all, as outlined in the European Skills agenda, published in 2020.

Public-private collaborations, such as the Centers of Vocational Excellence, are an important instrument to achieve the goals of the European Skills Agenda. They allow to build regional skills ecosystems, which bring together educators, governmental organizations and companies, including many SMEs. We have high expectations of the public-private collaboration in education, training and skills development.

I am very pleased to see that the first twelve Centers have joined forces in creating this publication. I sincerely hope that the decision tree and best practices and examples provided in this publication will inspire many of you to reach out to schools, regional governments and other companies, with the view to jointly meet the challenges of our times head-on. It is only by working together that we can ensure that our workforce has the skills it needs to thrive in our green, digital and inclusive societies.

Commissioner Schmit



Education is the engine for your business

To grow as a company, you need the right staff. Wouldn't it be a great opportunity for you to see the most talented students before they even enter the job market? Or have students research new technologies you can use to tap into a new market? Or the other way around: wouldn't it be incredibly inspiring for your employees to teach and thus to develop your future staff? The time to wait is over: let's actively seek collaboration with education!

Are you already working with the education sector?

Collaboration is certainly not a new idea. Chances are that you did an internship or graduation project at a company yourself. However, this handbook can help you getting the insights into what collaboration costs in terms of effort, what it delivers, and what you need to look out for and what you can expect as a result.

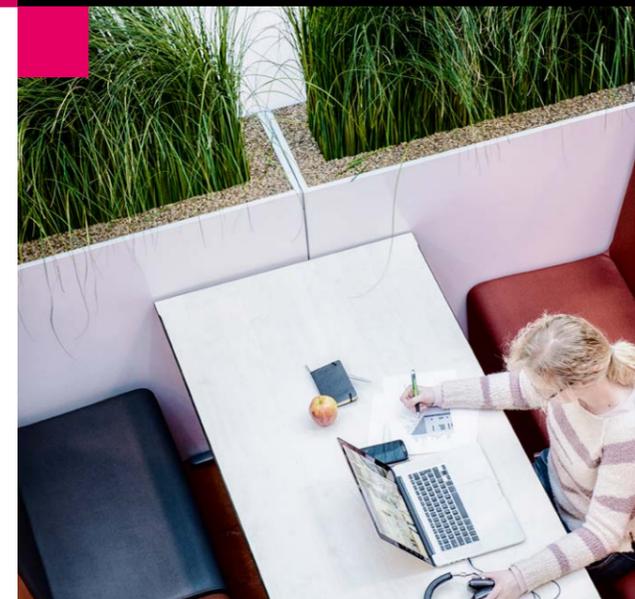
Three steps to success

This handbook describes three simple steps you can use to get started right away. It offers concrete reasons to collaborate, inspiring practical examples, and valuable tips that can make your collaboration even more successful. And the great thing is that all the information comes from other local companies from all over the EU, and therefore directly from daily practice.

What's next?

Read this handbook, get inspired, and get going! Would you like to brainstorm about a possible collaboration with an educational institution? Then contact Katapult at hello@wearekatapult.eu or visit www.wearekatapult.eu. Or get connected to your Platform of choice!

Because working together works!



Research justification

This handbook is meant to help SMEs to recognize chances to work together with vocational education via Centres of Vocational Excellence. We used the input and examples of the recently launched 12 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) funded through the Erasmus+ program. These Centres already achieved impressive results in many sectors of the economy throughout Europe. The insights and analysis are (partly) based on the ICT-specific 'Working together Works' publication (2020), conducted by Human Capital Agenda ICT and Katapult in the Netherlands. This publication is an adaptation of that work.

Chapter 1: The roadmap for collaboration

You can build a successful collaboration using the three steps listed below. Each step includes references to chapters in this handbook.



Step 1: Develop a vision for collaboration

1. Think about why you want to work together.
 - Review the frequently mentioned reasons in Chapter 2
2. Determine which type of collaboration suits you.
 - Find inspiration in various forms of collaboration in Chapter 3
 - Use the decision tree to find the form that suits you best
3. Decide which educational institution you want to work with in your region.
 - See the network map or visit www.wearekatapult.eu to find an overview of international public private partnerships, collaborating on European level.

Step 2: Explore the possibilities for collaboration

1. Contact the desired educational institution.
 - Ask to speak with the director of the relevant program for your organisation
2. Discuss your ideas and desires.
 - Consider the examples in Chapter 3
3. Decide which initiative you're going to start.
 - Investigate the extent to which you can connect to subjects the students are working on or are interested in

Step 3: Set up the collaboration

1. Make a plan together.
 - Find valuable tips in Chapter 4
2. Start working together.
 - Begin with a shared moment (e.g., in the classroom) and consider inviting the press
3. Monitor progress and make changes where necessary.
 - If you like you can add your public private partnership to the network map on www.wearekatapult.eu so others can find you.

Chapter 2: Why should I collaborate with the education sector?

Companies cited four reasons for collaborating with educational institutions, all of which are listed in this chapter. If you recognize yourself in one or more of those reasons, then collaboration is an obvious advantage.

A. You're working to find a solution to your staff shortage

Recruitment is by far the most frequently mentioned reason for collaborating with schools. Some companies even judge the success of the collaboration by the number of students who join the company after an internship. What are the benefits?

First choice of talented students

Many companies see collaboration with education as the best opportunity to bring their company to students' attention. You can also meet the most talented students before they enter the job market as an entry level or retrained professional. In practice, students often continue to work at the company where they did their internship or graduation project. This saves recruitment costs, and reduces the initial training period. Your company also gets a close-up view of graduation projects, which will help you identify potentially interesting graduates.



Students learn the skills you need

By bringing in practical assignments, giving guest lectures, and doing joint research, among other things, you can influence parts of the curriculum so it better suits your needs. This applies to content knowledge as well as desired soft skills such as collaboration, problem-solving skills, and techniques such as Agile and Scrum.

Temporary extra workers at your company

Another advantage is that students can participate in assignments or tasks that are neglected because of other higher priority activities. Depending on the level of the assignment and the student's abilities, you can let them work on a task and thus temporarily expand your project team.

More sector-specific professionals on the labor market

Finally, companies indicate that they want to contribute to the long-term success of the sector. You can also do this by teaching and educating potential sector-specific students. This gives young people a better idea of what a job in your sector entails and promotes the influx of specific target groups, such as women, career changers, or people with disadvantages on the labor market.

"The best knowledge is shared knowledge."

B. You get access to innovation and research

Innovation and research were also often cited as reasons to collaborate. What do they offer you?

Increased creativity and innovation

Students generally have more time and space to experiment and can therefore be put to good use on all kinds of innovative assignments, such as setting up prototypes or trying out different concepts. This stimulates a learning culture in your company: more innovation stimulates your employees to get creative with new solutions and technologies. Collaboration can also open your company's doors to research grants where you benefit from the results as a co-funder.

Access to new equipment

Many educational institutions have practical classrooms or even innovation labs with groundbreaking equipment that students can use. By collaborating with educational institutions, you ensure that the knowledge gained there is also available to you. You can also encourage your interns to carry out part of their assignment using this equipment, for example.



“In a world of ultra-rapid change, we need robust vocational and professional education to build a sustainable future.”

“We believe that the key to building flourishing educational institutions is cultivating mutually beneficial relationships with the commercial sectors by forming public-private partnerships.”

New insights for your transformation challenge

Are you unsure whether your company and your employees are future-proof? Collaborating with educational institutions brings innovation into your company and gives your current staff retraining opportunities. Both of these are vital steps in future-proofing your company in a rapidly-changing market

C. You take your social responsibility seriously

Most companies like to invest time and energy in projects with which they demonstrate their responsibility for society as a whole. This has several positive outcomes.

Better sector-specific skills in society

Companies say that they would like to take their social responsibility seriously when it comes to the impact that their sector has on society. They see it as their sector's shared responsibility to teach everyone the skills they need to use the products and services that the sector develops. Of course, this also applies to your customers and business partners who must have the right skills to use your products and services. Education is the place where companies can let students work with their products; both within the sector itself, and in other sectors.

“We are on the move. Do you move with us?”



Greater local involvement

Another form of corporate social responsibility is participating directly in the community, neighborhood, or city. For example, your employees could take students at risk of dropping out under their wing and helping them stay in school. Some companies think local involvement is so important that they even have their own policy and department for such efforts.

Specific target group knowledge

Companies also indicate that because educational institutions are connected to government authorities, they are better informed about the developments and (grant) programs that apply to specific target groups. Think, for example, of people with disabilities or refugees. Access to this knowledge is important because this workforce can add great value to your company.

D. You increase your network and name recognition

Collaboration with the education sector increases your network and name recognition, which is important for your company. What are the advantages of that?

Greater name recognition

Fierce competition for talent makes name recognition among students a must. Students generally know how to find their way to the well-known, often large companies, but somewhat smaller, regional companies need to do more to raise awareness. This can be done through collaboration with the education sector, so students get to know your company while they study.

Expanding your network of companies

In some regions, there are active public-private partnerships between companies and educational institutions (see the network map on www.wearekatapult.eu for an overview). By joining such a PPP, you also get to know other companies that may be of interest to you. One advantage companies cite is the opportunities these new connections offer to enter into partnerships, start projects together, or innovate further.

Chapter 3: Forms of collaboration and Best Practices

Collaboration comes in many degrees, ranging from light to very intensive. The form you choose depends on your own objectives, the opportunities for deploying your own people and resources, and the extent to which the educational institution is open to and offers opportunities for collaboration.

This chapter describes eight forms of collaboration and ranks them from little to a lot of use of your own resources. The chapter includes an explanation, the input you need to provide, and the benefits of each type.

Then, the number of stars indicate what your own input would be in time and money. The more stars, the higher the input. The expected results are also indicated in stars. Again, the more stars, the greater the expected results.

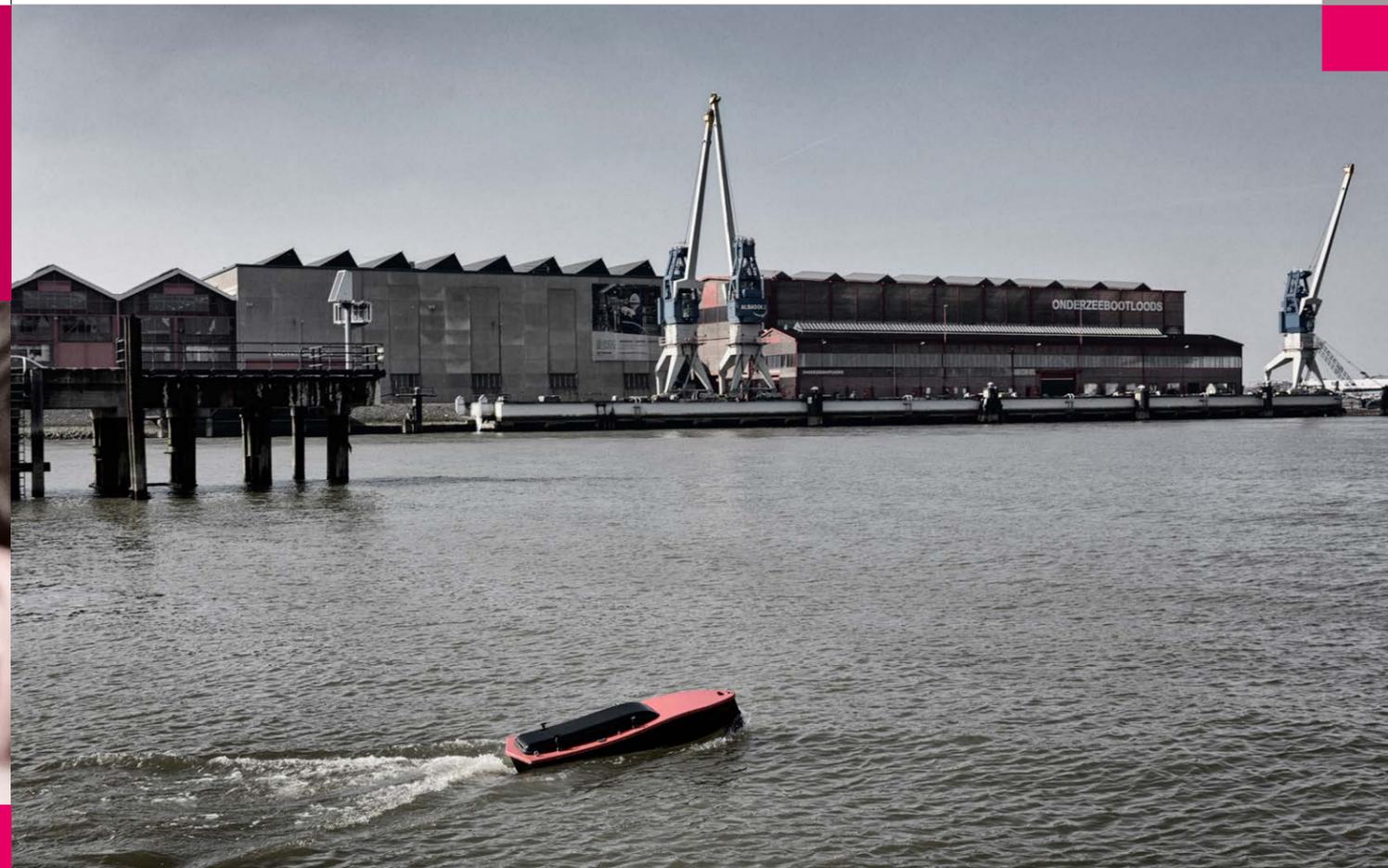
The reasons stated in Chapter 2 form the reference points for the input for this. In the box 'In practice' you find a real life example from the 12 Centers of Vocational Excellence of the activity described.

Tip: the decision tree

Use the decision tree on p10 and p11 to quickly determine which form of collaboration suits you best. In this decision tree, the degree of commitment of your own people and resources is the starting point. Then you choose the reason why you want to collaborate. These choices lead you to most appropriate form of collaboration.

Business models

Although a public-private partnership does not necessarily have to be profitable, finding a cost-effective business model is essential. The Business Model Canvas offers a good starting point. wearekatapult.eu/tools/business-model-canvas



Start Decision tree

Limited commitment of people & resources

Reason for collaboration

- A. Solution for your staff shortage
- B. Access to innovation and research
- C. Social responsibility
- D. Increase your network & name recognition

1

Familiarize students with your company
 Draw students' attention to your company easily by posting vacancies on the ICT degree program intranets and by attending national or regional job markets. This creates name recognition and could result in new employees or business opportunities.

2

Inspire and enthuse (potential) students
 Coach students, give guest lectures, hold workshops and hackathons, provide information, and show students around, to increase students' enthusiasm about the profession. This also has a positive effect on employees when they have an opportunity to talk about their own work.

3

Professionalize teachers
 Inform and inspire teachers with projects and developments from practice. By keeping teachers up to date about what goes on in companies, you narrow the gap between theory and practice. Students coming onto the market will be better educated.

Moderate commitment of people & resources

- A. Solution for your staff shortage
- B. Access to innovation and research
- C. Social responsibility
- D. Increase your network & name recognition

4

Let your employees work as part-time teachers
 Inform and inspire teachers with projects and developments from practice. By keeping teachers up to date about what goes on in companies, you narrow the gap between theory and practice. Students coming onto the market will be better educated.

5

Offer practical and graduation projects or internships
 You can have students work on issues that you can't get to yourself and which you want to gain insight into relatively quickly. This gives students a look behind the scenes and lets you see how they function in practice. This way, you get a good view of students who might later be of interest to your company.

6

Contribute to the retraining and further training of your (potential) employees
 During the retraining or additional training period, you get an overview of students' development and can therefore relatively quickly assess whether they are eligible for a job. This also (further) prepares your existing employees for the future.

Maximum commitment of people & resources

- A. Solution for your staff shortage
- B. Access to innovation and research
- C. Social responsibility
- D. Increase your network & name recognition

7

Contribute to improving teaching methods
 You can participate in developing cooperative education programs using blended learning, setting up innovation labs, or deploying your own (software) programs and in-house teaching materials. This brings your employees into close contact with students and offers a lot of insight into talent.

8

Contribute to improving educational content
 You can work on improving educational content through minors at professional education institutions (HBO) and optional modules at vocational education institutions (MBO). Employees contribute to good education, you see the results of the assignments, and frequent contact gives you opportunities to encourage students to come to work for you.

Most appropriate form of collaboration

IN PRACTICE

1 Focus on networking in your field

Explanation:

Create an open community! Get, and keep, in touch with other important stakeholders in your field, like schools, potential employees or other SMEs. When you know each other better, you'll be able to learn from each other and to help each other when needed.

Commitment of people and resources:

Networking asks minimal commitment of people and resources. Interesting contacts in the field are often close by and most of the time easy to approach. To focus on networking is to approach these people differently and to recognize the value of this contact. And that doesn't have to be time-consuming at all!

Advantages:

By getting and keeping in good contact with the stakeholders in your field, you can learn from each other by sharing practices and knowledge. This way, you won't have to reinvent the wheel. Furthermore, you can achieve high name recognition by focusing on networking.

Commitment of people and resources: ★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★
- Social responsibility ★
- Network and name recognition ★★★★★

Platform for 'Internet of Things' (IOT) VET Excellence Talentjourney

www.talentjourney.si

Talentjourney is the Platform of Vocational Excellence in the field of IOT in smart manufacturing. With partners in several countries, it aims to narrow and close the skills' gaps in IOT in smart manufacturing, to innovate and improve the responsiveness of VET systems to the needs of the industry. They do this among others by focusing on networking.

For example, Talentjourney designs a completely new educational paradigm and environment, an open and innovative space, and a networking and sharing ecosystem, where everyone will be able to discover their potential and develop it professionally to their personal satisfaction. All developed Talentjourney services focus on user-oriented, user-friendly and eco-friendly solutions.

2 Familiarize students with your company

Explanation:

Draw students' attention to your company easily by posting vacancies on the school's intranets and by attending national or regional job markets. This creates name recognition and could result in new employees or business opportunities.

Commitment of people and resources:

These are minimal. Business fairs are often part of larger regional campaigns in cooperation with other companies, municipalities, and social institutions. As a result, you don't have to invest time in organizing the event itself; you only have to staff the stand. There are often costs associated with having a presence at a job fair.

Advantages:

You will quickly come into contact with students and, at business fairs, you will also come into contact with other companies in the region. This can lead to name recognition, potential new employees, and interesting business opportunities.

Commitment of people and resources: ★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★
- Access to innovation and research ★
- Social responsibility ★
- Network and name recognition ★★★

IN PRACTICE

'Flow project Westeinde' Platform of Vocational Excellence Water (PoVE Water)

www.povewater.eu

The PoVE Water draws on existing and emerging vocational competences and skills needs in the water sector, translating them into an approach of vocational excellence. The project intends to create the infrastructure necessary to embed vocational excellence in the water sector in Europe, thus laying the grounds for vocational curriculum- and VET student competence development. One of the things the PoVE Water focusses on, is bringing together students and companies.

For example, students of the VET School of Life Sciences got the chance to work together with the waterboard Wetterskip Fryslân within the 'Flow project Westeinde'. In 'the spirit of the Environment Act', the students worked on a project relevant for a real company, which was received with great enthusiasm from both sides. The students know a lot more now about the activities of Wetterskip Fryslân.



3 Inspire and enthruse (potential) students

Explanation:

Coach students, give guest lectures, hold workshops and hackathons, provide information, and show students around, to increase students' enthusiasm about the profession. This also has a positive effect on employees when they have an opportunity to talk about their own work.

Commitment of people and resources:

This is limited. Giving a guest lecture, workshop, information, or guided tour often takes no more than a half day. Preparation takes time, of course, but this is limited because employees share knowledge about a theme they are working on every day.

Advantages:

Employees are often proud to be able to share their knowledge and convey their love for the profession. They radiate that, both outside and inside the company. That is especially true when your employees visit their own degree program or the visiting students are part of the same degree program as their tour leader. This type of activity improves your employees' soft skills, which they then use in their daily work.

Commitment of people and resources ★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★
- Access to innovation and research ★
- Social responsibility ★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★★

IN PRACTICE

Innovative VET BRIDGES

www.bridges.eu

Bridges' main goal is to help develop VET schools in aquaculture to become high-class centers providing all the needed competence, while also support innovation in their region.

They're developing an Innovative VET that makes education and training more accessible to company staffs and others who want a job in the industry. This applies to education in relation to national qualifications, further education and shorter courses as part of, for example, in-company training.

Like the Guri Kunna VET School, in Norway. They have a strong focus on connecting students and the business community by organizing an annual Educational Trade Fair where the business community gets to present themselves to students. Also they arrange an annual overnight innovation camp (sponsored by business community) where students receive challenges that are demanded in the sector.

4 Professionalize teachers

Explanation:

Inform and inspire teachers with projects and developments from practice. By keeping teachers up to date about what goes on in companies, you narrow the gap between theory and practice. Students coming onto the market will be better educated.

Commitment of people and resources:

This requires a limited effort. You can make your knowledge available at set times or on demand. You can also combine this with other types of collaboration, such as a graduation project.

Advantages:

Teachers will be better informed about what goes on in companies, and you narrow the gap between theory and practice. Then, better educated students will come onto the market. You also show that you want to work hard for modern education.

Commitment of people and resources ★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★
- Access to innovation and research ★★
- Social responsibility ★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★

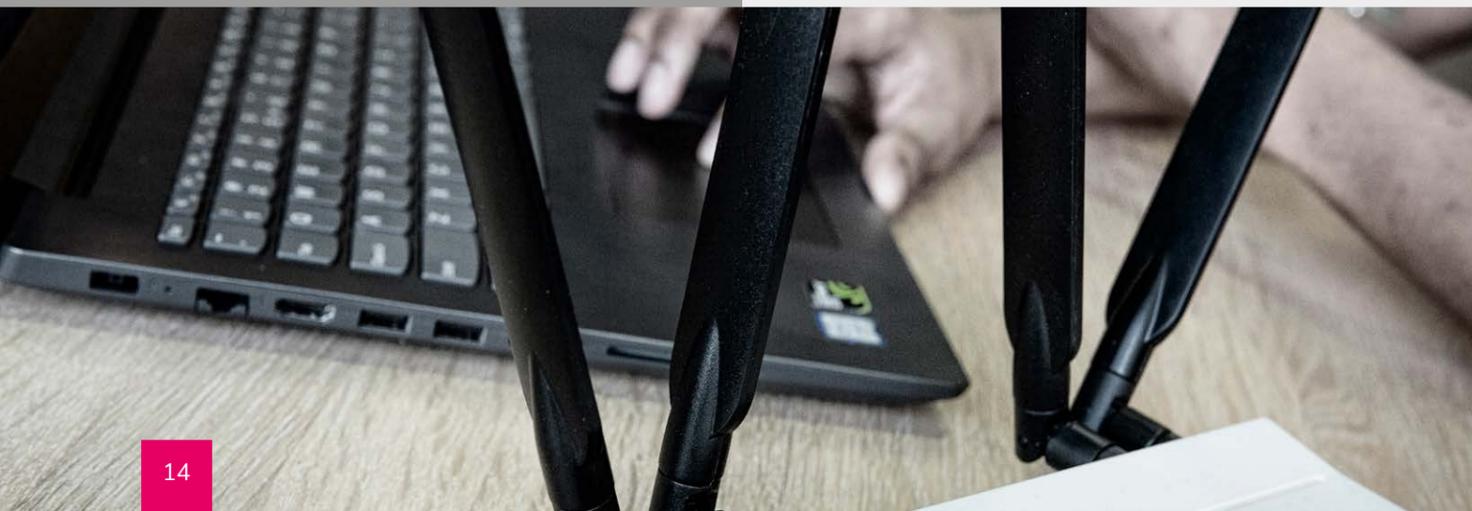
IN PRACTICE

Online showcases Platform of Vocational Excellence Water (PoVE Water)

www.povewater.eu

In various online showcases, the partners of the PoVE Water present educational projects in the field of water. Throughout these showcases diverse and extended knowledge is exchanged between partners. If anything, every country has their own expertise and own problems concerning water management. By learning from each other and hearing of several problems and solutions teachers broaden their knowledge and professionalize further within this field of expertise.

For example, The Netherlands shared with other partners in several countries how they organize their water projects and Latvia explained how their water system is organised. Teachers from the partner countries sat down to gain inspiration and knowledge from their lessons.



IN PRACTICE

5 Let your employees work as parttime teachers

Explanation:

Inform and inspire teachers with projects and developments from practice. By keeping teachers up to date about what goes on in companies, you narrow the gap between theory and practice. Students coming onto the market will be better educated.

An parttime teacher (also known as hybrid teachers in the Netherlands) works part-time for your company and as a teacher the rest of the time. An employee who also works as an parttime teacher could also be referred to as an employee with a 'circular career.' For more information, visit the Expertise Centre for adjunct instruction: www.hybridedocent.nl (in Dutch).

Commitment of people and resources:

You can see this as an alternative interpretation of your employee's employment contract. It doesn't cost you much effort, although such employees are less usable for your company. Often you see that people who are parttime teachers have a past at the educational institution, remain partly connected to it, and come to work part-time at a company.

Advantages:

Employees cite meaningfulness as the most important argument for such an arrangement. You see your employees grow in both hard and soft skills. This increases their knowledge and improves collaboration with colleagues and clients. Educational institutions see this approach as an enrichment of their lessons and a solution for the teacher shortage.

Commitment of people and resources ★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★★★
- Social responsibility ★★★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★

TKgune

Excellent Advanced Manufacturing 4.0 (Exam 4.0)

www.examhub.eu

TKgune is a network formed by Vocational Educational Training centres aimed at facilitating bidirectional knowledge transfer between VET centres and companies. The goal is to develop applied innovation projects with companies to respond to the requirement to bring the teaching staff up to date in terms of science and technology, promoting innovation both in small and medium-sized companies and in vocational training centres.

The teacher becomes 'hybrid', they operate in the SME's and bring that up-to-date knowledge back to their students. Moving back and forth between these two (most of the time) separate worlds closeness the gap between what the students learn at school and what knowledge they actually need working in a SME.



6 Offer practical assignments, internships, and graduation projects

Explanation:

You can have students work on issues that you can't get to yourself and which you want to gain insight into relatively quickly. This gives students a look behind the scenes and lets you see how they function in practice. This way, you get a good view of students who might later be of interest to your company.

Through internships and graduation projects, students work on concrete practical assignments, often with a research component, and get a glimpse of your company. As an educational institution's partner, you can also develop practical assignments and thus inspire students and instructors to work with the teaching material in a practical way.

Commitment of people and resources:

This is a large commitment. Students are often unable to start an assignment independently because they do not have the skills to do so yet. It is also important that you invest time in building a bond with the educational institution. The better you know what knowledge and skills the students bring with them, the greater the chance that the assignment will be successfully completed.

Advantages:

You can have students work on issues that you can't get to yourself and that you want to gain insight about relatively quickly. You see students functioning in practice and get an overview of students who you might want to hire.

Commitment of people and resources ★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★★★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★★★
- Social responsibility ★★
- Network and name recognition ★★★★★

IN PRACTICE

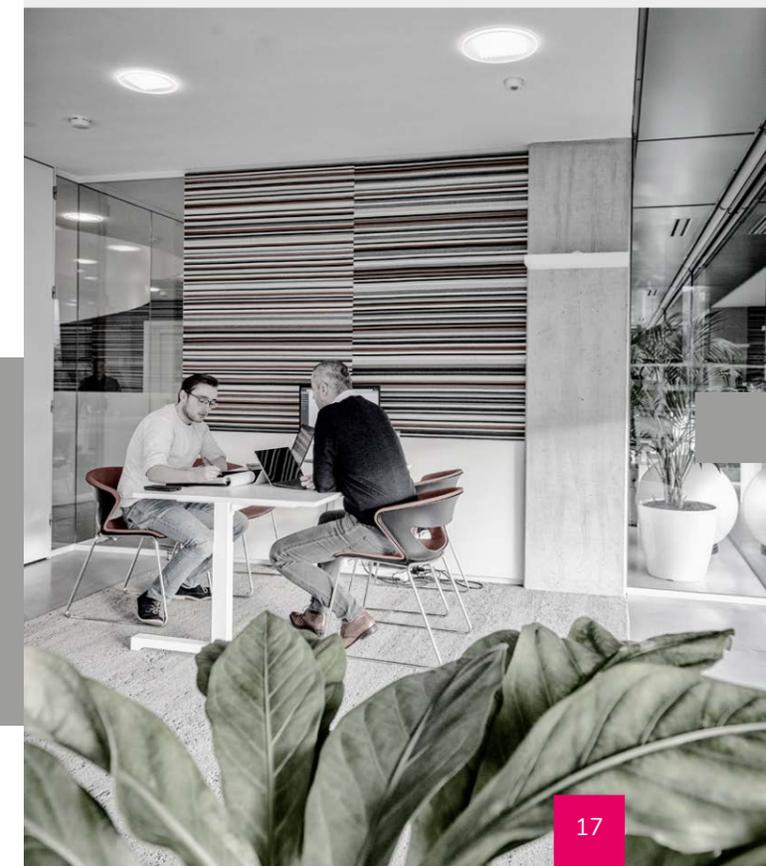
Internships with job security

European Centre of Vocational Excellence in Microelectronics (ECoVEM)

www.ecovem.eu

ECoVEM tries to tackle the challenges of digitalization, artificial intelligence, green technologies, gender equality and technology and the integration of migrants. Among others, they try to do this by offering internships to scholars.

They do so by bringing students in on real-business-based projects, thereby creating valuable internships which provide job security. For example, Romit Ltd, a small enterprise, attracted three students and teamed them up with three of their own engineers to develop and install the wireless sensor network for measuring the oxygen concentration in microelectronics production facilities. The students actively participated in all activities and acquired practical knowledge and skills that are not taught in their educational environment. Two of them immediately started working at Romit Ltd after their graduation.



7

Contribute to the retraining and further training of your (potential) employees

Explanation:

During the retraining or additional training period, you get an overview of students' development and can therefore relatively quickly assess whether they are eligible for a job. This also (further) prepares your existing employees for the future.

You can play a supporting role in retraining or further training your current and new workforce, ensuring that candidates have enough knowledge for a successful career or ensuring that your own employees are fully up-to-date again.

Commitment of people and resources:

It mainly takes effort in terms of content. Students that receive retraining have work experience, but lack certain basic knowledge that they did not acquire during their studies. So, prepare yourself to help them fill in this missing content-related knowledge. In some public private partnerships, companies pay a part of the retraining costs.

Advantages:

You help to increase the population of professionals who come onto the market with the right skills. More specifically, during the retraining or additional training period, you get an overview of students' development and can therefore relatively quickly assess whether they are eligible for a job. Additional training also prepares your existing employees for the future.

Commitment of people and resources ★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★★★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★
- Social responsibility ★★★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★★

IN PRACTICE

Skills for a Green Europe

GREENOVET

www.greenovet.eu

The GREENOVET project fosters the development of VET Excellence in Green Innovation across Europe enabling innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy. Furthermore, it will provide a platform to interconnect the European VET schools on regional, national and transnational level with key partners in the local innovation and skills ecosystems. Part of the platform's aim is to enable retraining and further training of SMEs potential employees.

SMEs themselves are playing a crucial role in creating skills for the future labour market. They contribute to and benefit from the development of a dynamic and inclusive ecosystem. They steer the regional VET, get acquainted with new trends, and acquire new skills for their current teams assuring the green transition.

Biodiversity Course European Platform Urban Greening (EPLUG)

www.platformurbangreening.eu

EPLUG aims to increase the knowledge and skills required to address biodiversity, climate adaptation and well-being in the urban, green living environment, and to broaden the expertise among professionals in Europe. Among others, the platform enables companies to further train and retrain their potential employees.

For example, Green Academy, a Vocational Education and Training school in Denmark, recently teamed up with the landscaping company OK Nygaard for a 'Biodiversity course'. The strength of this course is that it was created by using the input of the involved company, using their knowledge by asking what jobs will look like 10/20 years from now. Green Academy then created an innovative and inspiring course which provides OK Nygaard's (future) employees with up-to-date knowledge and skills, ready for their jobs in Urban Greening – today and tomorrow.

8

Contribute to innovation of teaching methods

Explanation:

You can participate in developing cooperative education programs using blended learning, setting up innovation labs, or deploying your own (software) programs and in-house teaching materials. This brings your employees into close contact with students and offers a lot of insight into talent.

You can contribute to innovating education by participating in cooperative education programs or blended learning (in which two or more learning methods merge imperceptibly, often a mix of digital and non-digital education), deploying your own (software) programs and in-house teaching materials, and setting up innovation labs.

Commitment of people and resources:

This depends on your choice. Merely contributing your own in-house teaching materials takes little effort. In contrast, starting an innovation lab or cooperative education program with an educational institution requires significantly more effort.

Advantages:

This method of collaboration brings you into intensive contact with students and offers great insight into potential talent. In addition, you can contribute a lot of your own knowledge and products, which is of great benefit to society as a whole.

Commitment of people and resources ★★★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★★★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★★★
- Social responsibility ★★★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★★★★

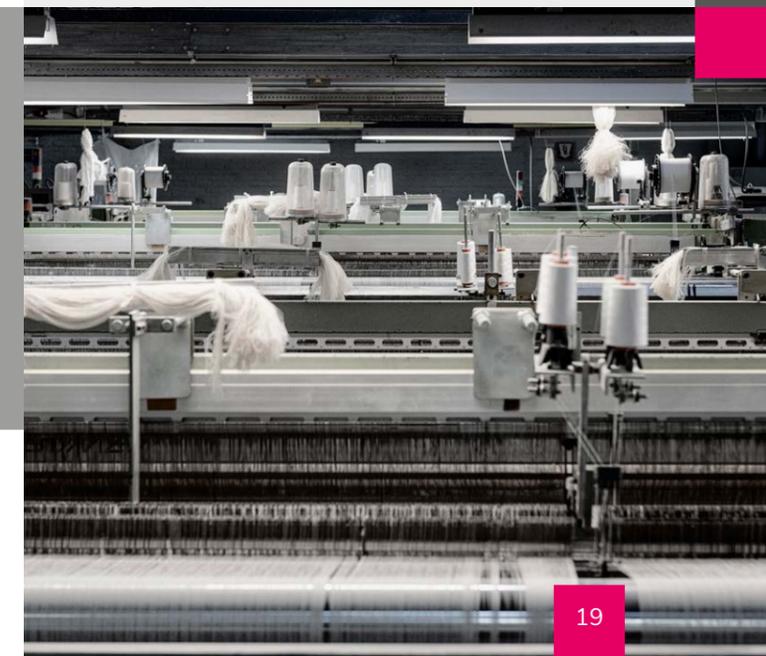
IN PRACTICE

Business Administration SME European Centre of Vocational Excellence in Microelectronics (ECoVEM)

www.3-loe.eu

The key priority of the 3-LoE is the comprehensive provision of green skills. Addressing the challenges of energy, climate and environmental protection, 3-LoE establishes Centers of Vocational Excellence on green economy and implements a wide range of vocational education and training concerning green economy, digitalization and entrepreneurship. One of the things 3-LoE does, is contributing to improving teaching methods.

For example, they created the application-oriented dual bachelor program "Business Administration SME". The program has been developed by the school in collaboration with SMEs, qualifies students for responsible positions in small and medium-sized enterprises and, in parallel, it lays the foundation for a hands-on understanding of work processes as well as the necessary technical competences. This broad spectrum of management knowledge, craftsmanship and personal competence of graduates that both have academic knowledge as well as the practical experience on the job, is very welcome for SMEs.



9 Contribute to innovating educational content

Explanation:

You can work on innovating educational content by delivering optional modules at vocational education institutions or developing and overseeing minors at professional education institutions.

Commitment of people and resources:

This collaboration method is intensive. It takes time to prepare the lessons together with the educational institution and you also have to consider the time invested during the implementation of the course.

Advantages:

Employees contribute to good education, you see the results of the assignments, and through frequent contact you get opportunities to encourage students to come to work for you.



Commitment of people and resources ★★★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★★★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★★★
- Social responsibility ★★★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★★★★

IN PRACTICE

Minimaster Platform of Governance for Inclusive Vocational Excellence (GIVE)

www.thegiveproject.eu

GIVE is essentially focused on the social dimension of VET. The project aims at designing and developing a European Platform of Centres of Excellence devoted to innovating VET sector for the social inclusion of individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups.

For example, they provided the 'Minimaster'. The Minimaster is a one-year program to train future staff for the local hospitality sector, including SMEs directly involved in the course offering both internships and work-based learning. The program was created on request by the local hospitality companies facing an existing skills gap. Companies have the opportunity to co-create the training contents, to play a direct role in the training with their own staff as trainers and hosting long-term internships. Most of the learners are migrants and asylum seekers, making this practice relevant also for inclusion.

Training course 'Digital Transformation Manager of the Furniture Sector'

ALLVIEW

www.allview.eu

The objective of ALLVIEW is to introduce a European dimension to vocational training for the Wood and Furniture sector, whilst integrating local centers. They focus mainly on creating (online) training courses and conferences with topics related to innovation, social and environmental challenges.

The Training course 'Digital Transformation Manager of the Furniture Sector' (DITRAMA) is a great example. The DITRAMA course is a complete and interactive online training which offers two training paths: for Higher Education and for Vocational Education & Training students. DITRAMA aims to train the 'Digital Transformation Manager' of furniture manufacturing companies. The manager will be able to lead each and every department through the digital transformation.

10 Work in shared facilities

Explanation:

Working in shared facilities means you avoid unnecessary costs, use your space more efficiently and to get in contact with and learn from other stakeholders in your field.

Commitment of people and resources:

This way of working together may require quite some effort. A space suitable to become a 'shared facility' is often not immediately available. You'll have to make agreements with your partner, among others, on planning and costs.

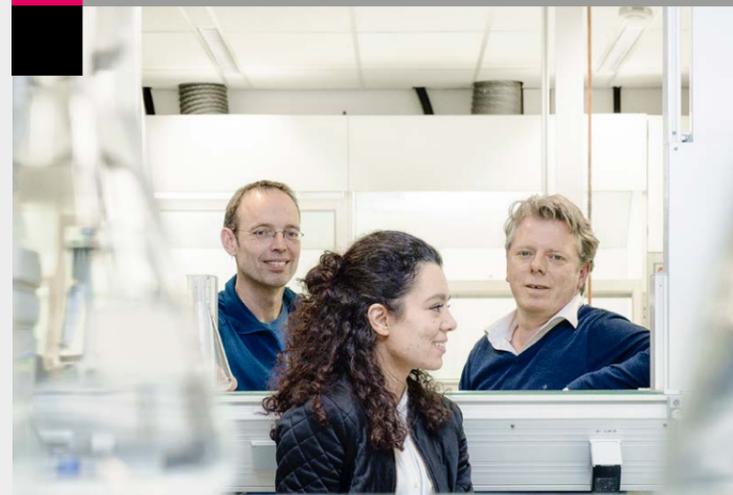
Advantages:

By sharing facilities, you can avoid unnecessary costs and use your space more efficiently. Also, shared facilities are a good way to get in contact with other stakeholders from the field and allows you to learn from each other.

Commitment of people and resources ★★★★★

Outcomes:

- Staff shortage solution ★★
- Access to innovation and research ★★★★★
- Social responsibility ★★★
- Network and name recognition ★★



IN PRACTICE

Digital Innovation Hub DIHUB

www.dihubcloud.eu

The main goal of the Digital Innovation Hub (DIHUB) is to establish a state of art European wide cluster of interconnected nodes for innovations development, education and new start-ups benefiting of the latest cloud computing technologies. The platform will offer a learning environment to VET students and it uses Cloud computing technology to provide services to the SMEs involved to update their knowhow.

Through their 'Digital Innovation Hub' they aim to connect students, VET/Education providers and businesses by offering real business cases. By using this Hub for their collaborations, innovations development, education and cloud-based projects they share their knowledge without limitations and open for everyone involved. It's a win-win situation for all students, teachers, and companies.

Creative Knowledge Platform DEUS

www.deuscci.eu

DEUS is shaped around the Open Design School, a design laboratory using a peer-to-peer approach, where professionals of any discipline work together sharing knowledge and expertise and testing the design solutions with the local community.

The Creative Knowledge Platform brings together creative professionals, education providers, researchers and policy makers, and invites them to build an informal, open and Pan-European community. The platform is a one-stop shop for the cultural and creative industries. It offers opensource educational materials and a variety of training possibilities for creative professionals. It also features inspiring initiatives, toolkits and other interesting reads to be inspired by.

Chapter 4: Valuable tips for collaboration

The willingness of the education sector to collaborate with companies is still growing rapidly. However, collaboration can sometimes be difficult in practice. Here is an overview of tips from fellow companies that have already gained experience.



Tip 1: Appreciate and respect the efforts of educational institutions

Understand that the goal of educational institutions is to “teach students how to learn”

A diploma alone is no guarantee of success in work later. That is why the education sector is now shifting from training for a certificate toward student self-reliance. The purpose of education has broadened: it no longer only provides a professional qualification, but also the necessary love of the profession and cognitive skills students need to make a difference. As a result, the education system is already moving toward better development of soft skills (e.g., Agile, Scrum).

Work together with the goal of preparing students for the future

From a business point of view, you cannot assume that an educational institution only delivers students who immediately function perfectly in your company because they have precisely the right skills to work with, for example, a certain software package. The starting point of collaboration should therefore be making students self-reliant in society and thus preparing them for the future together. This attitude eliminates any skepticism about collaboration.

Tip 2: Reserve time and money for collaboration

Collaboration costs time and money...

Whatever form you choose, collaboration costs time and therefore money. Whether you or your employees are part of a steering committee, supervise interns, or occasionally provide information, these activities always come at the expense of productivity. Companies experience a big difference in speed between themselves and educational institutions. It takes time to recognize and acknowledge this difference and build mutual trust.

...but so does recruitment

However, you have to look at this from the perspective of recruitment costs. Many students have an easier time finding large corporations than smaller, relatively unknown SMEs. Make an inventory of your recruitment costs as well as the efforts that employees want to make, and then see what type of collaboration is desirable and possible. Don't forget that access to innovations and tools is much easier if you collaborate with educational institutions.

Tip 3: Want to have more impact? Then commit for a longer time

Don't expect immediate changes to the curriculum

A curriculum goes through a legal accreditation process, so its foundations are fixed. Announcing today that things will have to change tomorrow doesn't work. It's unrealistic to ask for immediate changes or adjustments to the curriculum. It is better to have a long-term vision of education than to invest in the joint development of programs and thus change small pieces of education. But such a vision is only possible if you have the willingness to invest on a long-term basis.

Commit to a full-time degree program to have the greatest impact

If recruitment is an important reason for collaboration, then in practice it is wise to commit yourself to a full-time degree program. It takes time to get and keep students' attention, especially in a tight labor market. In addition, many students continue to work at the company where they do their graduation project and they often come into contact with those companies early in their studies. This means that, in addition to graduation projects, it is also wise to offer internships and assignments in earlier years.

Give yourself and each other a trial period

Before you enter into a very intensive, multi-year collaboration, it is advisable to agree on a trial period. Keep talking to each other, even if the collaboration does not go according to plan, and adjust the strategy where necessary. And if it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

Tip 4: Express expectations to each other

Make smart agreements about collaboration and commitment

Simple as it may seem, the success of the collaboration depends on good agreements. Think about the staffing commitment on both sides, about communication and continuity in collaboration. Expect each side to take an active role, ensure regular contact, and evaluate the collaboration. Also discuss whether the educational institution is open to one-on-one collaboration, or whether it expects several companies to develop a joint collaboration proposal.

The educational institution is in charge, regardless of how intensive the collaboration is

The more intensive the collaboration, the more important it is to have clear roles, tasks, and responsibilities. The most important fundamental understanding is that directing the whole process lies and remains with the educational institution. The educational institution takes the lead and companies support; companies are the client and teachers do the work. Companies are in charge of deepening content-related knowledge; the degree program is in charge of the didactic component.

Make agreements about the weight of the assignment

Most companies like to see the collaboration focused on content. But make sure you don't overburden the students, especially at the beginning of the program. Give them assignments that you had too little time to complete yourself, that are not mission critical, and that are not super-secret. Another important area of attention when formulating assignments is the difference in judgement that can exist about the weight of a project; demands from the business community are sometimes higher than those from the educational institution. Watch out for this!

Students no longer automatically participate in commercial assignments

Be aware that professional education institutions are paying more and more attention to research and are less focused on production. This may affect the amount of time an intern or graduation project student can and is allowed to spend contributing to commercial projects at the company during their internship or graduation period. Make agreements about this.

Tip 5: Customize, customize, customize!

Keep in mind that every educational institution is different

Educational institutions differ greatly from each other, faculties are organized differently, and teachers are also very different in their collaboration with the business community. Not all schools work at the same speed, and innovation from education is not always self-evident. This differentiation is not always made clear, which means that a standard agreement between educational institutions and companies is impossible. Customization is always necessary!

Invest in personal contacts with teachers

Collaboration often comes about through personal contacts (e.g., when the teachers with whom you collaborate have been employed by the company). And the longer the contacts exist, the better and more streamlined the collaboration becomes. You have a better idea of what to expect from the teacher and the students, which prevents disappointment. This is also important because collaboration from the education sector is still (too) often organized outside regular hours. Also note that teachers are not focused on the long term at the beginning and end of the school year!



Is a sector-specific student right for you? Or perhaps another student with an affinity for your sector?

It can be interesting to collaborate with entirely different departments and students. Many students are perfectly capable of further training in additional skills and by broadening your reach you add extra knowledge (and therefore value) to your project team.

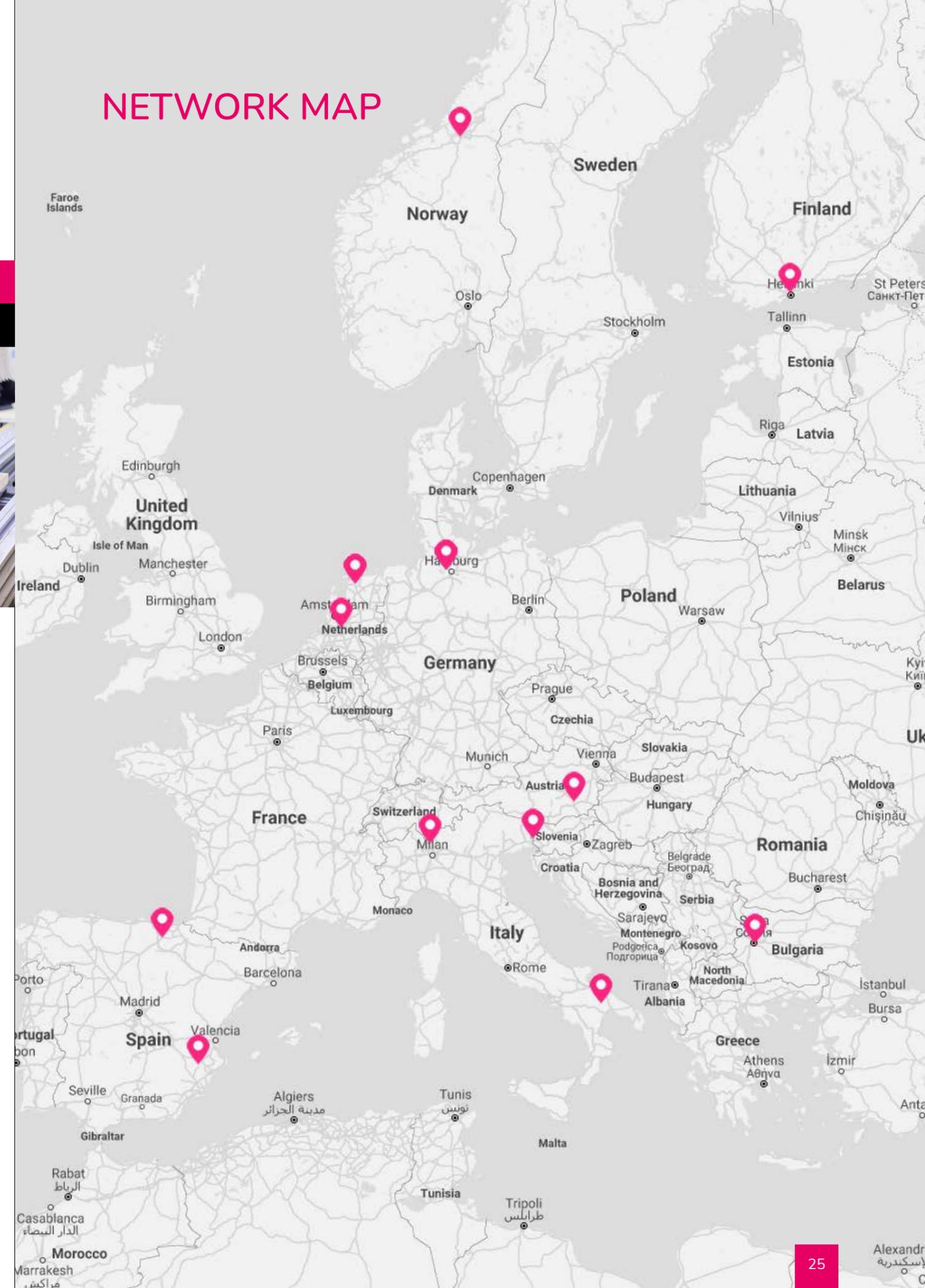
Finally: always celebrate your successes!

No matter how big or small a success, think about it and celebrate it. This gives energy to the entire team involved and a good opportunity to continue or intensify the collaboration.

Want to know more?



NETWORK MAP



Colophon

About this handbook:

This handbook is realized in cooperation with the Community of Practice of Centers of Vocational Excellence. This publication is an adaptation of 'Working together works'. The insights that have been obtained while writing this handbook were (partly) based on the ICT-specific Working together Works publication (2020). Furthermore, several meetings with the project leaders of the twelve Platforms provided all the information needed for this publication.

Copyright reserved. Use of the contents of this publication is permitted provided the source is clearly stated.

With thanks to:

Chiara Vegt, Nienke van Selm (Katapult)

Photography:

Maarten Noordijk, Maarten Noordijk Photography

Imagery obtained from the 12 CoVE partners

Formatting:

Grafitek

Published July 2021