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# **Employability in the European context and ensuring the quality of work based learning**

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## Shift of paradigm in employability discussions

- A longstanding focus on linking employability to education and acquisition of skills (European Employment Strategy, E.U, 1997)
- Lisbon Strategy (2000) & Europe 2020: employability seen as a cure against unemployment, but serves also social inclusion & citizenship.
- OECD & HE think-tanks : higher education graduates resist better labour market changes & are more flexible
- EC's Rethinking Education: move away from exclusive academic HE, to encompass PHE, EQF level 5 and Higher VET. Since then, includes also the value of relevant work experience and non-formal education, with the validation and recognition of prior learning, non-formal learning etc.

## What is **employability**?

*The ability to find and maintain employment at one's level of qualifications*

Employability is a relative concept as it depends on a combination of factors:

- personal (such as personality, network, social background, special talent etc.);
- acquired in education (knowledge, know-how etc.);
- and external (labour market situation, employers and other job seekers).

*HEI are not the only factor influencing employability but it is a very important one, and it is also the one policy makers/HE structures can influence most easily.*

## Recurring issues on the theme: internships and work experience

- Employers, students, graduates and HEI representatives value **work-based learning** (such as placements and internships) as particularly effective approaches to promote the employability of graduates.
- Rationale for this: work experience seems to signal
  - work-readiness (for the employer) in the sense of being instantly deployable
  - knowing work-life and attitudes
  - and to some extent that the skills certified by the diploma have been applied successfully in practice.

## Knowledge, skills and attitudes favouring employability acc. to employers

- Identified skills and attitudes valued by most employers in Europe at the moment, based on the many typologies available; relevant studies on Employability (from the standpoint of the employer):

REFLEX study (2008); Vandervelden, ROA (2014):

Main indicators for employability:

*Professional expertise*

*General academic skills*

*Innovative/creative skills*

*Strategic/organizational skills*

*Interpersonal skills*

*Commercial/entrepreneurial skills.*

## 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies / learning outcomes

<b>ability to integrate knowledge (insight, skills and attitudes) to come to solutions in specific contexts</b>	
Teamwork skills	67%
Sector-specific skills	62%
Communication skills	60%
Computer skills	60%
Ability to adapt & act in new situations	60%
Good reading/writing skills	59%
Analytical & problem-solving skills	53%
Decision-making skills	46%
Good with numbers	40%
Foreign language skills	33%

*Gallup for EC DG Education & Culture (2010)*

# How professional higher education contributes to employability?

## Linking PHE and employability

A type of higher education which emphasises practical professional aspects and professional skills, which consolidates the link between elements of professional practice and academic studies

- A strong link with the world of employment & with enterprises
- Close involvement of all stakeholders (including students)
- Regional embedding of education & research
- Practice-oriented & competence-based
- Accessible and labour-market oriented
- Flexible schemes and study programmes for new groups of learners, following new requirements of the labour market



# Strengthening links with the world of work

Employability is tackled through strong cooperation between PHEI and the world of work (WoW). This way employability is enhanced through:

- WoW connection
- Staff development
- Curriculum adaptation to future employment needs
- Skills development
- Research skills, innovation, entrepreneurship
- Transversal skills
- Professional trendsetting

Shifting focus from big multinational companies  
towards small and medium size enterprises

More than 90% of jobs in Europe provided  
within SMEs

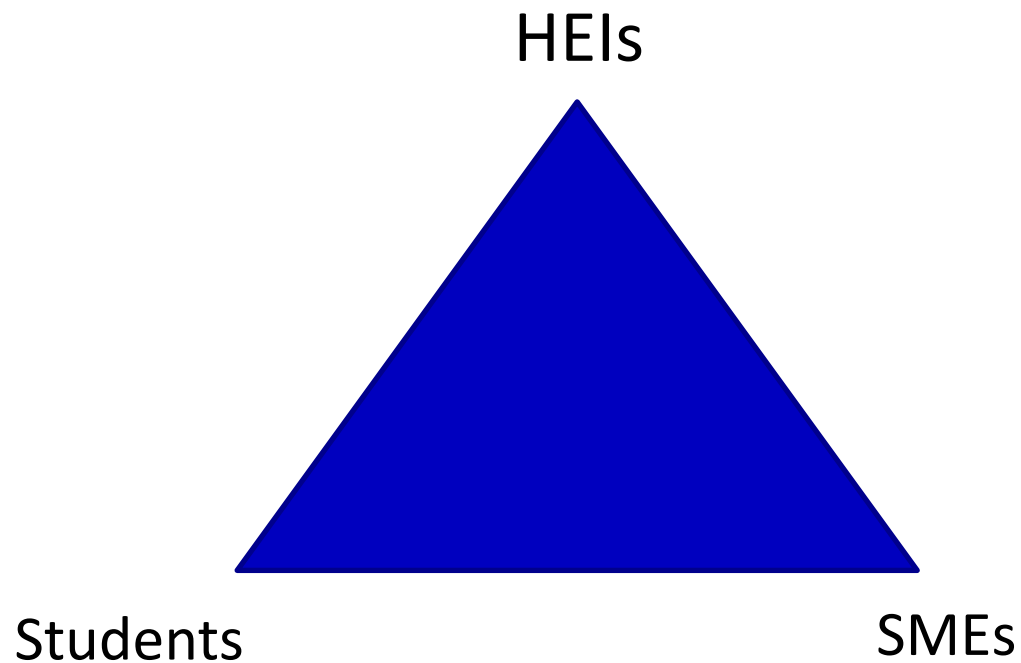
## SAPS

# Supporting internships and apprenticeships between PHE Institutions and SMEs

## PROCESS

1. supporting SMEs
2. promoting quality of internships/  
apprenticeships
3. Promoting cooperation

## Quality of internships



# Internship process

- Setting Learning Objectives of the overall programme
- Recruiting Placements
- Identifying / Creating Positions for Apprentices
- Negotiating the Apprenticeship Agreement
- Monitoring Apprenticeship
- Managing Apprenticeship
- Assessing the Apprenticeship

## Role HEIs in monitoring internships

- Have a procedure for quality assuring ongoing placements, including visits to placements as necessary (note: random checks are adequate)
- Have a procedure whereby the HEI periodically checks with students and SMEs as to the progress of the apprenticeship
- Provide a contact-point and mechanism for prompt issue-resolution

## More Information on the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

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