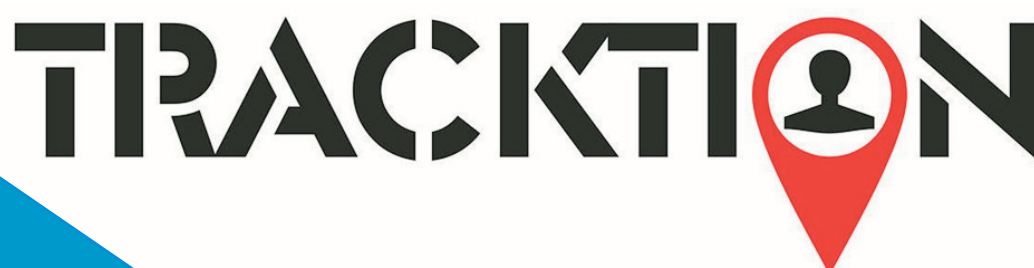


2018



**Advancing Graduate
Tracking and Alumni
Relations in VET Schools**

Baseline Study

Intellectual Output 2:
HOW-TO-GUIDE. Building and sustaining successful alumni relations programs in VET Schools.



Project Information



The EU-funded project “Advancing Graduate Tracking and Alumni Relations in Vocational Education and Training (VET) Schools – TRACKTION” focuses on strengthening graduate tracking capacity and fostering alumni relations in VET institutions. TRACKTION is a collective endeavour comprising of six organisations from five countries.

Country	Organization	Profile
Estonia	PKHK	VET providers
Italy	Cometa Formazione	
Netherlands	Alfa College	
Spain	Valnalón (Coord.) - Tknika	Intermediary organization
United Kingdom	Education & Employers	Research

Table 1- Project Partners

The project general objective is to improve VET schools’ understanding of “VET-to-work transition systems” (e.g. impact of learning on VET graduates’ careers, labour market relevance) and is based on three specific goals:



- a. To establish a more coordinated and appropriate set of VET Graduate Tracking measures at VET-provider level.
- b. To increase institutional capacity to act on and use results for a variety of purposes, such as enhancing study programmes and alumni services.
- c. To strengthen Alumni Culture in VET Schools.

The project foresees two main tangible intellectual outputs:

1. A Tracking Protocol that simplifies data collection from Alumni (O1).
2. A How - To - Guide “Building and Sustaining Successful Alumni Relations Programs in VET Schools” (O2).

The present report provides a concise summary of the tracking and alumni initiatives in nine VET schools in four European countries (Estonia, Italy, Netherlands and Spain). The report explores these VET tracking and alumni initiatives in detail, assessing the reasons for their use, methods used to collect information and obstacles encountered. While the coverage area is limited to the countries represented in the project team, lessons learned from this study will inform the design of a new graduate tracking protocol that will be tested in 2018-2019.



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Why Graduate Tracking?

Graduate Tracking is commonly understood as the set of systematic approaches that VET institutions put in place to record information on graduates with regard to their learning progress, skills acquired, perceptions, routes into employment, self-employment, or further training. VET graduate tracking is part of a broader system that requires:

1. **Creating and/or reinforcing VET Alumni Culture** bearing in mind that the ability to communicate with graduates is a precondition for tracking.
2. **Recording information on VET graduates destination.** Both with regard to entry of graduates into the labour market and their progression within it, perceived relevance of acquired skills and entry and progression into other education programmes.
3. **Using tracking for evidence-informed institutional decision-making.** Tracking helps VET providers to understand the impact of study programmes, as well as their relevance for the labour market.

The collection of graduate destination data can offer a strong basis to adapt and align VET curricula to the needs of a constantly changing and complex labour market. Furthermore, the strong connection with partner companies and businesses requires VET schools to be aware of skills gaps and shortages in order to accelerate and fine-tune the job matching processes. Moreover, tracking represents the statistical and quantitative aspect of alumni relations, an area in its early stages of development in the VET schools.

The European Context

The establishment of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (henceforth, EQA-VET)¹ in 2009 highlighted the importance of tracking the destination of VET graduates. In order to support the evaluation and continuous improvement of VET at system and provider level, the framework defines a set of ten quality indicators² and two of them are directly connected with graduate tracking:

EQAVET indicator

5. Placement rate in VET Programmes, which refers to the destination of VET learners and the share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training;

Dimensions

5a. destination of VET learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

5b. Share of employed learners at a designated point in time after completion of training, according to the type of programme and the individual criteria

6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace focussing on the occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training as well as, the satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills or competences.

Dimensions

6a. Information on occupation obtained by individuals after completion of training, according to type of training and individual criteria

6b. Satisfaction rate of individuals and employers with acquired skills/competences.

Table 2- EQAVET indicators 5 & 6



Graduate Tracking took centre stage again in 2017 with the release of two key documents. Council Recommendation on Tracking Graduates³ put the focus on improving the availability of qualitative and quantitative information on the destination of graduates. As regards VET institutions, the Commission set out to take stock of graduate tracking initiatives at system level across Member States.

The final report “Mapping of VET Graduate Tracking measures in EU Member States”⁴ echoes key messages of previous documents pointing out that “the systematic review and renewal of Vocational Education and Training (VET) is crucial to ensuring its continued quality and labour-market relevance. A better understanding of the performance of VET graduates in the labour market is one of the key sources for assessing and improving the quality and labour market relevance of VET, alongside forecasts of skills supply and demand”. The main results of this study are summarised below:

Mapping of system-level VET graduate tracking measures in Europe

“In total, 24 EU Member States have VET graduate tracking measures, of which 19 have national measures. Only four countries do not currently have any VET graduate tracking measure (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Latvia). In 19 countries the study identified regular VET graduate tracking measures, of which:

- 8 countries had measures that covered IVET and CVET (AT, DE, DK, FI, FR, IE, NL and UK)*
- 17 countries have measures that included both employment and education indicators (AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, PT, SE and UK)”.*

Source: Mapping of VET Graduate Tracking measures in EU Member States (EC, 2017)

As mentioned above, all partner countries represented in this consortium (EE, ES, IT, NL and UK) track in a regular way the destination of VET graduates into work and further studies. Normally, tracking initiatives are applied at national level. However, the emerging picture is more complicated in countries with largely decentralized VET systems as evidenced in the example below:

Mapping of VET graduate tracking measures in Spain

In Spain, the VET system is largely decentralised, so graduate tracking is mainly done at a regional level. TRACKTION has identified 23 measures in 17 Spanish regions. All regions have at least one graduate tracking measure in place. In 13 regions, tracking is a legal obligation so all VET providers are required to track graduate destinations on a regular basis. 78% of measures cover the whole reference population (all VET graduates). Telephone survey is the preferred method (70% of measures) and destination data is normally collected at a single measurement point (<one year after graduation). Most measures collect socio-demographic data, transitions to employment or further studies, field of study and occupation. In contrast, less than five measures collect qualitative data on graduate perceptions on quality of training received and relevance to employment. Data analysis is normally undertaken by Regional Departments for Education or by contractors. Quite strikingly, 48% of the measures analysed do not make their results publicly available.

While system level initiatives represent a good starting point for analysis, too little is known about the challenges of implementation at VET provider level. Consequently, a comprehensive framework of the relation of these two spheres is lacking.

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0001:0010:EN:PDF>

2 <https://www.eqavet.eu/EU-Quality-Assurance/For-VET-Providers/monitoring-your-system/evaluation/EQAVET-Indicators>

3 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H1209(01)&from=EN)

4 <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/00d61a86-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>



Methodological approach in survey analysis

The present study is based on a qualitative questionnaire, which was commonly agreed among the TRACKTION project partners. The survey (See Annex 1) is divided in two parts. The first section explores VET graduate tracking initiatives currently in place at school level. The second section puts the focus on alumni relations. The questions are both open-ended and closed-ended.

The survey was completed by nine VET schools from four European countries⁵. When deemed necessary, interviews with practitioners and regional or national authorities were undertaken to complete or clarify information provided in the survey. In the following sections, the analysis is divided into two areas:

1. **VET Graduate Tracking protocols**, with a closer look on
 - a. Political and institutional background
 - b. Actors involved
 - c. Process key features
 - d. Conclusions
2. **Alumni culture initiatives**, including details on
 - a. Process key features

The information boxes include examples and more detailed information about specific initiatives.

Graduate relations in VET schools

Political and Institutional Background

The nature and purpose of Graduate Tracking protocols at provider level depends on the specific national (or regional) context and legal requirements. For instance, VET schools in Estonia and Asturias region (Spain) have a legal obligation to gather and submit graduate destination data on a regular basis to respond to quality assurance and statistical purposes. In this case, all VET providers in that territory adhere to the same protocol designed by regional or national authorities. These protocols define the roles and responsibilities of actors involved, the type of data collected, as well as the frequency and timing of data collection.

This legal imperative on VET providers does not exist in the Netherlands, Basque Country and Italy. Yet VET graduate destinations are regularly surveyed in all these areas on the initiative of VET Schools (e.g. Cometa Formazione (IT), Alfa College (NL), CIFP Tolosaldea (ES), regional governments (Basque Country, Lombardy) or research institutions (The Netherlands). For instance, In Lombardy Region (Italy) the government has created a platform with information on graduates insertion in the labour market that is accessible for Job Agencies (in Italian: operatore accreditato ai servizi al lavoro).

⁵ Alfa-college (NL), Cometa Formazione (IT), Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre (EE), CIFP Comunicación, Imagen y Sonido (ES), CIFP Meka (ES), CIFP Tolosaldea (ES), IES Bidebieta (ES), IES Francisco de Vitoria (ES) and IES Escultor Juan de Villanueva (ES)



Code	Title	Scape (school/reg/nat)	Legal obligation for VET providers	Regular measure
ES1	VET Graduate Tracking protocol - FCT	Regional (Asturias)	Yes	Yes
ES2	Labour insertion of graduates in professional training - LANBIDE	Regional (Basque Country)	No	Yes
EE1	Graduate Tracking Protocol for VET Schools	National	Yes	Yes
EE2	National Graduate Survey	National	No	No
IT1	COMETA graduate tracking protocol	School	No	Yes
NL1	X-monitor	School	No	Yes
NL2	ROA School Leavers Survey	National	No	Yes

Table 3- Number and key features of protocols identified

Most of VET graduate tracking measures identified are conducted on a regular basis (yearly). The only exception to this rule is the Estonian National Graduate Survey (EE2) commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2017 to track destinations of VET leavers in 2015 and 2016.

Some of the protocols observed are long-established and widespread. In Asturias, Spain, all VET Schools apply the same protocol (ES1) defined by the Regional Department for Education in 2002. Other VET schools, like Alfa College (NL1), Cometa Formazione (IT1) are currently formalising their own approaches.

Strengths

- Legal obligation enables standardisation, and as a result comparability across schools in the same region, country.
- Tracer studies are done every year enabling comparisons with results from previous years.

Improvements

- Develop standardised protocols across regions/countries.

Table 4 - Context. Strengths and improvements



Actors Involved

Survey data shows that tracking procedures mirror a complex system due to the variety of actors involved. The division of tasks and roles of actors involved is influenced both by the policy context and single VET institution characteristics. As such, two basic patterns emerge:

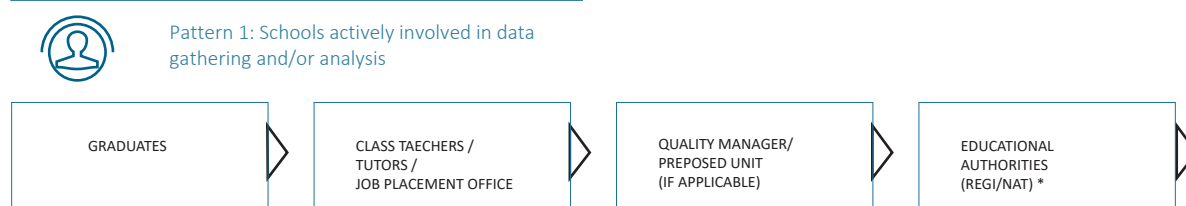


Figure 1 - Schools actively involved: Actors

In this pattern, graduates are normally contacted by their former class teachers or tutors.

Data is subsequently transmitted to a specific office or department within the school (eg. Quality Control Department, Employability Department, Job Placement Office) that is responsible for aggregation at institution level. Analysis of data can be either undertaken by regional or national authorities (eg. ES1, EE1) or carried out internally (e.g. NL1, IT1).

Alfa College (NL1) and Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre (EE1), have a dedicated office responsible for collecting, updating and analysing destination data and transmitting them to the responsible policy department.

Alumni tracking in Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre

In Estonia, all vocational education institutions are required by the Ministry of Education and Research to gather employment status information from their alumni six months after graduation. Class teachers contact former students either by e-mail or sometimes also by phone or Facebook Messenger.

The information is compiled into an Excel form and sent afterwards to the Quality Manager or the person in charge of tracking. Data is grouped based on the different vocational tracks and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Research. The average response rate has been consistently high (ca 90%) since the study was first conducted in 2013.

Cometa Formazione tracking system (IT1) relies on the informal relationship between the tutor and the student and on the Job Placement Office, which is currently the subject in charge of formally recording former students' destination.

The role played by the Work Placement Tutor is common to both Cometa Formazione and CFP Comunicaci3n, Imagen y Sonido, as these institutions are characterised by the presence of a specific department responsible for the graduates' entry in the labour market.



Pattern 2: Schools not actively involved in data gathering and/or analysis

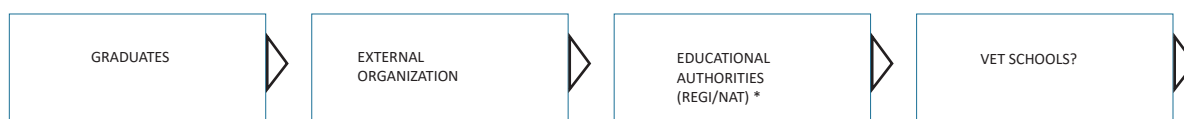


Figure 2 - Schools not actively involved: Actors

VET graduate tracking in Basque Country

LANBIDE, the Basque Employment Service conducts surveys about the movement of VET graduates in to the labour market . This survey, which is specifically about alumni employment situation, takes place between 15 and 18 months after graduation and collects a large amount of statistical data about labour market, unemployment, job-seekers, job vacancies, hiring, entry to the labour market and affiliation to the Social Security. Information provided by graduates is combined with administrative data taken from EUSTAT, the Basque Institute of Statistics.

Strengths

- Protocols define clear duties and roles for all actors involved.
- Teachers are key actors in the data collection process.

Improvements

- Decrease reliance on informal teacher-student relationships.
- Engage employers in tracking protocols.

Strengths and improvements

Process: Key Features

This section summarises the most relevant features of the identified protocols drawing some general conclusions on the main pillars of graduate tracking.

Graduates included & Sampling Approaches

All measures but one (NL2) put the focus exclusively on IVET graduates. Usually the VET graduate tracking measures identified refer to the total reference population, that is to say all graduates are surveyed. The only exception is X-Monitor (NL1) that chose a sample of 600 VET students.

ES1 - Total Reference Population

Asturias tracks the destination of all IVET leavers since 2002. A phone survey is carried out to elicit basic information about the employment status and occupation of previous year graduates. By way of example, in year 2016 the total reference population was 4330 graduates and 3485 completed the survey. This high response rate (80.5%) may be partly explained by the fact that graduates are contacted by their former teachers only six months after graduation so that students do still have a bond with the place where they undertook training. The protocol design distributes an otherwise massive surveying effort evenly across schools and teachers (work placement tutors). Each tutor is responsible for contacting a small batch of students. All VET schools aggregate and submit data to regional authorities on a yearly basis via an online platform (Web-FCT) provided by the Department for Education.



Strengths

- Measures specifically designed for IVET graduates.
- All last year graduates are targeted avoiding selection bias.

Improvements

- Track the destinations of graduates from different types of education to allow comparisons with different groups of people (eg. Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), dropouts, CVET, HE graduates...).
- Ensure the use of representative samples at VET-provider level or for specific study pro-

Table 5 - Sampling approaches: Strengths and improvements

Main data collected

There is also considerable differences across the nine VET institutions in terms of the range of type of questions asked of VET graduates. The table below compares the type of data collected with the indicators proposed in the “Proposal for a Council Recommendation on tracking graduates”.

Type of indicator	Indicators in the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on tracking measures	ES1	ES2	EE1	EE2	IT1	NL1	NL2
Indicators on individual background	Socio-biographical and socio-economic information	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Study intensity							
Indicators on completed studies	Study method							
	Qualifications					•		•
	Credits received							
	Field of study	•	•	•	•	•		•
Indicators on graduates' destinations	Transition to employment or further education and training	•	•	•	•	•		•
	Earnings		•		•	•		•
	Type of contract		•			•		
	Employment status	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Occupation, professional status and/or activity	•	•		•	•	•	•
	Geographical and/or sectoral mobility				•		•	
	Relevance of study to employment		•		•		•	•
	Participation in volunteering or civic engagement activities							
	Career progression and satisfaction							•
	Perceptions of the quality and relevance of their education and training experience		•	•	•		•	•

Table 6- Type of data collected



Indicators on socio-economic background

Socio-biographical and socio-economic information are covered by all the measures identified. All of them collect and store contact and personal details (birth date, nationality etc.) from students during the enrolment process. However, some differences are observed. For example, VET Schools in Asturias (ES1) also collect additional data on living arrangements (if they live with their parents) and family size (large family). Cometa Formazione (IT1) asks graduates if they have an own car.

Indicators on completed studies

Bearing in mind that most schools in the sample are involved in the collection of data, details on completed studies are easily retrieved by accessing students' database. This may be the main reason why these questions are missing from the VET tracking protocols.

Indicators on graduate destinations

The most common type of data collected sheds light on the transition to employment and/or further studies as well as current employment status (employed, self-employed, unemployed). Yet, only two of measures (ES2, IT1) elicit information on job quality (eg: type of contract (permanent/temporary, part-time/full-time) and earnings). Similarly, data on geographical mobility of graduates is only collected by two protocols (NL1, EE2).

Questions like "Is your job closely related to your course of study?" may be considered as proxies of relevance of study to employment but the satisfaction rate of graduates with acquired skills or competences is only addressed in depth in ES2, EE2, NL1, NL2. In the case of Graduate Tracking Protocol for Estonian VET Schools (EE1), Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre collects such data using an additional online survey.

It appears that surveys undertaken by external organisations gather more in-depth information on VET graduates destinations. However, this may have a negative impact on the response rate. Extended questionnaires may be off-putting, if not daunting, for respondents. The lack of an emotional bond with the interviewer, the method chosen and the timing of data collection may also represent factors at play in explaining variation in response rates.

	EE 1	EE 2
Method	Telephone survey	Online questionnaire
Commissioned by	Ministry of Education and Research	Ministry of Education and Research
Data collected by	School teachers	External organisation
Data granularity/level of detail	coarse-grained	fine-grained
Response rate	c. 90%	14%

Table 7- Variations in response rate in Estonia



Strengths	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ All VET graduate tracking measures include education and employment indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Gather more in-depth information on leavers' destinations.➤ Ensure coverage of qualitative aspects regarding satisfaction, expectations, and reasons informing choices.

Table 8- Type of data: Strengths and improvements

Data collection approach

Survey vs administrative data

Destinations data is mainly collected via graduate surveys. However, administrative registers grant automatic access to accurate and updated data on career progression whereas survey-data adds qualitative insights. The combination of administrative data (eg. Tax, Employment Office records) and survey data for VET graduate tracking enables a more detailed and precise analysis of the reasons behind career pathways, as well as the smoothness of the transition into the labour market.

Among the participant schools, only Cometa Formazione (IT1) has access to administrative data.

Data gathered by Cometa Formazione (IT1)

Cometa Formazione, based in Lombardy, uses a regional website (database) to collect the majority of information concerning the former student current status. The information is linked to the alphanumeric tax code of former students. Cometa Formazione has access to the regional platform due to its Job Placement Office's judicial status: in fact, it can be compared to a Job Agency (e.g. Employment centre).

Thus, a first batch of administrative data on graduates' destinations is easily retrieved from the regional platform. Shortly after, the Job Placement office contact former students on the phone. This second step is an opportunity to collect additional information such as address, age, with own car, internships made, disability, date of last update of employment situation, expiry date of contract, remuneration, company, placement sector, etc. Concerning this platform, it may be highlighted that the main weakness consists in the limited access to information since the latter concerns only alumni employed in Lombardy Region and not in other Italian regions.

Tools

VET schools reported the use of a variety of communication tools (e-mail, WhatsApp, online questionnaires) but phone is generally considered as the most effective tool to reach graduates. Quite interestingly, response rates are consistently high (almost 80%). Regardless of the communication channel used, data is fed into a database, whose nature can be extremely diverse. All VET schools in Asturias (ES1) region enter data in an online platform (Web-FCT) enabling aggregation at regional level. Alfa-college (NL1) uses SurveyMonkey, whereas Cometa Formazione (IT1) feeds data into an Excel File.

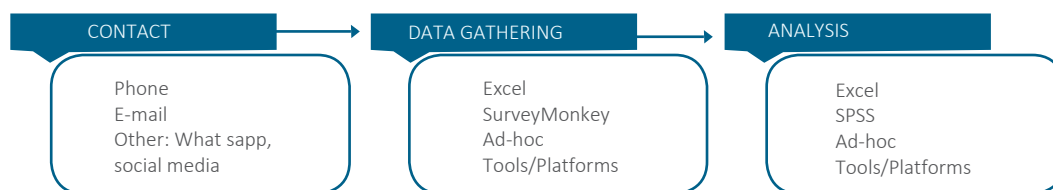


Figure 3 – Tools

Strengths	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Largely a survey-based activity. ➤ Response rates are consistently high (<80%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve procedures for collecting updated contact information. ➤ Make use of administrative registers and increase the links with survey-based data.

Table 9 - Tools: Strengths and improvements

Timing and frequency of data collection

As observed in the table below, VET institutions tend to contact graduates just once after graduation. In a constantly changing and complex labour market, young adults' pathways into work are far from smooth, in fact school-to-work transitions can be extremely complicated and fractured⁶. Bearing in mind this sheer complexity and variability, the timing and frequency of tracking begs fundamental rethinking.



Measure Code	Measurement points (Single/Multiple)	Timing (before graduation)	Timing (after graduation)
ES1	Single	-	6 months
ES2	Single	-	18 months
EE1	Single	-	6 months
EE2	Single	-	12 months (last year graduates) 24 months (graduated two years ago)
IT1	Multiple	-	3, 6, 9 and 12 months (last year graduates) Twice a year (former graduates)
NL1	Multiple	2 months	6 months
NL2	Single	-	18 months

Table 10 - Timing and frequency of data collection

⁶ <https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/schools-and-the-twenty-first-century-labour-market-perspectives-on-structural-change/>



Frequency and Timing

Having a single, and probably premature (<1year), measurement point may be adequate for the purpose of capturing entry into the labour market(first job) but not on career progression (first job vs first relevant job). The specific features of different professional sectors do also deserve careful consideration (e.g. seasonality may strongly influence the tracking results in the Catering & Food sector).

This single measurement point results in a static, and maybe premature picture of the complex nature of career trajectories of graduates. It does neither allow a timely matching in case of job offers. Where no other alumni services are in place, there is also an evident risk of losing contact with graduates Cometa Formazione (IT1) represents an exception to the rule.

Cometa Formazione (IT1): Tracking graduates at multiple measurement points

Last year graduates (graduated in June of the year before) are contacted every three months after graduation whereas the older graduates are tracked twice a year. This enables an updated picture of the graduates' current employment situation and career progression as well as a better estimate of the economic and social benefits of VET.

Should tracking start before graduation?

The expectations, career prospects and previous experiences of students before graduation are useful pieces of information. Comparing this data with the choices they make after graduation yields better insights into transition pathways. The only example recorded is summarised below.

Alfa College (NL1): Tracking students before and after graduation

Students at Alfa College are asked to complete a digital survey before graduation. The purpose is twofold. On the one hand, it lays the foundation to build a network of alumni by asking students if they would like to be contacted after graduation and how. On the other, it captures valuable information on students perceptions on the quality of career guidance provided by the school as well as their career prospects and plans for the near future. At the time of the survey a sample of 600 students responded to the survey before graduation. The school intends to contact them again six months after graduation.

Strengths	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tracking is done regularly (yearly).First career choices are adequately captured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase the number of measurement points after graduation.Include a measurement point before graduation to collect data on student expectations.

Table 11- Timing and frequency of tracking

Data published

As the table shows, regional or national level measures (ES1, ES2, EE1, EE2, NL2) release summary reports and/or raw data. Alfa College (NL1) and Cometa Formazione (IT1) data is for internal use only, although reports are delivered to different educational teams within the school.



Measure Code	Link to summary report
ES1	http://www.magma-store.com/consejo/ficheros/documentos/1519200019.1935_Memoria_2016_CAFP_.pdf
ES2	http://www.lanbide.euskadi.eus/estadistica/insercion-laboral-de-los-titulados-en-formacion-profesional-en-2016/y94-estadist/es/
EE1	https://www.haridussilm.ee/
EE2	https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/uuringud/lopparuanne_0.pdf
IT1	internal use only
NL1	internal use only
NL2	http://roa.sbe.maastrichtuniversity.nl/roanew/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ROA_F_2017_2E.pdf

Table 12- Data publication

Concerns over the user-friendliness of some of the reports have been recently aired in the “Mapping of VET Graduate Tracking measures in EU Member States”⁷ (EC, 2017). In some cases the information is too comprehensive and complicated to understand for the lay reader and/or key stakeholders (teachers, students, graduates). On the opposite end of the spectrum, some reports (eg. ES1) simply include tables and graphs with percentages of graduates’ employment status with little or no interpretation of findings.

In the cases of Estonia (EE2), Basque Country (ES2) and the Netherlands (NL2) raw data is also made publicly available for third parties potentially interested in undertaking additional analysis.

School Leavers Information System (The Netherlands)⁸

“School Leavers Information System (SIS) aims to provide a monitoring tool for the transition from school to work across the full breadth of education. Design, implementation and management of SIS are based on the ROA.

In addition to the quality assurance instrument for educational institutions, the data should primarily serve as a nationally representative data source whose social and scientific significance lies in increasing the understanding of the transition from school to work. The latter is reflected in the publication of generally accessible, national reports, which are compiled annually by the ROA. In addition, the data is used for additional, often more specific analysis on behalf of third parties.”

In any case, the results of regional/national level surveys (ES1, ES2, EE1, EE2) do not always reach schools. Even teachers who are directly involved in the data collection phase remain largely unaware of the publication of findings or how to access this information.

⁷ <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/00d61a86-48fc-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>

⁸ <http://roa.sbe.maastrichtuniversity.nl/?portfolio=school-leaver-surveys>



Strengths

- Data is publicly available and released in different formats.

Improvements

- Go beyond the mere description of data and averages in the interpretation of findings.
- Inform potential key stakeholders of the existing data.
- Release short reports for graduates, teachers and schools to facilitate the use of data in decision making.

Table 13 - Publication of data: Strengths and improvements

Use of data

VET graduate tracking data is mainly gathered for administrative and statistical purposes in the schools surveyed. In line with EQAVET recommendations, four schools gather destinations data for quality assurance purposes. Only two schools acknowledge the use of statistics on employment outcomes as a marketing tool. The use of graduate tracking data for career guidance is also a rare occurrence in the schools consulted. Other purposes included establishing a sustainable relationship with alumni and the management of job-matching processes by having access to updated information on the employment situation of graduates. Graduate tracking data informs changes in the programme design in Alfa College (NL), Cometa Formazione (IT) and Pärnuma (EE).



	EE		ES					IT	NL
TRACKING PURPOSE	PAR	CIS	ESC	FDV	TOL	BID	MEK	COM	ALF
Institutional or national quality assurance	•			•				•	•
Marketing				•	•				
Admin & statistical purposes	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	
Student counselling					•		•		
Student retention	•								•
Allocation of resources							•		
Programme design	•							•	•
Other					•	•			•

Table 14 - Reported purposes of tracking

Data protection and accessibility

Concerns over data protection have been repeatedly aired but at the time of the survey implementation (spring 2018), compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)⁹ was a work in progress in all schools surveyed. However, it can be said that national, regional and/or institutional background may have different implications for compliance with GDPR. For instance, no consent may be needed if the processing of data is done for public interest purposes. In any case, the new data subject rights and rules governing those rights introduced by this piece of legislation requires producing a privacy notice explaining giving information to graduates about how their survey response data will be processed.

9 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en



GDPR compliance at Alfa-College

Since May 2016, the data protection regulation General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been in effect in the Netherlands. However, since 25th of May 2018, it is possible for any individual request organizations to comply with the GDPR. Alfa-college provides students in their final year a summary of the categories of data being processed once they leave school and a copy of the actual data. Further details about the processing of data, such as:

- a) the purpose,
 - b) with whom the data are shared and
 - c) how the data were obtained are briefly explained.
- Graduates are entitled to request the removal of personal data.

Do you want to stay in contact with Alfa-college? *



- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Alfa-college uses this data to contact you for (future) opportunities to stay in touch, send newsletters and/or to send you questionnaires.*

Alfa-college does not distribute data with people outside our organization and you can have your contact details deleted at all times by contacting us.

Example text X-monitor

Strengths

- Data is publicly available and released in different formats.

Improvements

- Improve the capacity to act on data.
- Consider factors other than education/training that might explain the result. (eg. Labour Market Information).
- Resolve issues regarding the application of GDPR.

Table 15 - Use of data: Strengths and improvements



Conclusions

All project partners track IVET graduates in a regular way. Protocols cover employment and education indicators and use surveys to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The scope is different according to policy and institutional background. Alfa-College (NL1) and Cometa Formazione (IT1) have their own tracking protocol; PKHK (EE1) and VET schools from Asturias (ES1) follow the guidelines defined by national and regional educational authorities; and regional employment authorities develop the measure from Basque Country (ES2). Longitudinal measures are rarely implemented. Only Cometa Formazione (IT1) uses multiple measurement points after graduation, whereas Alfa-College (NL1) gathers pre-graduation data.

The main key features of protocols identified are summarised below:



Code	Data collection approach ¹⁰	Scope ¹¹	Graduates included ¹²	Sampling approach ¹³	Measurement points ¹⁴	Timing	Type of data ¹⁵
ES1	Survey	Regional	IVET	Total	Single	6 months	Precise
ES2	Survey	Regional	IVET	Total	Single	18 months	Precise
EE1	Survey	National	IVET	Total	Single	6 months	Precise
EE2	Survey	National	IVET	Total	Single	12 months (last year graduates) 24 months (graduated two years ago)	Precise Precise
IT1	Survey and administrative data	Provider	IVET	Total	Multiple	3, 6, 9 and 12 months (last year graduates)	Precise
NL1	Survey	Provider	IVET	Sample	Multiple	Twice a year (former graduates) 2 months before graduation and 6 months after graduation	Precise
NL2	Survey	National	School Leavers (SEC, IVET, HE)	Sample	Single	18 months	Precise

Table 16 - Key features of sample of graduate tracking protocols

¹⁰ Data collection approach: survey/administrative data

¹¹ Scope: national/regional/sectoral/provider/other.

¹² Graduates included: Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET)/Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET).

¹³ Sampling approach: total reference population of the VET graduate tracking measure/sample.

¹⁴ Measurement points: single/multiple measurement point.

¹⁵ Type of data: precise/broad categories.



Tracer studies are an excellent way to record graduates' opinions' on the quality culture of VET schools, but a word of caution is needed about the extent to which graduates' feedback should influence the VET provision/system. This report has highlighted the strengths of the measures in place but also some of the shortcomings. So the three key insights on the use of data are:

- 1) It would be unwise for VET providers/authorities to reform curricula and course content solely based on coarse-grained data collected at a single measurement point shortly after graduation.
- 2) While most of the measures target the total reference population of graduates with good response rates, the number of responses may still be too small to derive any conclusions on causality or generalisation, particular at VET provider or VET course/team level.
- 3) Last but not least, there is a high risk of misinterpreting results if destination tracking is considered in isolation to measure of the value of learning¹⁶. Avoiding the risk of misinterpretation requires incorporating a wider range of context variables like unemployment rate, economic structure and economic cycle, employment and skills forecasts, individual motivations inside the carried out investigation.

¹⁶ <http://www.neweconomymanchester.com/media/1042/new-economy-destinations-report-189-mb.pdf>



Alumni relations in VET schools

As stated in the introduction, tracking graduates and building a sustainable alumni culture cannot be seen as two separate worlds, since they are strictly interconnected and interdependent. Consequently, institutional efforts to engage with former students may pave the way for better and more consistent tracking. While graduate tracking is sometimes prescribed by educational authorities, decisions to build efficient alumni relations are essentially made at VET-provider level and different strategies may be observed. All VET schools highlighted the desire of enhancing and developing this pillar. The recorded responses can be found in the following section.

Process: Key features

Motivations to engage alumni

VET schools in the survey share the same kind of motivations for starting alumni relations. Former students are seen as valuable allies and key sources of information to enhance study programmes and improve career guidance services. Pärnumaa VET school (PAR) alumni cooperate in the development of school curriculum. For example, it is quite common set up a workgroup with Hairdressing graduates to discuss improvements in hairdressing courses.

Alfa-college: connecting with alumni

From Alfa-college's perspective, being in contact with the business community is of great importance to keep abreast of the latest developments and therefore respond quickly to newly requested competences and skills. To stay in contact with employers, Alfa-college uses both a formal approach (via business organizations) and an informal one (via former students and alumni). As far as technology education is concerned, alumni are highly valuable, since they are involved in workshops, guest talks and company visits. Practically speaking, they also assist in developing new training material or give feedback on the curriculum that the school implements. Teaching material is made by the professors themselves and students opinions are taken into account.

This enables Alfa-college to develop an effective teaching method that meets the needs of the business community. Through the involvement of former students, the school remains informed and connected with companies in an informal way. From alumni perspective, the involvement in the curriculum development represents the start of life-long learning. Alfa-college starts building alumni relations with the students in the last year of the program by involving them, for instance, in business-to-business meetings.



Raising awareness of the multi-faceted nature of alumni relations

Without creating a sense of co-responsibility and leveraging on the “give-back” sensitivity, it is extremely difficult to build a network of long-term relations. Only by implementing a strong cultural paradigm change, the strategy can be sustainable in the long run. The paradigm change relies on considering students not only as passive recipients of services provided by the school but as potential future partners. This perspective facilitates the creation of a community with strong and sustainable foundations. Furthermore, a constant interaction with students and alumni may enhance VET Schools’ capacity to respond “on-time” to the market needs. As a result, it is crucial to make sure students leave the school with a clear idea on the multiple roles they could play as alumni. Updated information on job openings and further training opportunities will undoubtedly continue having a central role in alumni relations programmes but that should not be the only reason to stay in touch with their former school. Their active contribution will be largely valuable in areas such as programme/curricular design and career guidance.

Alumni relations at Pärnumaa VET school (Estonia)

Students usually establish a link with class teachers who usually invite them to participate in different school activities when they graduate. The alumni network relies on the initiative of individual teachers to maintain informal contact with former students. Graduates are involved in different school activities, such as:

- Judges in skills competitions.
- Sponsors of school events.
- Guest speaker with students of the same specialty of studies.
- Graduate meetings every five years (dinner, concert...etc.).
- Participant in professional networking events (e.g. vocational education conference)
- Internship/Job Placement mentor (only self-employed graduates)

Keeping in touch: Creating and maintaining alumni database

Schools reported some interesting actions to stay in touch with alumni, but they often lack a clear strategy and a more structured approach. Only a few restricted attempts at network creation have been registered, such as “MTÜ Tihemetsa Vilistlane” alumni association from Pärnumaa VET school, which was initiated by forestry and gardening alumni and is currently managed by teachers. More often than not, alumni relations tend to rely, perhaps excessively, on the personal relationship established between the tutor and former students. This makes it very difficult to create and maintain an alumni database at institutional level.

Most effective channels

Phone and e-mail are considered as the most effective channels to maintain contact. However, schools admit contact may be lost as soon as graduates change their phone number or e-mail address. Some VET providers (eg. Alfa College) have started experimenting with Whatsapp groups with some promising results. The use of professional social networks (eg. LinkedIn) is seldom reported.



Range of activities

VET Schools are not obliged to establish an alumni relations programme. Consequently, the importance attached to this topic and the range of activities reflect the individual developmental stage of each school. In any case, the list of services offered is quite similar among VET institutions. Job-matching is definitely on the top of the list with alumni receiving updated information on job openings and training events. Pärnumaa VET school taps into the alumni network for the recruitment of VET teachers. Some schools go the extra mile providing additional services such as start-up support. The example below illustrates the portfolio of alumni services reported by one of the schools:

Alumni relations at CIFP Comunicación, Imagen y Sonido (CISLAN) VET School (Spain)

CISLAN has put four broad types of action in place:

Job-matching platform¹⁷: through this tool, the school posts vacancies on a weekly basis and students can apply for a specific job. Even employers have direct access to this platform and are able to post job offers. This platform is accessible for other VET providers too. However, graduates and employers seem reluctant to use it.

Alumni website¹⁸ with 400 registered users receiving updated news and events.

Business start-up support (CISLAB)¹⁹ : This service is provided in collaboration with Valnalon, a business incubator located nearby. Alumni willing to set up their own company have access to expert advice and training.

Informal activities: company visits, expert talks by former students.

In any case, teachers in charge of alumni relations report several obstacles such as the lack of funds, time, and trained staff to devise and implement a systematic, coherent and sustainable alumni relations strategy.

While keeping in touch with alumni is a task for VET providers, regional or national authorities can nudge schools into action as evidenced in the following example:

Urratsbat - Business incubation units at Basque VET Schools²⁰

URRATSBAT is a regional business start-up support programme promoted by the Deputy Ministry of Vocational Education and Training of the Basque Country and coordinated by TKNIKA. The goal is to encourage and support VET students and alumni to create their own company. Urratsbat aims to convert VET schools into incubation units. If the business projects require it, alumni are able to use further facilities such as school workshops to design the prototypes of the product at study stage. The in-house incubation unit is run by specifically trained staff, normally a VET teacher, whose role is to raise awareness about self-employment as a real way of getting access to the labour market and guide and support users in the business planning phase. The service is available for final year VET students, alumni and any person related to the school through non-formal training system or distance training.

The teacher in charge of the program implementation, contacts via phone the alumni between September and December to know if the company is still active. Then, each Urratsbat responsible of each centre uploads the information to Ekingune Platform, whose responsible is TKNIKA.

17 www.trabajaFP.es

18 <https://cislanalumni.wordpress.com/>

19 <http://cislal.es/tag/cislab/>

20 <http://ekingune.tknika.net/urratsbat>



Keeping in touch: Creating and maintaining alumni database

Data protection regulations need to be taken into consideration. Alumni relations programmes collect and use personal data so they are also impacted by the recently approved General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)²¹. Some schools have already planned for this, as shown in the example below.

GDPR compliance at Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre (Estonia)

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has recently released a comprehensive guide²² to support the implementation of GDPR in schools. According to guidance material (In Estonian, „Isikuandmete kaitse üldmääruse rakendamine haridusasutustes. Juhendmaterjal“) educational institutions are entitled to process the personal data of students on the basis of consent/permission. When people apply to Pärnumaa Vocational Education Centre they give permission in their application that they agree on using their data for study and analysis purposes. In the case of alumni, publication is allowed without prior consent (except for students who have special needs) as long as the data subjects are informed of their rights regarding erasure of data.



21 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en

22 <https://media.voog.com/0000/0034/3577/files/Isikuandmete%20kaitse%20%C3%BCldm%C3%A4%C3%A4ruse%20rakendamise%20juhend270418.pdf>

Next Steps

Graduate Tracking

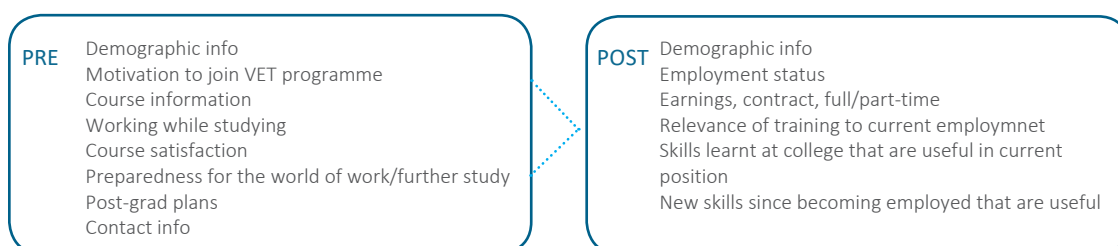


The conclusions derived from this baseline study will inform the design of a new tracking protocol. The resulting procedure will be a step forward only if the following aspects are considered:

- It should meet existing data requirements;
- It should build on the strengths of protocols already in place;
- It should overcome some of the key obstacles identified.

An online questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative questions will collect destinations' data from a small sample composed of one hundred VET students of the last school year at each VET school. The timing of data collection differs in each school but all VET students taking part in the pilot will be surveyed between 4 to 2 months pre-graduation before graduation and 6 to 12 months after graduation.

The new graduate tracking protocol aims to capture a variety of employment and education data. Expectations, career prospects and previous experiences of students before graduation will be collected. After graduation, the protocol will gather data on graduates' destinations in terms of both employment and further education and training. Qualitative aspects regarding satisfaction on quality and relevance of training received, quality of employment obtained and career progression opportunities will also be collected.



The protocol will also facilitate the tracking data availability and comparability across schools. In the first piloting phase (2018-2019), the protocol will be put to test in three VET Schools: Alfa College (NL), Cometa Formazione (IT) and PKHK (EE).

Ultimately, the protocol is expected to improve graduate tracking processes and as a result, positively impact quality assurance systems in participant schools, particularly in connection with EQA-VET indicators 5 and 6. This enriched dataset may serve as basis for future planning enabling VET institutions to flexibly adapt to the rapidly changing market conditions.

Alumni relations

Baseline results suggest that the sustainability of an alumni relations network and effective tracking measures represent two strongly interrelated aspects. Building on Gaebel, M. et al (2012), the ability to communicate with graduates represents the pivotal tool to reach the double-faceted aim of building sustainable long-term alumni relations and facilitate the tracking process. Consequently, leveraging on the human relational aspect while students are still at school may be a necessary first step to maintain contact and a fruitful relation after graduation.

The design of a long-standing strategy should rely on a combination of consistent tracking measures and a coherent portfolio of alumni services. Initial efforts should be directed at community-building that entails creating a sense of belonging and strengthen the relational bond with the school. Otherwise, students' and graduates will passively use the opportunities and services provided by the school until graduation or until they find a job.

Are there any existing or proposed systematic initiatives to track the progress of VET graduates into employment after their studies?

(e.g. surveys or collections of administrative data on time between graduation and employment, job characteristics, etc.)

Could you briefly describe them?

(e.g. how often do you track, coverage of graduate population, spread among VET institutions, other characteristics)

Who commissions the collection of data?

Who carries out the data collection?

Who is the questionnaire for? (ISCED/EQF level 1-5)

Is the questionnaire different for the various levels? If yes, please describe the differences.

How do you do the tracking? Please explain in detail.

(eg. phone calls, online, survey, etc.)

Are you expected to send your data to local/ regional/ national authorities?

Which topics are covered in your tracking tool?

1. Current status (employment, education, training, etc.), 2. Satisfaction with education and training, 3. Contact details, etc.

For what purposes is the collected data used?

- ☐ Institutional or national quality assurance
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Administrative and statistical purposes
- ☐ Student counselling
- ☐ Student retention
- ☐ Allocation of resources
- ☐ Programme design
- ☐ Other:

Which are the strengths of your tracking initiatives?

Which are the weaknesses of your tracking initiatives?

Which do you think are the opportunities or threats in the implementation of your tracking initiatives?

Do you have any initiative to keep in touch with your alumni? Please, describe them briefly.
(e.g. alumni database, alumni associations, alumni facilities)

Which are your institution main motivations to start alumni relations?

- ☐ Fund-raising
- ☐ Enhancement of study programmes
- ☐ Information on career paths
- ☐ Mentoring
- ☐ Other:

What do you offer your alumni?

- ☐ Info on events
- ☐ Job opportunities
- ☐ Access to incubation facilities
- ☐ Networking
- ☐ Other:

Which are the most effective channels to maintain contact?

- ☐ Social networks (Facebook, Instagram...)
- ☐ Professional social networks (LinkedIn, Twitter, ...)
- ☐ Online surveys
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ E-mail
- ☐ Other:

Which are the strengths of your alumni initiatives?

Which are the weaknesses of your alumni initiatives?

Do you see opportunities or threats in the implementation of alumni initiatives?

Are there sources of further information on your alumni initiatives you would like to share with us?

(e.g. reports, web sites, etc.)

Name and Surname:

Position:

E-mail:

Phone:

Do you know of any other initiatives, which could be relevant to mention?

Could you provide us with suggestions of persons and organisations to be contacted for further information on the issue?

(e.g. another VET school, policy makers, academics)

Name of the expert	Institution	Links to websites

TRACITION

Contact person(s) at your organisation

Do you have any further comments?

How do you rate the questions?

- ☐ very easy
- ☐ easy
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ difficult
- ☐ very difficult

Do you recommend this survey for self-evaluation in the future?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ no

TRACITION

Further information



Adapted from:

"Tracking Learners' and Graduates' Progression Paths (TRACKIT)" European University Association 2012

Further Reading



Berger-Voigt, B., & Overell, S. (2015). Moving on: Destination Tracking and the Value of Further Education.

European Commission (2017). Mapping of VET graduate measures in EU Member States. Brussels.

European Commission (2017). Proposal for a council recommendation on tracking graduates. Brussels.

Gaebel, M., Hauschildt, K., Mühleck, K., & Smidt, H. (2012). Tracking learners' and graduates' progression paths TRACKIT. Brussels: European University Association.

Schomburg, H. (2016). Carrying out tracer studies: Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs.Vol 6. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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