

NEW APPROACHES NEW SKILLS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Towards a VET alumni scheme: development of mechanisms using social media to encourage mutual support of VET learners

A VET alumni scheme was proposed at the outset of the project to support one key objective of the NANSSI project:

1. to look at ways to encourage young leavers from school/college who are 'graduates' in VET to study an extra year after their GCSEs/diploma, to prevent them from becoming unemployed and to increase their chances in the labour market by having skills which fit better to its requirements;

The principles of the proposed VET alumni scheme were developed in a paper which was presented to all the seminars. It is reproduced below:

Are you interested in a European VET alumni scheme?

Alumni schemes, in universities and colleges and, increasingly in the corporate world, are a very useful way of keeping in touch with successful students or employees, encouraging them back for a variety of purposes (courses, jobs and possibly fund raising) and a useful way of extending a brand.

For the alumni, they offer a number of benefits:

- Networking is one of the main advantages to joining an alumni scheme
- Special interest groups can be set up to put alumni in touch with those who have interests in the same field
- Both these provide a ready-made opportunity to make contacts and maybe get a boost up the career ladder
- Most schemes also offer a range of commercial benefits as well which may link them with their previous college, university or employer

Some colleges and university schemes use alumni as ambassadors to promote their experiences to other potential students or even corporate clients. As a result in alumni can enable businesses and educational establishments work more closely together.

Relationship between an alumni scheme and Europass

In Europe we already have 'Europass', which consist to a series of documents that have been designed to present an individual's skills in the best possible way, and consistently across Europe, to employers.

One of these is a transcript - the Europass certificate Supplement which is provided by awarding organisations to define an individual's skills and supplement their CV.

We see an alumni scheme being set up primarily for those who already have Europass, although there may be VET learners who have gained skills in the workplace, or outside Europe, and want to have them recognised. This would be phase 2 of the scheme.

Principles of a VET alumni scheme

The principles would be as follows:

- Open to everybody who has gained at least a one VET qualification/certification at any level
- Full alumni benefits for those who have achieved a level 2 or above
- Available to anybody who has at least one Europass certificate
- Alumni keep in touch through social networking, such as a special group within LinkedIn
- Linked to other EU schemes such as Leonardo?

What else we need to consider

- Who could manage or oversee the scheme – Europass, Eurodesk UK, individual organisations, another?
- Would there be a fee for becoming a VET alumnus and if so what would it 'buy'?
- What should the level of membership be for those at level 1 or below to encourage them and raise their aspirations?
- What specific benefits would VET alumni attract – or should be able to attract (eg should the scheme manager negotiate discounts on car hire, hotel accommodation etc?)
- Would someone have to participate in a European-related piece of learning to qualify as a VET alumni?

Outcome of discussions at the seminars

Delegates at NANSSI seminars were invited to discuss this proposal for a VET alumni scheme across Europe. In both countries it received support, (more so in the UK than the Netherlands) but with the proviso that it somehow needed to be linked to Europass, was not a European incentive scheme and it was not bureaucratic ie it needed to add value for learners. It is proposed that this is taken forward only should funding permit and after further periods of consultation.

The attempts to use social media as a means to engage staff in colleges through the project received limited success, and it seems that using social media for learning is still an immature market (for both staff and learners). In the first instance, therefore, a LinkedIn VET learners group has been established, to engage those staff and learners who were involved in the NANSSI project, and through this, further opportunities to develop an alumni scheme kept under review. The advantage of this approach is that it will gain its own momentum, or fade away, based exclusively on demand.