



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

### Recommendations and Experiences for VET Centres in the Area of Key Competences Development

DECO PROJECT – Key competences for career designing in cooperation with labour market.  
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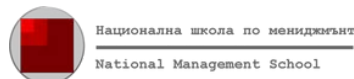
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## WHY THIS DOCUMENT?

This document aims to provide useful **recommendations and experiences** for **Vocational Education and Training** (hereinafter referred to as **VET**) **coordinators, teachers and trainers** on how to get learners engaged and make them acquire the most important competences that can be useful for their successful integration into the labour market and that have been identified as “key” after the research phase of the **DECO project**. It focuses on the concepts that are more successful in the implementation of strategies focused on the **development of key competences in VET centres**, defining their main **aspects**, the **impact or benefits** that they have on students and also

offering some **tips or examples** on each one. Thus, counsellors and trainers can get useful information on how to properly manage learners so that they can achieve the most important competences or skills demanded by employers in today’s business competitive world.

So, firstly, as a starting point, the document addresses the most important concept for the acquisition of key competences: **motivation**. Without engaged pupils, VET centres cannot make students obtain the rest of the skills and competences that will help them be more attractive to the labour market. The willingness and interest towards learning represents the base for the development of other crucial competences addressed in this document, such as **cooperation and collaboration, creativity and innovation** and **organisation and time management**.

In addition, the document also highlights some of the most **successful approaches or styles** that can help students achieve the key competences mentioned above, describing some of the most interesting strategies.





*Each and every problem is a skill waiting to be learnt in disguise*

## MOTIVATION: ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

VET students' motivation and their active participation and involvement in the different activities proposed inside or outside the classroom are key concepts, perhaps **the most important ones**, in order to foster the willingness of learners to make the effort to **pursue the acquisition and development of key competences**.

So, it is a must for VET staff, from coordinators to teachers and trainers, to awaken the interest of the students in the whole learning process, creating conditions that can foster a favourable environment for the acquisition of competences among students.

### KEY ASPECTS



In order to get VET students engaged, teachers and trainers must have **control and autonomy** over the **learning environment**: the course materials, teaching strategies, learning activities, and assessments.

Learners will only be motivated and engaged in learning as long as all of the above mentioned aspects included in the learning environment are designed and aligned in a proper way. These are the **three aspects** that must be covered in order to have a fruitful and proactive learning environment:

- **Clearness and honesty:** Learners know what to expect and what is expected of them. Assessments are fair and evaluate what they are supposed to.
- **Visibility and identification:** Learners see value in the course material, learning outcomes, and activities that they can relate to their own lives. The course objectives or learning outcomes align with students' interests and goals (academic, career, and social).
- **Chance and support:** Learning activities provide opportunities to achieve learning outcomes. Learners are not left behind and are given choices to fully understand the different aspects addressed in the course. Students visualise the learning environment as helpful and supportive and experience success in course activities and assignments.

## IMPACT



While motivating students can be a difficult task, the **rewards are much bigger than the efforts**. Motivated students are more excited to learn and participate and so, teaching a class full of motivated students is enjoyable for both teachers and students.

These are the main benefits of having VET students motivated.

- Motivated students work **longer, harder and with more vigour and intensity** (In other words, motivation helps individuals overcome inertia).

- Improvement of **self-confidence** in students, enhancement of **self-discipline** and challenging spirit, which makes students aim beyond their perceived limits.
- Make a **big impact in the VET centre**; as motivated students can act as an **example for others**, which would lead to an improvement in performance and attendance, exam grades and, as a result, enhance the VET centre status.

## EXAMPLES TO INCREASE VET STUDENTS INVOLVEMENT



Provide **clear course objectives and learning outcomes**, reinforcing what students will gain from achieving them.

Try to establish a fair connection between course activities and student objectives, as well as explain such connection to the students.

- Provide **instructions** on how to succeed in the course, by giving **clear communication** in the course agenda and constantly during the course, in order to provide a clear message. Provide **clear instructions** about **what the course expects from the students**, the level they must have before taking the course, if they need to study further documentation, if attendance is compulsory or not, how students are expected to participate (establishing ground rules for participation, for example), among other questions so that students know how to deal with the course.

- Develop a **positive environment** with students by **learning about them** (know their names, use icebreakers to know details about them, such as their interests, fears, expectations from the course and their careers, skills and knowledge they have, etc.).
- Try to **insert some variety** in the way classroom and activities are organised, in order not to bore the students and make lessons too predictable. **Introduce**, for those more critical issues or topics, **active learning activities** to draw students' attention, including assessments when possible.
- Give some **time to students** before and after each activity so that they can have **time for reflection** and define with them the main conclusions obtained from the activity.
- Provide **feedback to students** about their **progress**, supporting them so that they can assess their own work along the course. Facilitate constructive feedback and frequently **challenge and encourage students**, providing opportunities for success early.
- Provide **opportunities** so that **students can demonstrate their knowledge** or propose topics that the students can explore, based on their interests.
- **Foster learners' intrinsic motivation**: try to build self-motivated students help, helping them acquire critical qualities such as autonomy, competence, relatedness and *relevance\**.

## BUILDING TRUST: AN APPROACH TO GET SELF-MOTIVATED STUDENTS

The fact of having a good relationship with the teacher is a vital aspect so that students can develop an intrinsic motivation. Thus, it is necessary, above all, that the teacher gets the respect of the students.

In order to do so, there are some actions that teachers can take in order to have a strong and professional relationship with VET students:

- **Listen to the students:** Learn the interest of the students, their dreams, fears, etc, being a good listener, while at the same time expressing your own feelings and concerns, trying to drive the conversations to the lessons learnt or to be learnt in the classes and how they can apply to the personal and professional future.
- **Act friendly when needed:** Try to have a more relaxed approach some times, putting in the place of the students for a certain period of time in order to be more approachable and gain their confidence, especially with those students more reluctant to express their thoughts.
- **Be flexible and focus on the learning goal:** Try to approach students taking into consideration their interests, focusing on the learning goals and not so much on the topic
- **Don't surrender:** Be persistent, patient and positive as much as possible, providing support to students when needed and encourage a growth mindset.





*“Collaboration isn’t about giving up our individuality; it’s about realizing our greater potential.”*

*Joseph Rain*

So, collaborative learning is based on the view of knowledge as a social construct. Collaborative activities are most often based on **four principles**:

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## COLLABORATION: COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

In order to consolidate their understanding of the content, **learners need opportunities to problem solve, discuss, negotiate, and think and reflect with their peers.** Collaborative learning generates opportunities that ensure that learners practice and apply their learning while interacting with their peers.

- **Learner** as the **main focus** of instruction.
- Instruction based on **interaction** and “**learning by doing**”.
- Group working as an important mode of learning.
- Incorporation of **real-world problems**, with structured approaches focused on the **development of solutions** for such problems.



## KEY ASPECTS

Collaborative learning can mainly take place in **2 ways**:

- **Peer-to-peer** (one to one)
- In **larger groups** (in groups of students)

***Peer learning**, also called **peer instruction**, is a type of collaborative learning that involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss concepts, or find solutions to problems.*

On the other hand, it can take a **variety of forms**, being the most common ones:

- **Quick, active learning activities** in class; this is, involving students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing, for example after students are introduced to course material through readings or videos before class, and/or through instructor lectures.
- **Group projects of a more involved nature** that take place during **long periods** (quarters or semesters, for example).



Educational experiences that are active, social, contextual, engaging, and student-owned lead to **deeper learning**.

The **benefits** of collaborative learning include:

- Development of a series of **key competences and skills** among students:
  - critical thinking and analysis,
  - oral and written communication,
  - team working,
  - self-management and working independently,
  - leadership and project management,
  - problem-solving,
  - Others (retention of knowledge, self-esteem, responsibility).
- **Promotion of students-teachers interaction.**
- Approach of **misunderstanding and clarification of misconceptions.**
- **Exposure to different perspectives**, which also lead students to be more open-minded and empathetic.
- **Preparation for the real life**, in both social and employment situations.

## EXAMPLES TO FOSTER COLLABORATIVE LEARNING



## IMPACT



- **Challenging questions between peers:** Students create a challenging question based on the lecture content and then students ask the question to the person sitting next to them. Students can also write their respective questions on a paper and give them to the teacher so that they can be used in exams, or other activities to review or check students' understanding.
- **Sharing responses between peers:** Teacher asks a question that demands certain analysis, evaluation or synthesis, giving time to students to think about it and prepare a response individually. Then, students share their responses between each other and at the end all the responses collected are shared with the entire class. Finally, there is a follow-up discussion. Students can also be asked to try to convince those students with different responses or points of view.
- **Check the understanding of the whole class in a topic that is being explained:** Teacher stops the lecture that is being explained at a certain point and asks the students to compare their notes in groups, so that they can clarify questions between each other. Then, teacher checks that all students are in the same point and that they properly understand the topic.
- **Roles assignment:** Students are asked to sit in groups and are assigned with different and opposite roles to play and one person is responsible for taking notes and decide which position is more convincing. Then, there is a debate in the group between the different positions and the person in charge of deciding provides an argument for the choice considered as more convincing. Finally, all the discussions are summarised.
- **Case Study:** Teacher creates a series of case studies with similar difficulty and place students to work in groups and analyse their case study (each group analyses a case study).

Then, after a period of time, teacher approaches to each group and addresses the questions that may arise. Finally, call on all the groups and ask students to share their analysis with the rest of the students.

- **Team-based learning:** Teacher gives students some task to be completed before class. Once in the classroom, teacher checks the understanding of the materials through an individual quiz. Then, students are assigned in groups and they review their respective answers with other group members and reach consensus, submitting each group one answered quiz. Both individual and final group assessment scores are collected and represent the scores each student will obtain. Finally, teacher delivers a lecture targeting the misconceptions or gaps in knowledge that the assessment reveals. In addition, teacher can give groups a challenging task related to a real world situation so that they can apply the knowledge acquired.
- **Group Problem-solving:** Teacher presents students with a problem and provides some guidance or structure (but with a minimal role of the teacher) in order to solve the problem and reach a final outcome or solution.

This approach is also called *Problem-Based Learning\** (PBL).



## PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

**Problem-based learning (PBL)** is a student-centred approach (which can take place for a short time or involving a whole semester) in **which students learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem**. Therefore, rather than teaching relevant material and subsequently having students apply the knowledge to solve problems, the problem is presented first and **students must:**

- Examine and define the problem.
- Explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it.
- Determine what they need to learn and where they can acquire the information and tools necessary to solve the problem.
- Evaluate possible ways to solve the problem.
- Solve the problem.
- Report on their findings.

### How to design a PBL assignment / project:

- Definition **of the learning outcomes of the assignment or project (what students will know or the skills they will acquire through the assignment)**
- Creation of the problem **(ideally a real-world situation**

**that students face or will probably have to face in the future).**

- Ground rules setting **(explain students the rules and how to work in groups).**
- Introduction and Warm-ups **(explain the process of assessing own works and peers work and do some exercises or tests first).**
- Assignment of different roles **(making students assume different and contrast positions)**

Evaluation and assessment rules **(set how to evaluate and assess assignments and grade students also for the assessments students do of their own work and the work of their peers).**



*It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.*

*Albert Einstein*

## CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION: CREATIVE LEARNING

Apart from preparing learners for occupations where creativity is a must, **VET can foster skills to innovate and be creative and drive new ideas in business and industry.** It also supports competitiveness through the development and diffusion of new technologies, processes, and services and ultimately impacts on growth and prosperity.

The determination to **equip students with the skills to embrace change**, implement new ideas and develop an understanding and awareness of business practice resonates strongly with the creativity agenda. There is a valid overlap between promoting 'skills for creativity' and 'creative behaviours' with 'skills for enterprise and employability'.

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### KEY ASPECTS



There are two main modes that can be used in VET centres in order to foster VET students' creative skills:

- **Teach creatively**, by using *imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and effective*. Thus, it can be interpreted as being more concerned with '**effective teaching**', related to the way teachers give the lessons or interacts to students, focused on the personality of the



teacher itself, and that in this case must comply with the following characteristics: flexibility, being open to new ideas, and being imaginative.

- **Teach for creativity**, defined as *forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people own creative thinking or behavior*. Therefore, this is focused on making the students acquire creative skills by following some kind of guidelines, methods and techniques that looks for the '**learner empowerment**'.

Both concepts are fully dependent on each other and it is frequently stated that teaching for creativity involves teaching creatively.

## IMPACT

When students are thinking and behaving creatively, they are:

- **Questioning and challenging.**
- **Making connections and seeing relationships.**
- **Envisaging** what could be.
- **Exploring ideas**, keeping **options open**.
- **Reflecting critically** on ideas and outcomes.

## EXAMPLES TO FOSTER CREATIVITY

- **Teachers as role models:** The most powerful way to develop creativity in students is to be a role model. Most of the students develop creativity not when they are told to, but when they see a personal example.

- **No limits on students' potential:** Give students strong base for creativity, helping them believe in their own ability to be creative.
- **Focus on questioning:** Make questioning a part of the daily classroom exchange. It is more important for students to learn what questions to ask and how to ask them than to learn the answers. Help the students understand that what matters is their ability to use facts, and not the facts themselves.
- **Use of idea generator and problem solving techniques such as "Lateral thinking"\*:** Try to create ideas and solve problems through an indirect and creative approach, using reasoning that is not immediately obvious and involving ideas that may not be obtainable by using only traditional step-by-step logic.
- **Give proper time to develop creativity and allow cross-fertilisation between subjects:** Provide a realistic time so that students can have time to think creatively, as well as teaching them to cross-fertilize draws on their skills, interests, and abilities, regardless of the subject.
- **Reward creative efforts:** Reward students when they provide creative ideas (regardless they agree with teacher's opinion).
- **Toleration of ambiguity and mistakes:** Be tolerant with students regarding their lack of clearness and mistakes in their creative assignments, taking into consideration that creative people sometimes make mistakes and fail in their purpose.
- **Foster perseverance:** Students must learn rewards are not always immediate and that there are benefits to delaying gratification. Provide examples of creative persons and make students be identified with them in a certain way.

- **Promote self-responsibility and self-control:** Teach students so that they can take responsibility and control for their creative process and that they can understand their creative process, criticise themselves when needed, and be proud of their creative work.
- **Foster collaboration:** Collaboration can boost creativity. Encourage students to collaborate with creative people. Students benefit from seeing the techniques, strategies, and approaches that others use in the creative process.
- **Selection of creative environments:** Teach students how to choose creative environments that help ideas flow. Knowing how to choose a creative environment is one of the best long-term strategies for developing creativity.
- **Dissemination (Spread the word):** Show the virtues of teaching students in order to develop their creativity and highlight the difference it makes to teach for creativity. Try to do it not only within the VET centre itself, but also outside, through the participation in events such as conferences, seminars, etc.

## LATERAL THINKING: SOME TECHNIQUES TO FOSTER CREATIVITY

- **PMI (plus, minus, interesting) approach:** a brainstorming activity that encourages participants in a discussion to look at an idea from more than one viewpoint. The goals of PMI are to help participants see both sides of an argument and think more broadly about an issue. One of the problems with traditional thinking is that people focus their attention on how to back up an opinion that has already been formed, while PMI is designed to open up each participant's thinking and encourage creativity.
- **CAE (Consider All Factors) approach:** An attention directing tool designed to increase the span of our attention to aspects that might have otherwise been missed. During a defined interval of time, you mentally list every consideration about a topic you can think of, as opposed to just the first few that come to mind.
- **Random Input technique:** deliberate introduction of something that is unconnected with the situation, process and principles of the tool.
- **Concept Challenge:** looking at accepted ideas, things, that are taken for granted, adequate ways of doing things, and challenging them, process and principles of the tool.





*Time is the scarcest resource and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed.*  
Peter Drucker

## ORGANISATION: TIME MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE PLANNING

Organizational skills (which involve planning, organizing, sequencing, prioritizing, shifting attention, and time management) are **life skills**, not just school skills and like social skills they are rarely directly taught.

The **workload** that needs to be accomplished in a VET class, day or week can overwhelm even the healthiest student and that is the reason why **organisational and time management competences** are so important in order to succeed in school, professional and personal life.

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Nowadays' labour market requires **professionals** with high organisational competences, giving the fact that most jobs require employees to **develop several tasks at the same time** and this wouldn't be possible without an effective dose of planning capabilities.

### KEY ASPECTS

In order to achieve that VET students can organise themselves and plan their respective assignments in an effective



way, the **starting point** would be that VET coordinators, teachers and trainers have into consideration both the amount and the structuring of the tasks required on VET students, so that the **working demands can be reasonable and applicable** throughout their lives.

There are two main ways to structure classroom activities in VET centres:

- **Static organisational systems:** *Teacher-directed* approach consisting of doing the same thing, the same time, same place and the same way, breaking down activities and asking learners to complete very specific and defined units of information.

This approach is recommended during the **first years / courses of VET** due to the fact that the repetition of defined tasks helps students acquire good habits and routines.

- **Dynamic organisational systems:** More *student-directed* approach, introducing frequent adjustments regarding priorities, timings, workloads, tasks and places, “forcing” students use organisational skills to efficiently allocate time, resources, work places, etc.

This approach is recommended in **higher VET grades**, on which students already have gained experience and organisational skills and therefore can be required to manage increasingly dynamic workloads, at the same time they are being provided with little extra support or direct teaching.

## IMPACT

With a proper planning and organisation of the lessons, VET students will:

- Know **how much time** they have.
- Know **how long** it will take to get assignments done.
- Know **what they can achieve** in the time they have.
- Have **more breathing space**, which reduces the feeling of being rushed and overwhelmed, which in turn reduces the frustration and stress levels.
- Receive a **good example on how to organise themselves** for both personal and professional life, acquiring time management skills that can be useful throughout their lives.



## EXAMPLES TO FOSTER ORGANISATION

These are some examples that can foster the acquisition of organizational / time management competences among VET students:

- **Clear definition of the tasks and support:** Provide students with a clear explanation of the tasks to be done, along with some kind of support so that they can understand how to approach the tasks from an organisational point of view.
- **Foster motivation:** Making sure that students feel confident in understanding and accomplishing the tasks facilitates motivation and the acquisition of organisational skills. Providing small rewards to students



taking into consideration their respective situations makes them appreciate that completing a task is something useful and rewarding and therefore their motivation levels will increase.

- **Logistics preparation:** Make sure that students have a dedicated space for developing the tasks and that all the necessary tools (technology, books, supplies and other materials) are available and located in the best way.
- **Task organisation / division:** Show students how a task can be broken down in different sections or pieces in order to be more understandable and easy to accomplish and how the individual parts create the larger whole, taking into account that students are more willing to address a tasks when they can predict how much time they must invest on it.
- **Visual structures:** Use visual structures in order to both plan and monitor the different activities students must address. For example, long-term mapping charts, such as Gantt charts, can help students have a reference and so they can plan and monitor the multiple activities they must conduct, making them improve their organisational skills.
- **Priority and planning:** Help students to develop priorities and understand that the most desirable tasks sometimes need to come last, explaining the risks of procrastination.
- **Communication student-teacher:** Teach students (especially those with social learning and organizational weaknesses) the importance of asking teachers for help, highlighting that, in addition to asking their peers for support, they should also ask for teachers' advice.

- **Task completion:** Make students know when a task is completely finished, and that most of the times the process does not end until the task is delivered or presented.

## PLANNING SOFTWARE AS ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

The Internet is full of **free resources and tools** that can help both teachers and students handle and manage their assignments within the deadline given, only through downloading the tool from the Internet and creating an account.

Most of the tools available nowadays have a **user-friendly and intuitive approach** and are easy to adjust to the different requirements that teachers and students must face. Moreover, they can be used in **every kind of electronic devices** (computers, laptops, tablets, smart phones, etc), which lead to their broad use and popularity among youngsters.

Thus, on the one hand, there are multiple **software programmes** explicitly related to facilitate tasks organisation and planning, allowing the following features:

- **Creation of to-do lists:** Possibility to create online multiple to-do lists for multiple objectives,
- **Goals and achievements tracking:** Creation of different project folders and addition of to-do lists for completing



each project, with lists prioritisation and reminder settings possibility.

- **Information sharing and collaboration:** Possibility to stick and share information with others and get a response / feedback to notes, documents and photographs. Sharing and collaboration on the creation of a calendar. Creation and sharing of to-do lists on the clipboard and on calendar.

On the other hand, **social networks** can also help with organisational duties. In addition to connect students with each other and foster communication between peers and with teachers, they can also be useful for **information sharing and collaboration**, as well as serving as a platform for **tasks scheduling**, providing the possibility of **setting reminders** and **linking contents**, among other options.

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