



**Educational Resource to
enhance Virtual & Blended Work-Based Learning**

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COMPENDIUM



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INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

We are glad to present you the *Compendium of Virtual VET Best Practices*, developed in connection with the project “*MoBlend – Educational Resource to enhance Virtual & Blended Work-Based Learning*”.

MoBlend is a project financed by Erasmus+ Programme: KA226 - Partnerships for Digital Education Readiness in the VET field in response to COVID-19 and it brings together 5 partners among organizations active in the VET field from Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Croatia.

The background behind this initiative is characterized by the crisis caused by Covid-19 and the strong repercussions it had on our lives, from the economic and working point of view, as much as on the educational environment. Indeed, all forms of education and training, including VET, have been disrupted, with WBL and apprenticeships being the most affected.

During the lockdown, distance learning failed to reach between 5% and 20% of beneficiary students in Europe, including those living in rural areas, with poor IT literacy and limited economic means, as well as students with special needs.

The slowdown of business activities during the lockdown amounted to a -11.7% decrease in the EU GDP and the consequences on the labor market have been severe. The number of companies with staff working from home has risen to 88% (EAE Business school), leading to the impossibility for companies to host interns, especially those most fragile.

As stressed by the Commission in the communication on the 2020 country-specific recommendations, the benefits of telework may not be available to the unskilled future workers, risking to further exacerbating existing inequalities.

In this context, there is a critical need to improve the quality of Virtual and Blended WBL (V&BWBL) and to ensure its inclusiveness. Hence, the main objective of MoBlend is to improve the quality of Virtual and Blended WBL initiatives and to guarantee an equal and inclusive access and participation to ensure its inclusiveness, especially for students with fewer opportunities and special needs.

In this Compendium we display a collection of concise but detailed information about the opportunity of access to Work Based Learning through Virtual and Blended mobilities, showing how this approach can be a best practice to face the actual and future crisis and can be an inclusive solution as it provides access to WBL abroad also to whom doesn't have the opportunity to travel.



METHODOLOGY

In order to perform this Best Practice research & Compendium, the methodologies used have been a field research (for the Best Practice research) and then a focus group (for the Compendium).

First, the research has been carried out in all the five countries involved through a questionnaire addressed to students and VET School Tutors. The associated partners supported this process with the aim of identifying already existing best practices in virtual WBL emerged during or before the Covid pandemic.

After that, the results have been brought to the attention of a Focus Group Team who has analyzed them and drawn the conclusions displayed at the end of this Compendium, so as to inspire future actions in this field.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thanks to this survey we reached, among Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, and Croatia, 62 VET School Tutors and 315 students, overcoming our initial goal (50 VET School Tutors and 250 students). Due to the international character of this work, we want to offer a truthful statement of virtual WBL opportunities in the UE.

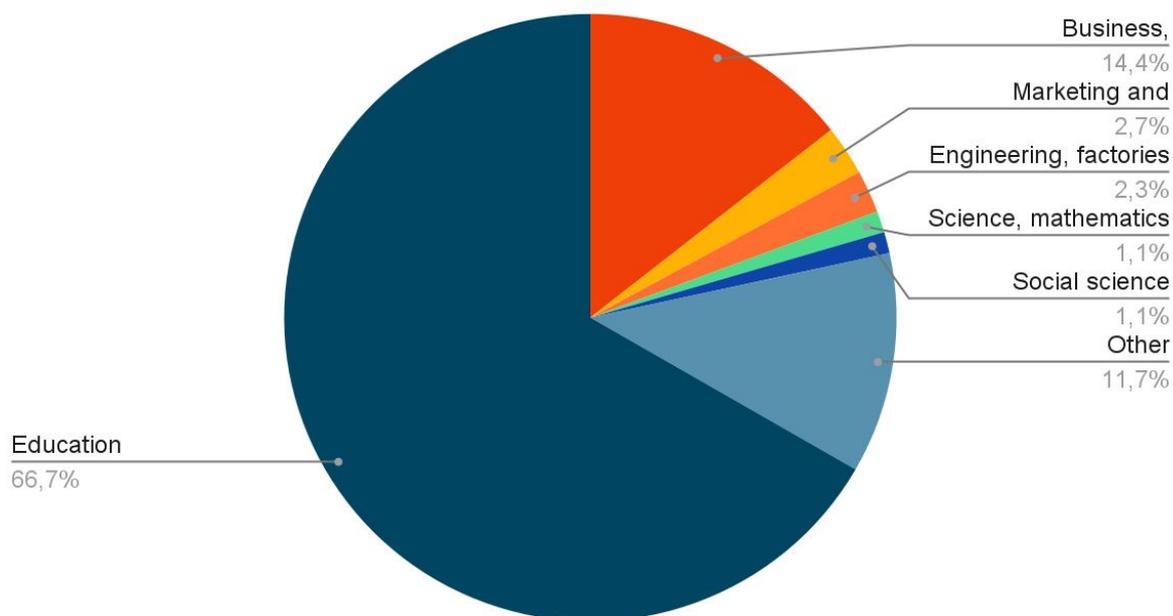
In the following sections we show how students and teachers have perceived Virtual and Blended WBL initiatives among Europe, so far. We display strengths and weaknesses of this approach and finally, we highlight the Best practices identified.

Survey for students

Of the 315 students interviewed, 263 (83%) have participated in a workshop, internship, or other professional activity done entirely virtually. These activities averagely lasted one month and they were very variegated. They dealt with education in general (67%) and the other main topics were business, administration and law (14%) and marketing and communication (3%) [Table 1].

Almost all of these opportunities (87%) were provided from the school, but only in the 22% of the cases the institution provided the devices to conduct the remote internship and the 60% of the students stated that they did not receive training on how telework is done.

Table 1. Virtual activities

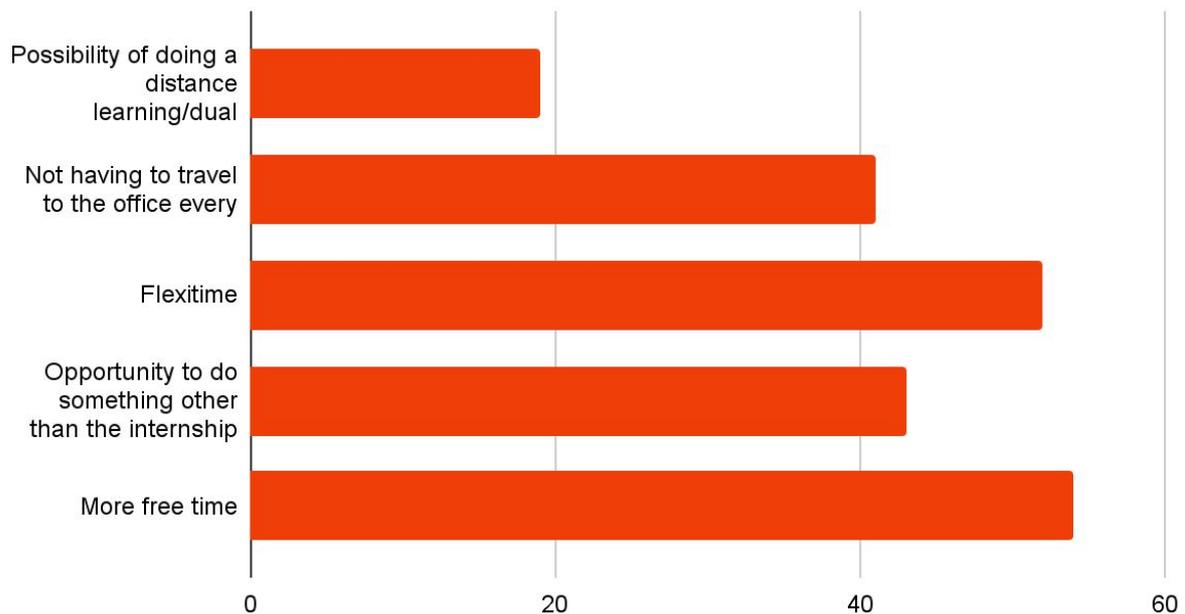




The pupils were also asked how would they rated the positives of some aspects as:

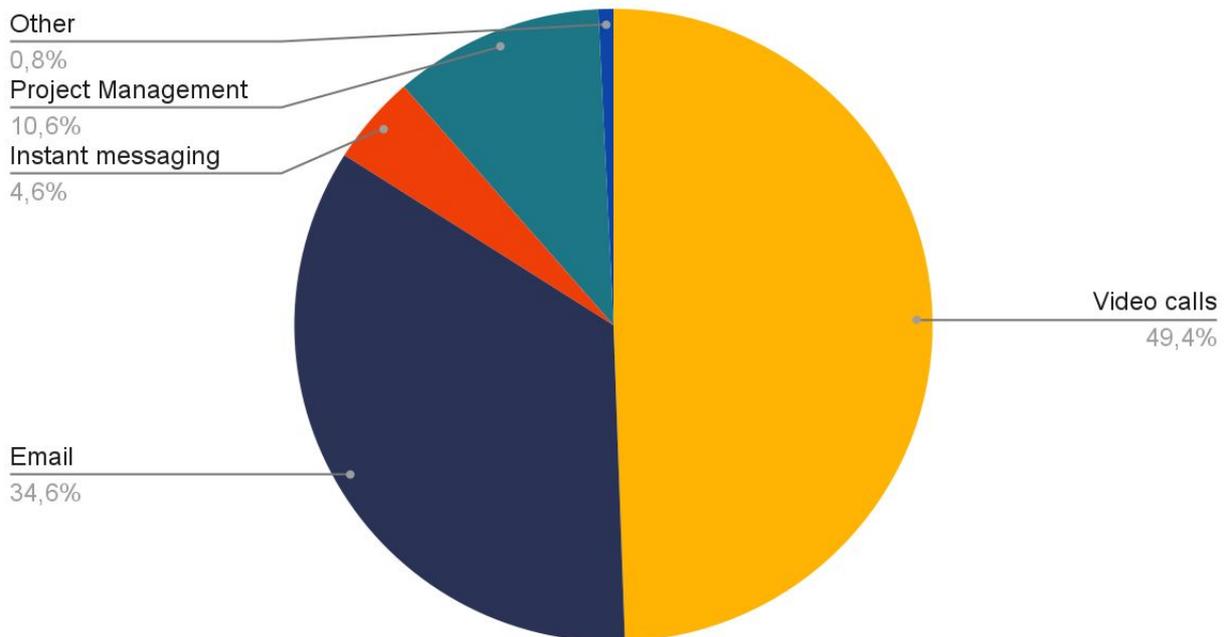
- The possibility of doing a distance learning/dual training despite the Covid-19 pandemic (19% rated it highly);
- Not having to travel to the office every day (41% rated it highly);
- Flexitime (52% rated it highly);
- Opportunity to do something other than the internship (43% rated it highly);
- More free time (54% rated it highly) [Table 2.].

Table 2. Virtual activities appreciation rate



The preferred tools for discussing work assignments were video calls (50%) and emails (35%). Microsoft Teams was particularly appreciated in all countries [Table 3.].

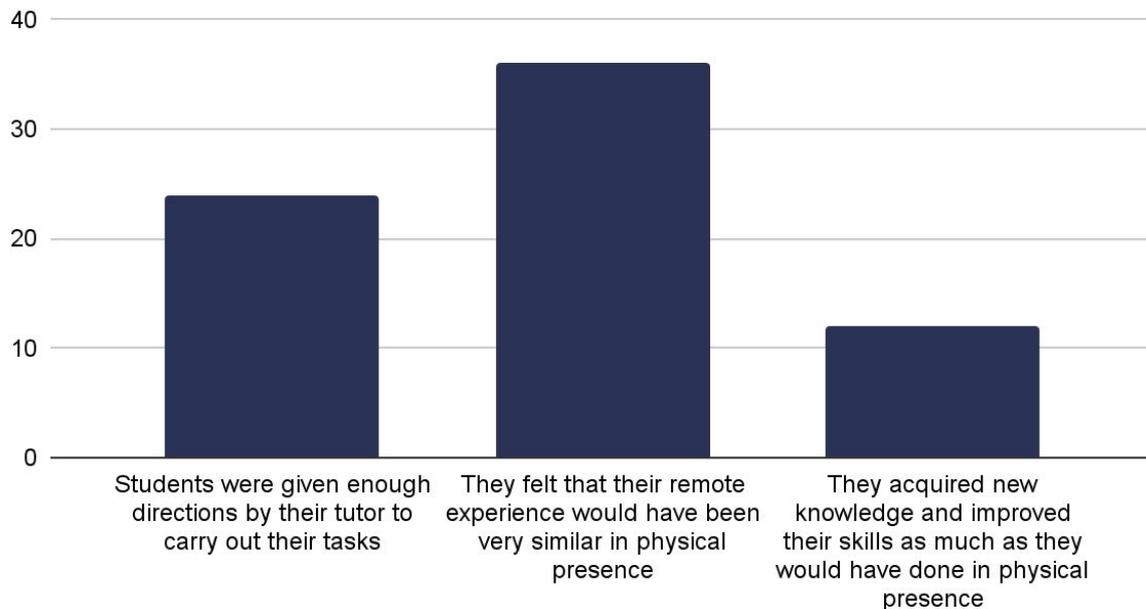
Table 3. Virtual activities management tools





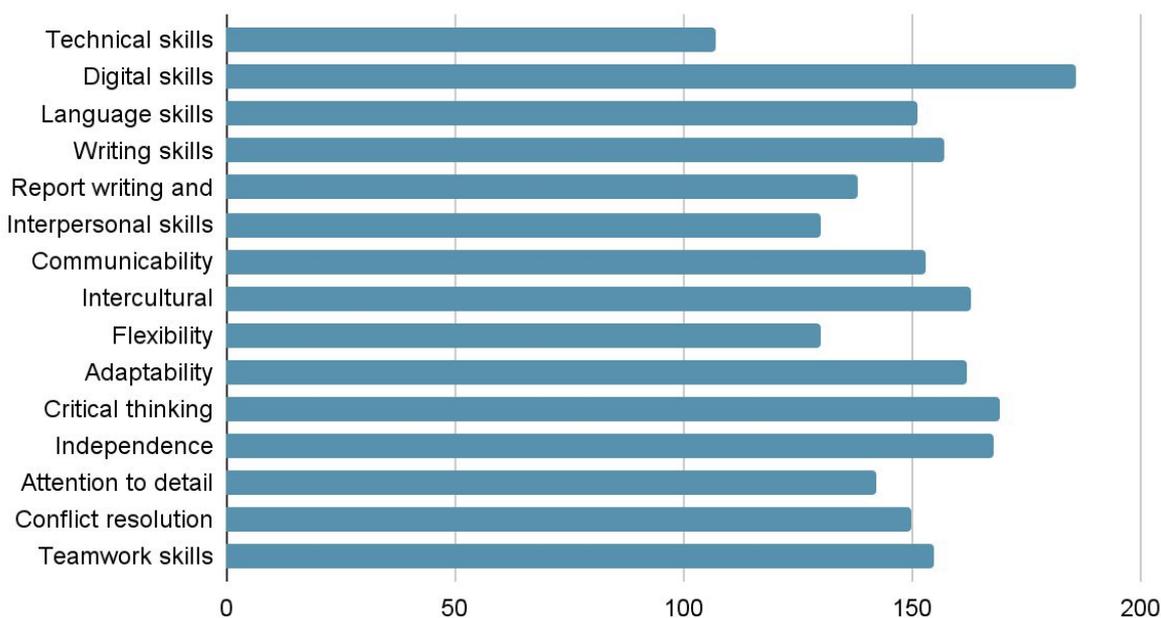
Moreover, 64% of the students felt they were given enough directions by their tutor to carry out their tasks. 41% of them felt that their remote experience would have been very similar in physical presence and 43% felt they acquired new knowledge and improved their skills as much as they would have done in physical presence [Table 4.]. Those are very positive feedback that support the effectiveness of virtual WBL opportunities.

Table 4. Feedback on the effectiveness of virtual activities



We also investigated the skills developed by the students thanks to the virtual activities and the main ones are digital skills (70%), critical thinking and independence (64%) [Table 5].

Table 5. Skills developed thanks to virtual activities





Concluding, 63% of the pupils would suggest that their colleagues/classmates participate in a remote internship and 39% of them thinks that their future professional development will benefit from their work-from-home experience.



Survey for VET School Tutors

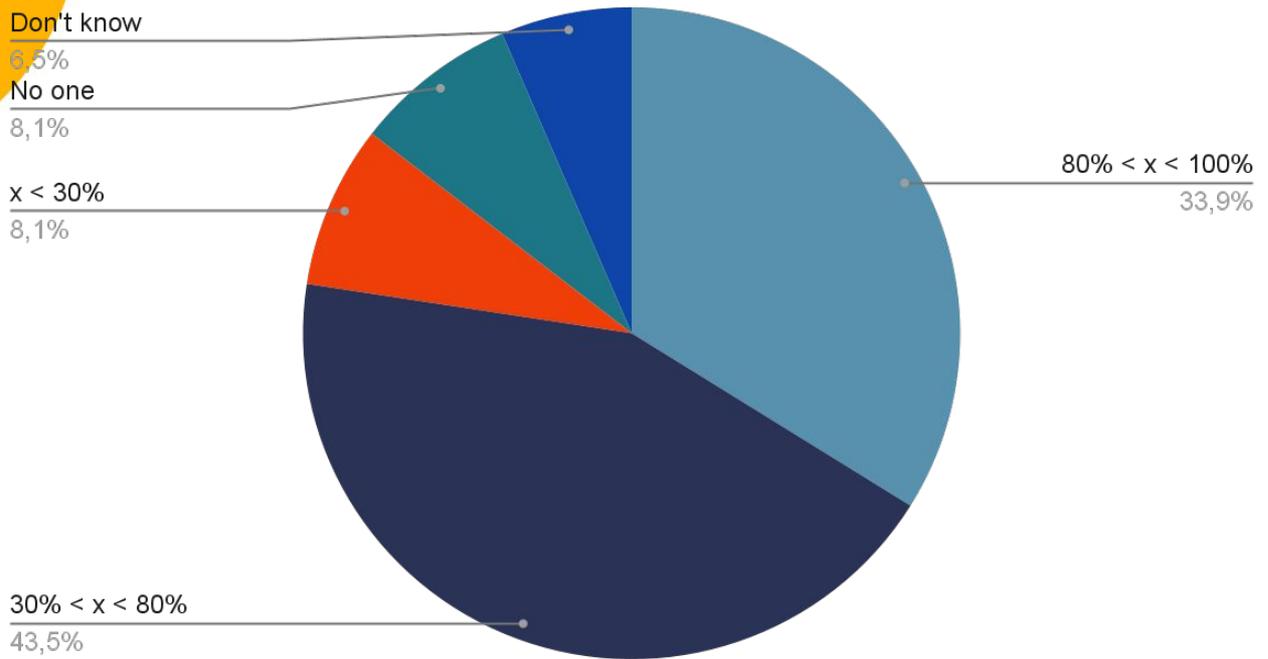
The questionnaire addressed to teachers was shorter and composed of six questions. It investigated the number of students involved in a distance learning placement in the last 5 years and the way the activities have been implemented, considering both the positive aspects and the obstacles.

The results show that about one third of the respondents stated that between 80% and 100% of their students have done a distance learning placement or other activity within the framework of dual training. Moreover, only 6,5% of the teachers said that less than 30% of their students attended those kind of activities [Table 6.].

From this we can deduce that the involvement of the pupils in the virtual learning environment is medium-high.



Table 6. Students involved in virtual activities

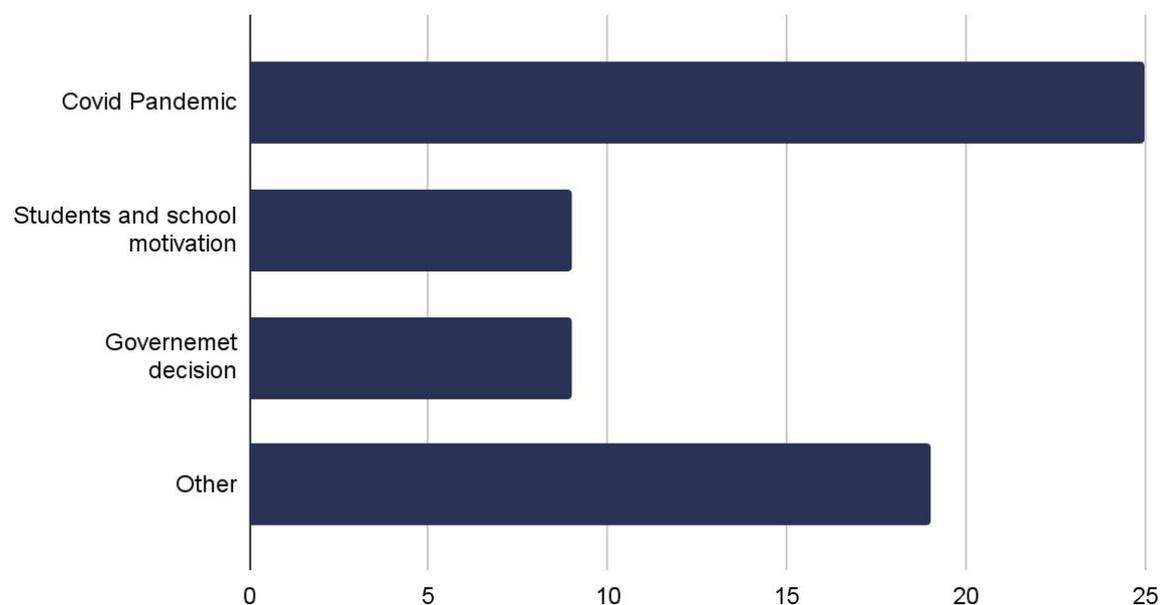




Furthermore, 40% of the teachers identified the emergency situation caused by the Covid pandemic as the main cause of participation in online activities. Instead, about 10% of them stated that the high level of involvement was due to the motivation, both of the students and of the school [Table 7.]. They believe that a positive attitude and the willingness to pursue their vocational studies let them attend virtual activities successfully.

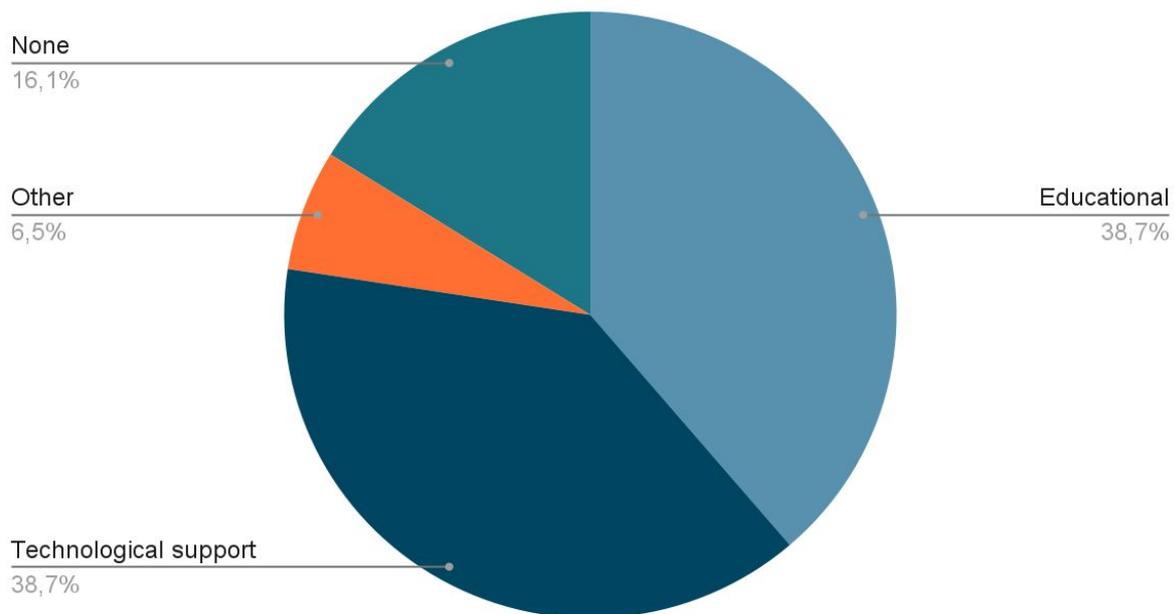
On the other hand, they explained the cases of low engagement as a consequence of the lack of motivation caused by the lock-down situation; of the lack of concrete opportunities due to bureaucratic obstacles and to the fact that they were not prepared to conduct remote training, due to the specificity of their area of interest.

Table 7. Causes of virtual activities increasement



When asked about what activities had their organization undertaken to prepare and deliver the distance learning placement and/or other dual learning activity, 39% of them stated that they focused on teachers' educational preparation, in order to provide the students with a customized didactic plan. Moreover, another 39% invested on technological support, focusing on the selection of digital tools and adequate softwares.

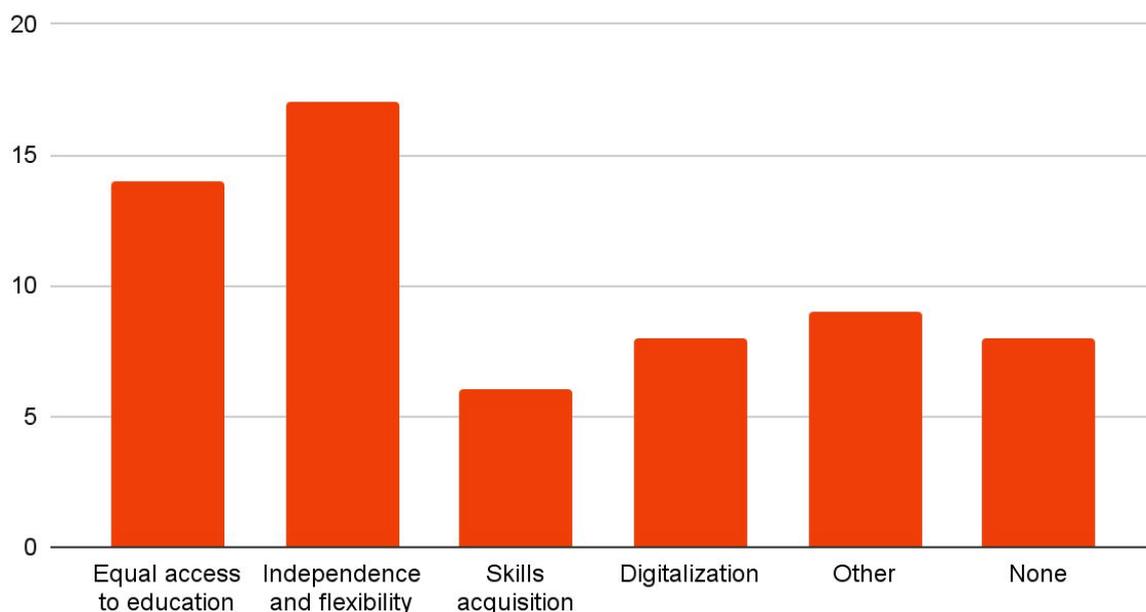
Table 8. School investments on online activities



The survey also investigated the positive aspects and the obstacles to distance vocational traineeships or dual training. It has been displayed that the main strengths of this approach are [Table 9.]:

- It gives all students equal access to education and it allows them to get in touch with realities and companies not from their geographical area;
- It allows students to be more independent and flexible, adapting to their educational need and letting them to develop transversal skills;
- It promotes the digitalization of both students and teachers and allows them to continue to develop their digital and professional competencies independently.

Table 9: Virtual activities positive aspects





On the other side, the weaknesses identified are:

- Bureaucracy and legal framework that prevents it to happen;
- Internet problems and system overload due to the large number of participants in distance learning
- Students inactivity and demotivation due to physical isolation and to the feeling that their work was not tracked properly.



Best practices

The VET School Tutors survey let the teachers share some interesting insights about distance learning and vocational traineeship. Among those, we would like to highlight the following, as we consider them impactful and a game changer in the management quality of Virtual and Blended WBL initiatives:

- Optimizing the tools available in order to replace the classic blackboard and trying to support the oral explanation with visual material;
- Choosing carefully apps and platforms, preferring the ones with easy and immediate tools that would “push” the pupils to work;
- Organizing with the companies virtual visits, Open Day and cross-curricular pathway involving the pupils during the classroom activities.

The inputs obtained thanks to the survey highlighted how an innovative mindset is required in order to face the change we are witnessing in the educational field. It is important to adapt the available tools to the needs of students and trainees so as to offer inclusive and impactful opportunities for career growth.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to this Compendium, we had the opportunity to better understand the situation related to the Virtual and Blended WBL initiatives among Europe. As we have seen, Virtual mobility has been used with a medium-high intensity in the last five years all over the five countries involved in the MoBlend project.

Most of its popularity is surely due to Covid-19 and to the pandemic, that forced people to work and study from their houses. Nevertheless, we obtained a significant amount of feedback that showed how a positive attitude and the willingness to pursue their vocational studies let both the tutors and the students attend virtual activities successfully. In this way our survey displayed that, even if not everyone was prepared at first, not only virtual mobility and learning can work, but they can also be successful.

The identified weaknesses are mainly related to external factors as bureaucratic framework. Instead, as far as internet problems are concerned, a good response could be investing in better working tools, app and platforms and deepening digital training. This would improve not only the virtual performances, but it would also increase the student engagement. In fact, dealing with easy and immediate tools would “push” them to work and they would feel satisfied with the skills acquired.

Moreover, these aspects confirm the relevance of the objectives that MoBlend is pursuing:

O1) Support VET Students, VET School Staff and Company Tutors in improving the quality of V&BWBL through design of a tailored learning

course on digital tools and methods of V&BWBL;

02) Promote the inclusiveness of V&BWBL through design of an ad-hoc and user-friendly tool for the evaluation and validation of VET experiences;

03) Deepen the interest and trust in V&BWBL, affirming their value and match with the requests of the labor market;

04) Develop a cross-border and cross sector synergy with the purpose of creating innovative uses of Virtual&Blended Work-Based Learning tailored to the needs of students with fewer opportunities and special needs, even afterwards the COVID era.

An innovative action answering those needs would impact positively not only students skills, but it would break down geographical barriers, offering more inclusive opportunities for everyone and, most importantly, ensure their professional growth and the proper acquisition of skills that meet the needs of the labour market effectively.

ATTACHMENTS

A.1 Survey for students

1. Have you participated in a workshop, internship, or other professional activity done entirely virtually (no physical presence)?
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Do you live in a remote area (a remote area is a place 15 kilometres or more from the municipality)?
5. Which economic sector was the internship in which you participated remotely?
6. How long did the distance learning/work activity last? Please specify in weeks.
7. Did your school provide this distance learning opportunity?
8. Who provided the devices to conduct the remote internship (computer, tablet or other)?
9. Has anyone given you training on how telework is done?
10. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the positives for you in relation to the following aspects [The possibility of doing a distance learning/dual training despite the Covid-19 pandemic]
11. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the positives for you in terms of the following aspects [Not having to travel to the office every day]
12. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the positives for you in terms of the following aspects [Flexitime]
13. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the positives for you in terms of the following aspects [Opportunity to do something other than the internship]

14. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the positives for you regarding the following aspects [More free time]
15. During the internship, how did you and your mentor discuss work assignments?
16. Did you use any particular program or technology tool to complete the tasks assigned during the internship?
17. In case you answered "yes" to the previous question, please indicate which ones?
18. Did you have to physically visit the internship site?
19. If you answered yes to the previous question, please indicate how many times
20. On a scale of 1 to 5, how did you feel about the following aspects [I felt I received enough guidance from my teacher to carry out my tasks.
21. On a scale of 1 to 5, how did you feel about the following aspects [I felt my remote internship would be very similar in physical presence].
22. On a scale of 1 to 5, how did you feel about the following aspects [I felt I gained new knowledge and improved my skills as much as I would have done in physical presence].
23. Technical skills (skills that are directly related to your work field).
24. Digital skills (Office suite, social media, e-mail, etc.)
25. Language skills
26. Writing skills
27. Report writing and presentation skills
28. Interpersonal skills
29. Communicability Intercultural dialogue



30. Flexibility
31. Adaptability
32. Critical thinking
33. Independence
34. Attention to detail
35. Conflict resolution skills
36. Teamwork skills
37. Would you suggest that your colleagues/classmates participate in a remote internship?
38. Would you repeat this experience?
39. Do you think this work-from-home experience will benefit your future professional development?

A.2 Survey for VET School Tutors

1. In the last 5 years, how many students have done a distance learning placement or other activity within the framework of dual training? Please indicate the exact number of these students and what percentage they represent of the total number of trainees in your institution.
2. What do you think is the reason for these high/low values (e.g. lack of motivation or high motivation from schools/students/business).
3. What supporting activities has your organisation undertaken to prepare and deliver the distance learning placement and/or other dual learning activity (e.g. educational training, provision of online devices, etc.)? Were these measures targeted at specific sectors, or were you able to include activities in sectors that are not normally considered to be delivered remotely?
4. In your experience, what are the positive aspects of distance learning and dual training activities?
5. In your opinion, what are the obstacles to distance vocational traineeships or dual training?
6. Could you share best practices in this area?