



„Development of Soft Skills through Apprenticeships“

Erasmus Plus KA2 – Cooperation and Innovation for Good Practices

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## **O1/A5 Development of a scheme for apprenticeship**

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**Author:** Kaunas construction and services training centre “KSPMC” (Lithuania - Agne Morkeliunaite);  
**Contributors:** Friesland College (Netherlands); IDEC (Greece); IIEK DELTA (Greece); Politeknika Ikastergia Txorierrri (Spain); Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Lodzi (Poland);  
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## Introduction

The changing role of vocational education and training in a changing world of work underpinned by the fourth industrial revolution, obliges the European Union and its Member States to face the question of how to place and manage apprenticeships, within the education and training system, and in connection to the labour market. It is increasingly important to understand the relevance and the role of apprenticeships in national policies for collective skills formation, as part of human capital development strategies.

Across different countries, there are variations in the quality of apprenticeship provision as well as the proportion of learners pursuing apprenticeships based on the occupational sector, type of employer and level of apprenticeship. The functioning of an effective apprenticeship system depends on many elements, such as its place in the VET system, contractual arrangements, governance, salary levels, cost-sharing, supporting structures, recruitment procedures. Even among well-established apprenticeship systems, all these elements are fine-tuned differently in different countries. It is important to find the right balance between these elements and respect the diversity of different countries' education and labour market situations.

Many researches and examples from different European Union countries show that apprenticeships are an effective way to prepare qualified professionals with labor market needed skills, thus meeting the needs of employers and making it easier for individuals to enter the labor market. The benefits of this collaborative form of training are felt by all involved parts: employers, apprentices, the state and other organizations. Among other benefits, apprenticeships are regarded as particularly efficient in supporting the school-to-work transition of young people, enhancing their employability. Together with other forms of work-based learning, apprenticeships are proposed as solutions to combat: high youth unemployment rates, low soft skills, constant changes in the labor market, social exclusion, demographic trends, importance of key competences, mobility. But there are more different obstacles, that different countries are facing during apprenticeships.

Many employers see, that many employees have a lack of soft skills that are not developed or not developed sufficiently in educational and training institutions. Responding to the needs of employers and searching effective ways to prepare employees more effectively for the labor market and successful integration, Vocational education and training (VET) providers notice the need to develop students' soft skills. These skills are much more effective to acquire through apprenticeship, when students have real situations at their workplace.

DESSA is an Erasmus+ project in the field of VET education, which is implemented by 6 partners from 5 countries (Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Poland and Lithuania), representing four VET schools, one university and one adult training company. Based on different European Union countries experiences in apprenticeships and analysis, international DESSA project partners have developed an apprenticeship scheme for the acquisition of soft skills by students in upper secondary and higher vocational education and training that supports apprenticeships process by using gamification elements and natural mentoring.

This document addresses: VET providers, companies involved in apprenticeship programs, students enrolled in upper secondary and higher VET centres and aims to keep the apprentices more engaged, motivated, involved, comfortable and more confident during apprenticeships.



This document's purpose is to ensure understandable and adaptable apprenticeships in every country, to guide DESSA project target groups members to a better quality apprenticeship by using main and supporting apprenticeship elements and DESSA project intellectual products. This apprenticeship scheme is adaptable for every country and can help achieve better goals in every country apprenticeship by preparing high qualified employees with a wide range of skills.

In this “Development of a scheme for apprenticeship” document there are detailed descriptions of involved parts in the apprenticeships, importance of hard skills and soft skills in apprenticeships, the apprenticeship scheme chart, main and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools, benefits of apprenticeships for stakeholders and a SWOT analysis of the apprenticeship scheme.

You can find more information about “Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences” on the web platform – (link to website).



## Involved parts in apprenticeship scheme

- **Vocational education and training providers.**

Most apprenticeship programs in Europe have been launched through the efforts of vocational training institutions to find employers and jobs for graduated students. Vocational education and training providers provide students with the opportunity to receive practical on-the-job training and help young people make a smooth transition from VET centers to the labor market. Apprentices, by combining vocational training with work, acquire the practical knowledge and skills needed for the labor market. However, many employers see, that many employees have a lack of soft skills that are not developed or not developed sufficiently in educational and training institutions. Responding to the needs of employers and searching effective ways to prepare employees more effectively for the labor market and successful integration, Vocational education and training providers notice the need to develop students' soft skills. These social skills are much more effective to acquire through apprenticeships, when students have real situations at their workplace.

- **Companies.**

Every job has essential hard skills and experience necessary for the work. Even though these skills are extremely important. There are specific soft skills that employers look for when hiring people for their organization. Soft skills refer to personal attributes such as skills in communicating, managing time, working in a team or creative abilities. Businesses move to a matrix organization hierarchy to capitalize on the abilities of their existing employees, and soft skills are more necessary than ever. Small and medium-sized enterprises employ two thirds of the European workforce. One out of three creates new products and processes. These kind of companies need to secure qualified workers to be competitive. However, many employers see, that many employees have a lack of soft skills that are not developed or not developed sufficiently in educational and training institutions. The role of employers is important in the design of curricula, so as to embed wider range of skills (soft skills and hard skills) into apprenticeship schemes.

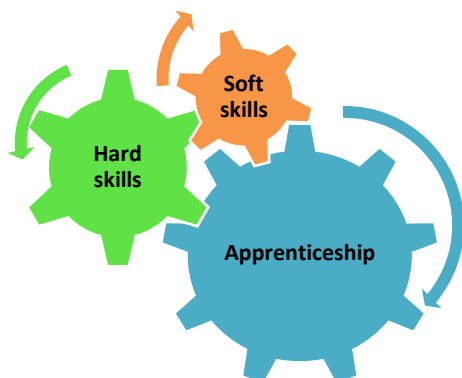
- **Students in upper secondary and higher vocational education and training.**

By combining learning and work, apprenticeships with wider range of skills allow young people to gain work experience while acquiring hands-on skills matching employers' requirements. It is because of this inherent relevance to the labour market that apprenticeships pay off, both for young people and businesses: apprentices often stay in the company where they completed their training or have better chances to find a qualified job than their peers from general education or school-based VET. Small and medium-sized companies' employers, on their side, secure skilled workers. Training an apprentice allows a company to shape a young person's work habits and to retain, over time, a qualified and motivated employee.

Companies (employers), VET providers and Member States explore the possibilities for setting up national pilot actions to develop a public-private partnership to foster the promotion and acquisition of soft skills. International organizations emphasize, that close and direct cooperation between different stakeholders and involved parts is a key aspect in the implementation of good quality apprenticeship scheme.



## Hard skills and Soft skills in apprenticeship



### • Hard skills

Hard skills are specific professional abilities that can be learned through courses, vocational training, and on the job. They typically include the necessary technical expertise that employers expect their workers to have. Hard skills can mostly be quantified, measured, defined, or evaluated in some way. These skills are usually focused on specific tasks and processes such as the use of tools, equipment or software.

Every job requires hard skills that are industry-specific and usually form the basis for the job requirements. Recruiters will look for hard skills in a resume to gauge how well a candidate will be able to perform the core components of the job.

### • Soft skills

Soft skills are subjective skills that relate to the way people interact with each other. Soft skills are also known as people skills, interpersonal skills or personal skills and are personal traits that shape how a person works on their own and with others. Usually, they are not taught but are rather the natural result of emotional intelligence and life experience. Soft skills are difficult to quantify. It can be hard to prove proficiency in a soft skill, but they are necessary to create a positive and functional work environment. Soft skills are also mostly transferrable between jobs or industries.

In recent years there has been a notable shift in the skills required by employees by privileging soft skills over hard skills. Soft skills are currently described as some of the most important core competences.

Soft skills are divided into three main groups: personal skills, social skills and content-reliant/methodological skills (Cinque, 2016).

These competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual, emotional and practical skills which can be applied across employment contexts.

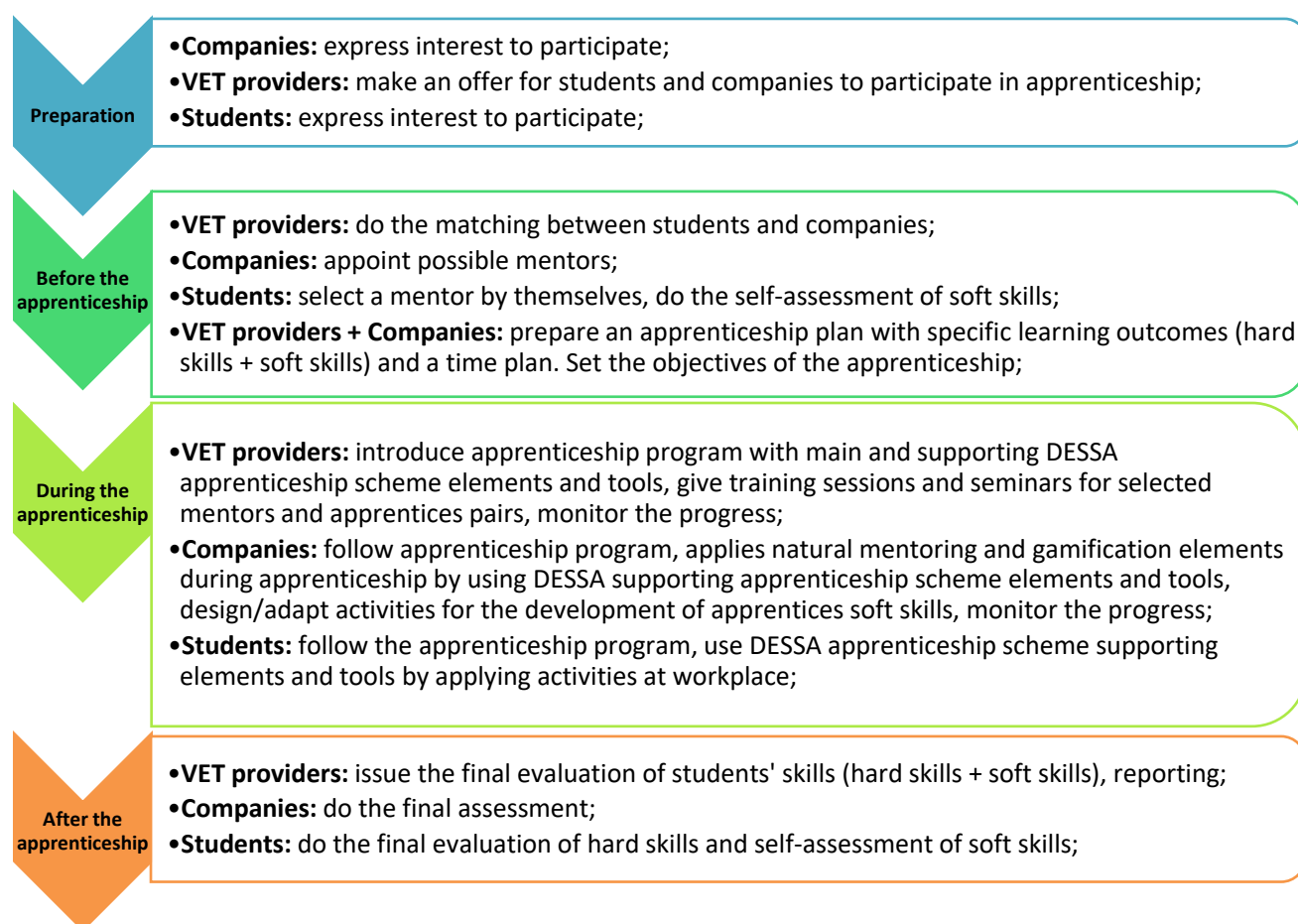
While hard skills are necessary to successfully perform technical tasks in a job, soft skills are necessary to create a positive and functional work environment. For this reason, employers often seek individuals who possess proven wider range of skills. Some employers may prefer to select candidates who have a stronger set of soft skills over hard skills, as soft skills are at times more difficult to develop.

You can find more information about “Soft skills” in the “Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills” and in “Trainers’ guide”.

## Apprenticeship scheme

Apprenticeships in all Europe are focused mostly on the specific vocational skills, required in the specialization and not on the acquisition of soft skills. This apprenticeship scheme, developed of DESSA project, purpose is to ensure understandable and adaptable apprenticeships in every country, to guide DESSA project target groups members to a better quality apprenticeships with clear vision and action plan by using main apprenticeship scheme elements (gamification and natural mentoring) and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide of soft skills", web platform). This apprenticeship scheme is adaptable for every country and can help achieve better goals in every country's apprenticeships by preparing high qualified employees with a wide range of skills. When apprenticeship schemes are designed around the real needs of the labour market, it contribute to the increased productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, which fosters job creation and supports youth employment.

### • Apprenticeship scheme chart



1 chart. DESSA apprenticeship scheme chart.



- **Apprenticeship scheme phases.**

**Apprenticeship scheme consist of four main phases:**

**1<sup>st</sup> PHASE “PREPARATION”:**

- Companies express interest to participate in apprenticeship and collaborate with VET providers;
- VET providers make an offer for companies. VET providers make an offer for students to participate in apprenticeship with list of companies and possible apprenticeship positions;
- Students express interest to participate in apprenticeship;

**2<sup>nd</sup> PHASE “BEFORE THE APPRENTICESHIP”:**

- VET providers do the matching between students and companies by sectors, specialities and possible apprenticeship positions;
- Companies appoint possible mentors;
- Students select a mentor at the company by themselves. Students, as well, do the self-assessment of soft skills to know which parts of soft skills could be improved during the apprenticeship;
- VET providers and companies together set the objectives of the apprenticeship, prepare an apprenticeship plan with specific learning outcomes, that includes hard skills (based on main program), soft skills (based on self-assessment results and DESSA project program) and a time plan of all apprenticeship program.

**3<sup>d</sup> PHASE “DURING THE APPRENTICESHIP”:**

- VET providers introduce apprenticeship program with DESSA main elements (gamification and natural mentoring) and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide of soft skills", web platform). As well VET providers give training sessions and seminars for selected mentors and apprentices pairs. During the apprenticeship VET centres monitor the progress;
- Companies follow apprenticeship program, applies DESSA main apprenticeship scheme elements (natural mentoring and gamification) during apprenticeship by using apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide of soft skills", web platform), design/adapt activities for the development of apprentices soft skills, monitors the progress;
- Students follow the apprenticeship program, use DESSA apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide of soft skills", web platform) by applying activities at workplace and for a better understanding of soft skills importance at workplace;

**4<sup>th</sup> PHASE “AFTER THE APPRENTICESHIP”:**

- VET providers issue the final evaluation of students’ skills, reporting;
- Companies do the final assessment;
- Students do the final evaluation of hard skills and self-assessment of soft skills to see, what skills were improved during the apprenticeship program;



## Apprenticeship scheme main elements



2 chart. DESSA apprenticeship scheme main elements.

- **Gamification**

Gamification it's a great way of amplifying the learning process. Gamification is the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.

Gamification has been attracting attention in the context of education and training as it offers a variety of benefits associated with learning outcomes because a strong effect. While playing games people feel happy, excited, more interested and involved, competitive, engaged and motivated. Gamification increases motivation, satisfaction and performance, strengthens communication, engagement and commitment, improves knowledge absorption and retention.

Mentors could use gamification elements during the apprenticeships, for the development of students' soft skills. Game-based tools can be used in a strategic manner to integrate them with existing business processes or managing systems. These techniques can be used to help drive positive employee and organizational outcomes.

You can find more information about "Gamification" in the "Trainers' guide".

- **Natural mentoring**

During the apprenticeships, students find themselves on the road to self-development and preparation for their future career. While developing their soft skills, students often need help during personal and professional growth process. For this reason, is important to have support from the outside, that can create an extra dimension to the learning process of the student.

By using DESSA apprenticeship scheme the student is put in the lead to find their natural mentor on their own. A natural mentor is a person who is willing to share their experiences and advice on developing soft skills with the apprentice. More important, the natural mentor is investing in the learning process of the student and is willing and able to help stimulate the student by actively showing support and asking the student self-reflective questions. It is also important for the natural mentor to provide a safe space for the student to talk open and freely about his/her learning goals and further ambitions. It's a mentoring relationship which is built on trust and mutual respect and its aim is to help the student become more self-aware, confident and have a pleasant and successful learning experience. This is what makes it different from a regular mentor, which is normally found through mentoring programmes by using matchmaking techniques. The student's supervisor or teacher during the apprenticeship can provide guidance and help the student think of a suitable candidate, but the student is in charge of finding and asking the natural mentor by themselves.

You can find more information about "Natural mentor" in the "Trainers' guide".



## Apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools



3 chart. DESSA apprenticeship scheme supporting elements and tools.

- **Self-assessment of soft skills tool**

Self-assessment tool helps students assess their own performance and it is primarily used to support them in the development of the soft skills they already have and the soft skills that they will need to improve for a higher personal and professional development. This process may assist in making students more aware of and more responsible for their own learning process. The self-assessment tool requires to fill first set of questions before the apprenticeship program to see the current level of soft skills. At the end of the apprenticeship program, apprentices should fill the final self-assessment questionnaire, to see if their soft skills were upgraded and improved.

You can find more information about “Self-assessment of soft skills tool” on the web platform – (link to website).

- **Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills**

The purpose of orientation guide for improvement of soft skills is to highlight the importance of soft skills and assist the student in developing them, providing useful tips and examples. It provides valid information, explains exactly what soft skills consist of and offers tips and examples of activities aiming to develop and strengthen them. Keeping in mind contemporary needs and modern life’s requirements, the guide serves as a concrete informative tool, in which could be found more or less everything that is needed, to be prepared for an interview, new working environments or successfully deal with everyday setbacks and challenges. This guide aims to assist, especially young people who are starting their lives and careers. Furthermore, this guide can open up minds to new ways of dealing with problems and modern behavioural skills, that will come handy in personal and professional life. Acknowledging the fact that everyone is different, this guide covers a vast variety of examples and consistently aims to promote outside the box thinking, and enhance creativity, collectivity, well-being and personal growth.

You can find more information in the “Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills” and on the web platform – (link to website).

- **Trainers’ guide**

The trainers’ guide – is a guide to develop apprentices’ soft skills. There is a description of the importance of mentoring, goals and the role of a mentor. This trainers’ guide is filled with detailed information about the apprenticeship program by developing apprentices soft skills, different assignments for students, that can help to improve apprentices soft skills more successfully. Each assignment has been written with the focus on the main soft skills during apprenticeships. Trainers’ guide were designed based on students experiences during apprenticeships in project partners countries. This trainers’ guide with assignments was created for trainers and students to give a clear vision of the apprenticeship program, by



including practical tasks and examples. The Trainers' guide gives apprentices the opportunity to develop their soft skills, gain valuable experience in a real working field environment and ultimately grow as a professional.

You can find more information in the "Trainers' guide" and on the web platform – (link to website).

- **Web platform**

DESSA project web platform is filled with all detailed information of DESSA project's main idea, information of project partners and links to the project's intellectual products: "Apprenticeship scheme for the development of soft skills and competences", "Self-assessment of soft skills tool", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide" and other important information of DESSA project.

You can find more information on the web platform – (link to website).

- **Seminars for trainers in VET providers and companies**

VET providers and companies should participate in seminars where the DESSA apprenticeship scheme could be introduced with main apprenticeship elements (gamification and natural mentoring) and apprenticeship supporting elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for the development of soft skills and competences", "Self-assessment of soft skills tool", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide", DESSA project web platform). Before starting to use the apprenticeships scheme, it's recommended to study and analyze recommendations and methodology of DESSA project's intellectual products.

The seminars for trainers in VET providers and companies will give a clear direction to all DESSA project created intellectual products. It will help find a suggestions, how to organize apprenticeships more effectively by implementing gamification and natural mentoring by training apprentices in soft skills during the apprenticeship period.

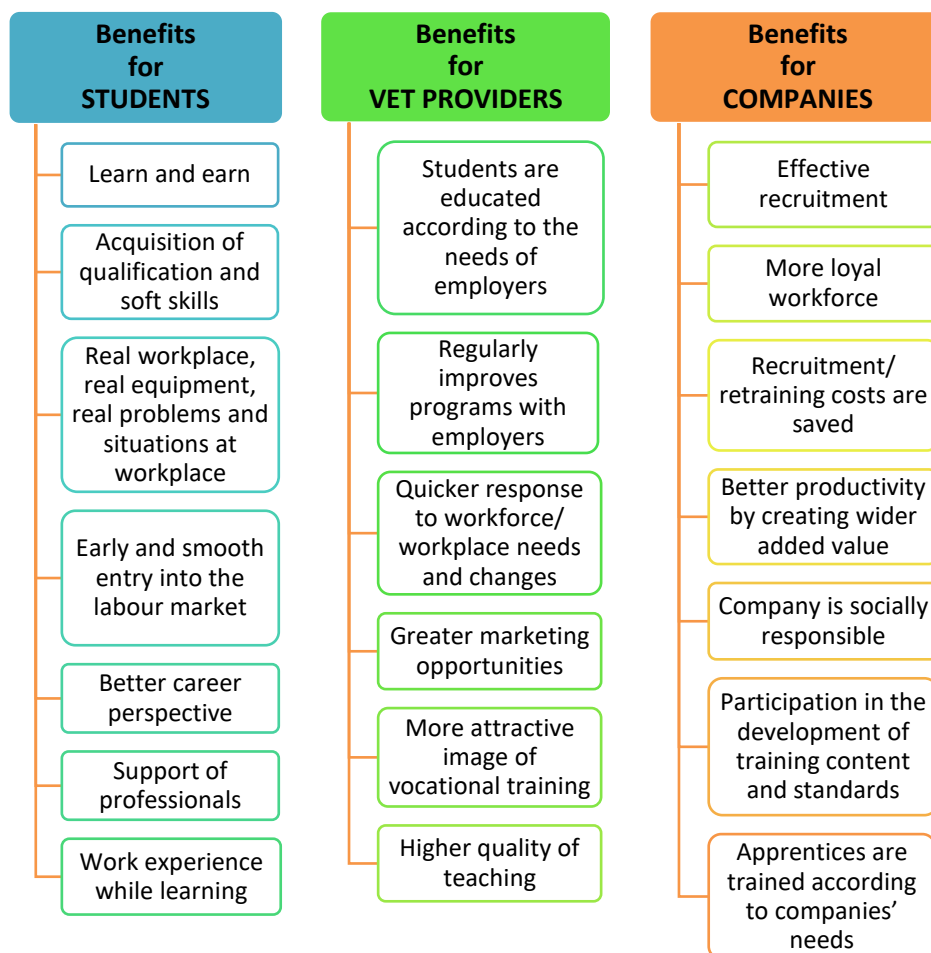
DESSA project provide useful and easily accessible methodology to all European countries. All DESSA project intellectual products are available for all interested and involved parts (VET providers, companies, students and other interested stakeholders). Apprenticeship scheme and DESSA project intellectual products will create a balanced and unambiguous understanding of apprenticeships, the specifics of apprenticeship organization, and the importance of apprenticeships in developing apprenticeships through mentoring by using gamification elements and the benefits of training qualified professionals.

The seminars provide detailed information on the usefulness and relevance of the products created by the DESSA project. It is worthwhile to get acquainted with the recommended methods and tools when presenting all the components of more effective and high-quality apprenticeship.

You can find more information about seminars on the web platform – (link to website).



## Benefits of the apprenticeship scheme for stakeholders



4 chart. Benefits of the DESSA apprenticeship scheme for stakeholders.

DESSA project partners examples and researches from different European Union countries show that apprenticeships are an effective way to prepare qualified professionals with labor market needed wider range of skills, thus meeting the needs of employers and making it easier for individuals to enter the labor market by enhancing their employability. The benefits of this collaborative form of training are felt by all involved parts: students, VET providers, companies and as well - states.

### Benefits for students:

- Learn and earn. At the same time apprentice can learn by improving hard skills and soft skills and get a salary;
- Acquisition of qualification and soft skills;
- Real workplace, real equipment, real problems and situations at workplace;
- Early and smooth entry into the labour market;
- Better career perspective with wider range of skills;
- Support of professionals during all apprenticeship (on hard skills and soft skills);
- Work experience while learning;

**Benefits for VET providers:**

- Students are educated according to the needs of employers. Acquired apprentices' skills, meet the requirements of a specific job, ensuring that the employee meets the needs of companies;
- Regularly improves programs with employers;
- Quicker response to workforce/ workplace needs and changes;
- Greater marketing opportunities. Easier to attract students;
- More attractive image of vocational training by suggesting wider range of skills and more possibilities;
- Higher quality of teaching. More effectively improved teachers' qualifications by working directly with employers and professionals by using DESSA methodology and materials;

**Benefits for companies:**

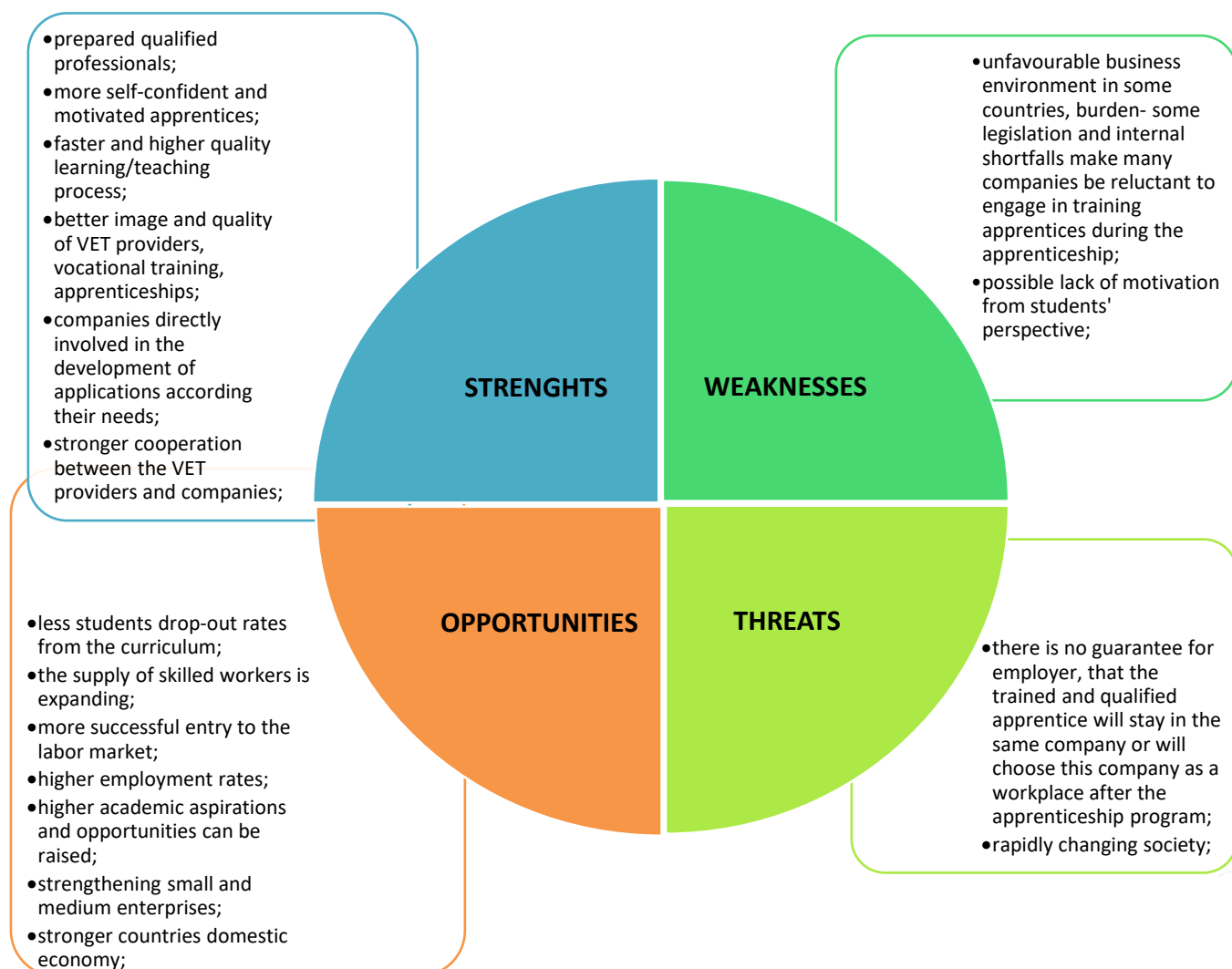
- Effective recruitment. Easier to attract young perspective people by suggesting wider range of skills and opportunities;
- More loyal workforce by concentrated on hard skills and soft skills;
- Recruitment/ retraining costs are saved;
- Better productivity by creating wider added value. Apprentices directly contribute to the company's economic, professional and collective activities by creating wider added value;
- The company is socially responsible by concentrating not only in professional skills (hard skills), but also training employees soft skills;
- Participation in the development of training content and standards;
- Apprentices are trained according to companies' needs. Acquired apprentices' skills, meet the requirements of a specific job, ensuring that the employee meets the needs of companies.

In a totally, there are **benefits for states** as well:

- Positive economic and social impact;
- Education adapts more successfully to business needs;
- More flexible vocational training system;
- Better response to changes in the labour market.



## SWOT analysis of the apprenticeship scheme



5 chart. SWOT analysis of DESSA apprenticeship scheme.

**SWOT analysis of the apprenticeship scheme consist of:**

### **Strenghts of the apprenticeship scheme:**

- prepared qualified professionals;
- more self-confident and motivated apprentices;
- faster and higher quality learning/teaching process;
- better image and quality of VET providers, vocational training, apprenticeships;
- companies directly involved in the development of applications according their needs;
- stronger cooperation between the VET providers and companies;

### **Opportunities of the apprenticeship scheme:**

- less students drop-out rates from the curriculum;
- the supply of skilled workers is expanding;



- more successful entry to the labor market;
- higher employment rates;
- higher academic aspirations and opportunities can be raised;
- strengthening small and medium enterprises;
- stronger countries domestic economy;

**Weaknesses of the apprenticeship scheme:**

- unfavourable business environment in some countries, burden-some legislation and internal shortfalls make many companies be reluctant to engage in training apprentices during apprenticeship;
- possible lack of motivation from students' perspective;

**Threats of the apprenticeship scheme:**

- there is no guarantee for employer, that the trained and qualified apprentice will stay in the same company or will choose this company as a workplace after the apprenticeship program;
- rapidly changing society. A very striking feature of our times is the accelerating rate at which change occurs. In every area of human endeavour a great of new knowledge is being generated, and old practices are being rejected one after another. At this point in history, no one can possibly deny that society, in all its aspects (social, economic, political and cultural) is going through a process of fundamental.





## Conclusions

This apprenticeship scheme, developed of DESSA project, purpose is to ensure understandable, adaptable and more effective apprenticeships in every country, to guide DESSA project target groups members to a better quality apprenticeship with clear vision, direction and action plan on how to train apprentices in soft skills during the apprenticeships by using main apprenticeship scheme elements (gamification and natural mentoring) and supporting apprenticeship scheme elements and tools ("Apprenticeship scheme for development of soft skills and competences", "Orientation guide for improvement of soft skills", "Trainers' guide of soft skills", web platform). This apprenticeship scheme is adaptable for every country and can help achieve better goals in every country's apprenticeships by preparing high qualified employees with a wide range of skills (hard skills and soft skills). Dessa apprenticeship schemes are designed around the real needs of the labour market and it contribute to the increased productivity and competitiveness of enterprises, which fosters job creation and supports youth employment.

DESSA apprenticeship scheme includes theoretical foundation with links to practical foundations and guiding principles for the design, implementation and evaluation of the apprenticeship program for the development of soft skills and competences. The apprenticeship scheme has been created based on different European Union countries' experiences in apprenticeships, analysis and researches.

This document is intended to introduce the main goals of the DESSA project for the emergence of the apprenticeship scheme and the intellectual products created that make the implementation of the apprenticeship scheme smoother and more efficient.



## Sources

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