



## Webinar: Enhancing the quality of internships

2 July 2013, 16h00 Paris (France) time

### Food for Thought

#### How does workplace learning help people make a successful transition to work from higher education?

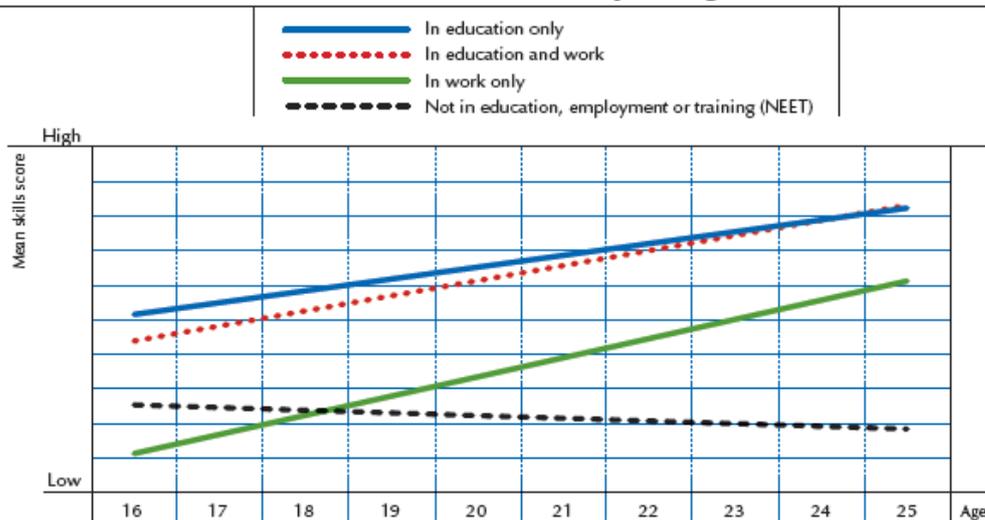
Global economic competition requires a labour force with a range of higher-order skills (“21st-Century Skills”), such as the “4 C’s” of Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and others. Such skills are essential for absorbing knowledge as well as for work performance and are typically associated with university education.

Good-quality internships – and a variety of other forms of workplace learning – give students valuable labour market experience before graduation. Combining work and study typically yields better labour market outcomes for people.

Workplaces can provide a strong learning environment by enabling interns to put theoretical knowledge into practice and gain real world experience in skills such as teamwork, communication, negotiation and networking.

Employers’ willingness to offer internships also provides a concrete expression of employers’ skill needs and can help to ensure relevant skills are taught in the curriculum. Internships also facilitate labour market recruitment by allowing employers and potential employees to get to know each other, while interns also contribute to the enterprise’s outputs.

Young people in their mid-20s who are in education and work have higher average levels of foundation skills (country average)



Note: This figure is based on results of the PIAAC field trial. It is not based on representative samples and is therefore only illustrative.  
Source: PIAAC field trial data (2010).

#### How to read this graph

Young people in their mid-20s who are only in education and those who are in education and work show higher levels of foundation skills, on average, than younger cohorts in comparable situations. The pattern is similar for young people who are only in work, albeit at a lower level. In contrast, older youth cohorts who are neither in work nor in education (NEET) show lower levels of skills, on average, than younger cohorts in comparable situations.

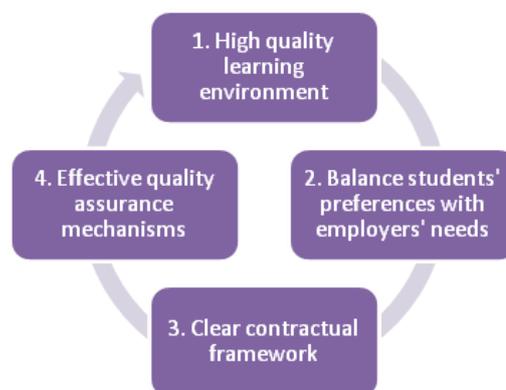
## What practices are most important for effective workplace learning?

### ***A high-quality learning environment***

Internships should offer a high-quality learning environment that enables students to develop key soft skills – such as client relations – in a real-world environment. It is also very important to highlight that, whether in the workplace or the classroom, a high-quality learning environment requires, among other elements, well-prepared supervisors and teachers.

### ***Balance students' preferences with employers' needs***

Internships should be structured to facilitate a two-way flow of information between potential employers and employees, making later recruitment more effective and less costly. Very importantly, employer provision of internships should signal that a programme has value in the labour market. At the same time, employers should be involved in identifying and developing the learning objectives to ensure that they are both relevant to their immediate needs and balanced by sufficient emphasis on transferable skills for future employability.



### ***A clear contractual framework***

Internships must operate within a clear set of rules. These rules should clarify:

- Who is responsible for finding the internship (student, program staff, central services...)?

The procedures for securing internships and the criteria for their approval, including the consequences for students who fail to secure or to complete a suitable internship should be specified.

- What sort of contract should cover the internship?

The contract should encourage employers to help interns make a productive contribution, ensure that interns receive effective learning opportunities and protect interns against exploitation at work. An internship contract that sets out the rights and obligations of both interns and enterprises also underpins the quality of internship.

Insurance, health and safety issues should also be considered as important elements in assessing suitable student employment.

### ***Effective quality assurance***

The higher education institution is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the intended learning outcomes are appropriate in terms of academic standards. To ensure the quality of internships that are integrated in higher education curricula, internal and external quality assurance processes must be developed such that internships are included in quality reviews. Within the institution this would require open and consistent information exchange between the workplace (supervisors, HR services...), the institution (professors, career advisers...) and the student. For external quality assurance, transparent and thorough reporting of internship programs should be provided for all external reviews.

## What are the frequent challenges?

### ***Benefits and costs are hard to estimate***

The willingness of all key actors (higher education institutions, employers, students) to improve the effectiveness of internships also depends on how each perceives the benefits and costs of doing so. Organising successful internships requires considerable resources (expertise, time, money, commitment...) that are not accessible for all organisations. This can be a barrier to small and medium-sized enterprises, for example. It also requires all-around agreement on the importance of the targeted outcomes. For example, successful practices developed for pre-professional programs could be duplicated more broadly and the collaboration between career services, faculties and management of higher education institutions increased.



A higher education institution should use available information, including budgetary and alumni tracking data, to develop communication material to inform companies, students and academics about the value and benefits of internships.

### ***Motivate employers***

Workplace learning is not new; however, internships have become more widespread with the economic downturn and the employer requirements for work experience. As a result of high demand, it can be a problem to secure internships for all students. Employers might not see the value in investing time and resources in internships. As incentives for employers, governments can introduce direct subsidies, special tax breaks and arrangements to share the burden of workplace learning between groups of enterprises. At the higher education institutional level, it helps to build long term, mutually beneficial relationships with employers, create clear communications channels and consistent placement structures.

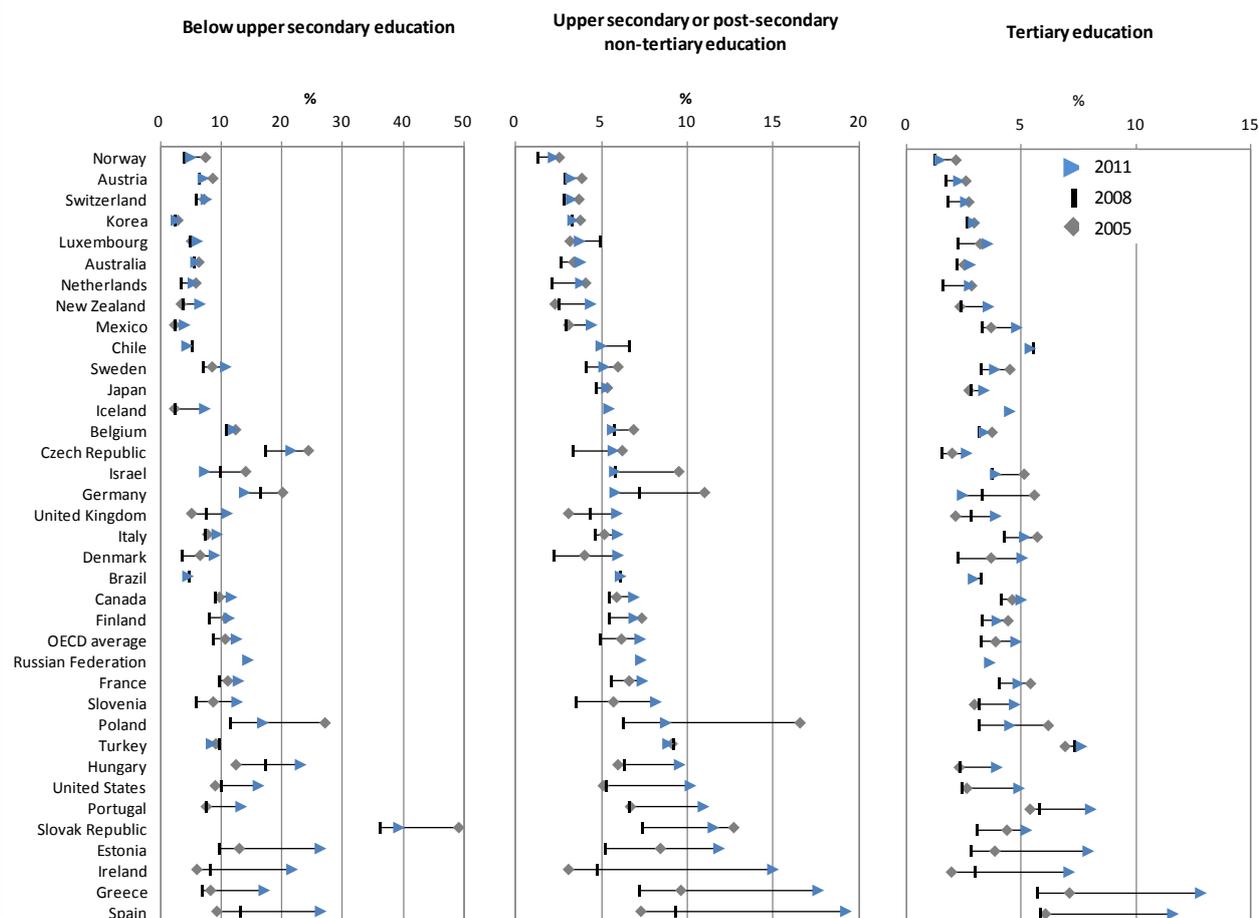
### ***Develop effective career guidance***

Rapidly evolving jobs and careers have expanded career opportunities, but employment choices are complicated and career guidance is therefore becoming both more important and more challenging. There is a need to develop a coherent career guidance profession that is pro-active and well informed about the labour market and that can provide useful information about careers and course choice. This service should receive adequate resources, be independent from the institution at which it is based and properly evaluated.

#### **Workplace learning includes a diverse set of practices:**

- Job shadowing: students “shadow” a worker to learn about their job.
- Service learning: voluntary work by students, typically in non-profit organisations.
- Internships: short period of time, typically weeks or months, in which students work for a firm for zero or nominal wages.
- Apprenticeships: they provide more structured long-term workplace learning, typically over a period of years, leading to a qualification.
- Employee training: training of regular employees in the workplace.
- Informal learning: through part-time work.

## Unemployment rates among 25-64 year-olds, by educational attainment (2005, 2008 and 2011)



**Note:** Countries are ranked in ascending order of 2011 unemployment rates among 25-64 year-olds with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

**Source:** OECD. Table A5.4a. See Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm)).

**How to read this graph:** Unemployment rates are nearly three times higher among individuals who do not have an upper secondary education (13% on average across OECD countries) than among those who have a tertiary education (5%).

### References

- OECD (2008), *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, Volume 1 and Volume 2, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/9789264046535-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264046535-en)
- OECD (2010a), *Learning for Jobs*, *OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training*, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/9789264087460-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264087460-en)
- OECD (2010b), *Off to a Good Start? Jobs for Youth*, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/9789264096127-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264096127-en)
- OECD (2012), *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives, A Strategic Approach to Skills Policies*, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/9789264177338-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264177338-en)
- OECD (2013), *Education at a Glance 2013*, OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, doi: [10.1787/eag-2013-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en)

### Find out more:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| OECD, Skills Beyond School              | ⇒ <a href="http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/skillsbeyondschool.htm">www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/skillsbeyondschool.htm</a> |
| OECD Skills Strategy                    | ⇒ <a href="http://skills.oecd.org/">http://skills.oecd.org/</a>  |
| OECD, Learning for Jobs                 | ⇒ <a href="http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/learningforjobs.htm">www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/learningforjobs.htm</a>       |
| OECD, Jobs for Youth                    | ⇒ <a href="http://www.oecd.org/els/offtoagoodstartjobsforyouth.htm">www.oecd.org/els/offtoagoodstartjobsforyouth.htm</a>                         |
| OECD PowerPoint presentations on skills | ⇒ <a href="http://www.slideshare.net/OECD/EDU/tag/skills">www.slideshare.net/OECD/EDU/tag/skills</a>   |