I hope that you will enjoy using this ‘Employer Engagement Guide’ that offers resources, solutions and best practice examples on how schools and employers can work together in order to prepare young people for the world of work. The guide offers support to schools and employers who are seeking opportunities to strengthen or establish new partnerships and improve the quality of secondary education.

We have developed the guide as part of the project ‘Employer Engagement and reform of Vocational Education and Training in the Western Balkans’ which is implemented by the British Council and is funded by Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The project covers Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro with the aim of supporting reform of vocational education. As part of this project we have worked side by side with policy makers to deliver new policies and standards in VET. We have supported the process of establishing Sector Skills Councils. Together with UK partners we have facilitated the setting up of employer sector forums. We have delivered leadership training for head-teachers from vocational schools. We have worked closely with both schools and employers in order to establish new apprenticeships for students.

Finally, we have developed this guide for employer engagement that I hope will help you to establish effective school-employer partnerships. These partnerships will help you to align education with the future needs of employers, and will improve young peoples’ job prospects.

Her Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia
His Excellency Mr Denis Keefe CMG
It only takes a cursory glance in a local newspaper or on the internet to see that we are living in a globalised society. The reasons and impacts of this are wide and varied. We all live in a globalised world where products and services can be manufactured in multiple different locations and sold to markets anywhere in the world. This global view drives demand for products and services to be adapted, updated and adjusted at a fast pace, to ensure that they respond to the needs of their customers.

Like the businesses and organisations that produce goods and services for these markets, vocational education equally needs to be able to adjust and change to ensure that the skills and knowledge that they are developing in young people are those which enable them to enter this fast-paced, increasingly dynamic workplace. Many schools and educational providers across the Western Balkans already work hard to engage with employers in their local area, and have developed links which ensure that students can gain and learn from positive new work experiences. These opportunities are based on schools and employers working together.

But how can this be achieved? The world of formal education is very different from that of commercial business and employment with differing pressures and priorities. At first a link may seem unattainable. However, with a little thought and imagination, positive, productive partnerships and relationships can be formed.

This guide has been split across seven sections, each of which covers a key area of employer engagement.
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SETTING THE SCENE
WHY SCHOOLS NEED TO ENGAGE

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE ABOUT?
This short handbook has been written to help both head teachers and vocational teachers working across the Western Balkans to identify how employers and industry local to them can be engaged with and encouraged to work with vocational schools. The guide presents a wide range of ideas obtained from real examples from both across the Western Balkans and from the UK, where employer engagement has worked and is having a positive impact on the outcomes of their students.

It is acknowledged that not all of the ideas proposed and described within these pages will work for you and your particular school. You may have even tried some of them before. But, it is important to recognise that any successful employer engagement activity needs to be a ‘win win’ solution. In fact, it needs to be a ‘win win win’ scenario with the benefits being equally felt by the students, vocational schools and the employers. Therefore, by adjusting what you currently do, or by adopting some of the ideas presented in this guide book, it is suggested that a more productive and effective relationship with industry can be formed.

WHO HAS PRODUCED THIS GUIDE?
This has been developed as part of the project ‘Employer Engagement and reform of Vocational Education and Training in the Western Balkans’ funded by Foreign & Commonwealth office and is implemented by the British Council with a goal to support co-operation between vocational schools and employers in the Western Balkans. The overall aim of the project is to improve young peoples’ job prospects through ensuring that vocational education and training equips young people with skills that meet the expressed needs of employers in the region. These are challenges which the UK education system has faced for at least the past 20 years, and has therefore developed a great deal of experience and knowledge. The guide aims to inspire head-teachers, teachers and employers to establish or strengthen co-operation with employers and the wider community in order to prepare young people for world of work.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

The guide has been written to act as a ‘handbook’, with content not only stimulating new ideas, but also providing you with tools and processes to follow to help you develop successful employer engagement interventions. You should feel free to cut, share and copy the content and use it to help inform meetings with colleagues and of course with employers themselves.

To help with this approach, the guide is divided into short sections, focusing on proposing different activities and also guidance in regards to how these plans can be achieved. The guide also contains a number of case studies which help to illustrate the impact that employer engagement can have as well as how successful partnerships have been achieved.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide has been written to help head teachers consider and plan methods for developing a closer relationship between their schools and local employers and for teachers who deliver vocational subjects understand what specific activities can be planned. You may be a junior teacher, a head of a school or department or an individual with responsibility to organise student work experience placements with employers. Likewise, you could be a teacher who specifically deals with vocational subject matter.

The guide can also be of assistance to employers working within industry who wish to develop positive and productive working relationships with either an individual vocational school or a group of schools. Some of the resources from this guide, employers can use to attract young people to work in their industry and/or business. Guide will also help to highlight some of the activities employers may undertake so that more up-to-date content is being taught and practised in the schools that prepare students for the world of work and the challenges that schools can face when organising employer engagement activities.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR INDUSTRY?

At first glance, the world of vocational education and the world of business and industry may appear very different. Schools will be focusing on working with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and, over a number of years, aiming to develop their capability as citizens.

Business and industry on the other hand will be focused on the needs of their customers and ensuring that the products and services that they produce can meet their expectations and sold at a price that makes the business viable. Surely such a business does not have time to work with
local schools? Likewise, why might a school teacher spend time talking to a local business?

So, on the surface it appears that developing a productive partnership with local industry may appear to be hard to achieve. However, the worlds of education and industry are actually much closer than you might initially think.

Businesses and public sector employers are faced with the challenge of recruiting skilled and motivated people to work within them. Therefore, the role that schools can play in helping to address this need is very important.

**Example 1:**

**G1 Group – Taste Programme, Scotland**

The G1 Group is a hospitality business which runs a number of restaurants, bars and hotels across Scotland. The group also incorporates the Tennent’s Training Academy, a dedicated hospitality industry training provider which supports a range of other hospitality businesses. They offer training courses relating to food preparation, bar service, legislative training and managerial skills programmes.

The G1 Group recognises the importance of attracting young, talented people into the hospitality sector and has over the past few years run the ‘TASTE Programme’ which offers young people in schools the opportunity to learn more about job roles in the industry. A key point of the programme is to highlight the fun that can be had working in the sector. The TASTE Programme has now been run in a number of schools across Scotland, engaging a number of different employers both large and small.

As an example, in January 2016 a TASTE Programme was run in a secondary school in Dundee. This two-day event provided students with hands-on workshops on making ‘mocktails’ (cocktails which do not contain alcohol), front-of-house service and cook-off style masterclasses with top Scottish chefs. A total of 220 pupils aged 14–18 took part, with the aim of considering the hospitality and tourism industry as a potential career option when they leave school.

Tennent’s Training Academy Director Stephanie Wade said: ‘We’ve had 110 pupils take part each day. We’re going to do some practical skills master classes, so they’re going to learn how to do some cooking, how to be a bartender, how to make coffee, real practical skills that they need to go out into the world of work.’
'We hope that by the end they might consider a career in hospitality industry. But if they don’t that’s OK – they’ll have had a real fun day.'

The TASTE Programme was developed following the publication of a Scottish Government report ‘Developing the Young Workforce’, which indicated that employers and education should work more closely in an effort to encourage entrepreneurial and enterprise type skills.

The report highlighted that giving young people skills and knowledge will give them confidence that they can gain employment after leaving school and help reduce youth unemployment.

Lauren, a third-year pupil from Broughty Ferry, said: ‘We’ve been learning new skills and we’ve learned about the different jobs that are out there. I’ve learned a lot more today than I knew about the hospitality industry beforehand.'
WHY WORK WITH INDUSTRY? – THE BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING

There is a clear need for partnerships between vocational schools and employers.

If schools want to develop young people with skills and knowledge that industry wants, they need to be able to find out what is needed by the industries that they aim to support. In addition, if employers want to ensure that they have a supply of motivated and capable young people to help their businesses grow, then they need to be able to articulate what they need to those within the vocational education system and support vocational schools at both local and/or national level to help achieve this.

Without such a two-way dialogue neither partner will succeed, but with a little imagination, creativity and effort a ‘win win’ situation can be achieved. Therefore, benefits can be found on both sides.

The benefits to employer

The employers will benefit from an opportunity to:

- showcase their company/sector to a potential, future workforce
- engage with potential apprenticeship/junior employee applicants
- increase school partnerships
- fulfil the corporate responsibility of giving something back to the local community.

The benefits to schools

Working with industry ensures that:

- examples and lesson activities/assignments used with students are relevant and realistic
- the school is supported by local business and increases its status in the community.

But there are also benefits to individuals who take part in employer engagement activities.
The benefits to employees

- Vocational teachers and other school representatives will benefit from:
  - a motivating experience by learning about and engaging with local businesses/employers
  - increasing sense of value as their work is seen as being more relevant
  - ensuring that what they are delivering is genuinely of value to students
  - generating new ideas for examples and activities to use in the classroom.

The benefits to students

Most significant of all however are the likely benefits to the students themselves. Employer engagement is likely to:

- create an opportunity to develop entrepreneurial skills
- assist them to develop skills and knowledge that makes them more employable
- make the learning more fun and engaging
- add context and greater understanding to what they are learning
- support and motivate students to learn and acquire new, practical work related competencies
- link expert knowledge of theoretical concepts and skills to particular occupations
- encourage and inform career choices for students – guiding their decision making process in regards to employment and/or further education choices
- develop key employability skills.

Examples of co-operation between vocational schools and employers that currently exist in the countries of the Western Balkans have had strong impact on students. One of the examples is the VET schools from Delchevo. This example shows that it is important for employer to provide real work environment for students that are involved in professional practice. This is the essential precondition that allows students to acquire skills and knowledge more directly linked to their future jobs.
Example 2:

At SOU Metodi Mitevski – Brico, Delchevo

The local ‘RUDINE’ factory in Delchevo is visited by the students from all years of the Chemistry and Food departments at different stages of their study linking in with different aspects of their studies. During the visits, the students visit the working areas, get to feel the working atmosphere, and observe the production process.

The students develop working habits, become aware of the working environment for their potential future profession and get to see how the theory they have learned in class is applied in practice in the real production process. This experience helps to motivate the students to develop further skills and knowledge. Sharing this experience in school during practical lessons is inspiring the younger generation for higher engagement in the learning process.

The partnership with the owners of the factory has been developed over time and is supported by them as they see the partnership as a source of potential, future employees.
DEVELOPING AN ENGAGEMENT
DIFFERENT IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS GET INVOLVED WITH EDUCATION?

So what do we actually mean by ‘employer engagement’? There are many advantages for teachers and schools if they make the effort to work with employers for the benefit of their students. It is acknowledged that all schools, no matter where they are, struggle with what appear to be increasing pressures on the resources that they have. It would be naive to develop a guide such as this that did not take into account the pressures that are already placed on vocational teachers and the education system as a whole. Therefore, the ideas proposed within this guide represent a range of different approaches some of which will be more relevant to you than others. You may be implementing some of the ideas already or at least considering them.

Common to them all however is the principle of bringing employers and the vocational education sector closer together, sharing ideas and building links which help to ensure that students receive the best education they can which prepares them for fulfilling and rewarding careers.

For the purposes of clarity, the employer engagement activities proposed can be split broadly into two key groups:

1. assisting with delivery and student engagement – activities that have a direct impact on the student
2. planning the curriculum – working at a strategic level to influence curriculum design.

We will start by painting a picture of what some of these activities might look like and the form they might take.

ASSISTING WITH DELIVERY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

As a vocational teacher it is likely that you will consider on a regular basis how to make your teaching sessions ever more relevant, new, fresh and more engaging for your learners. No doubt the internet has been a very helpful tool to help with getting information about different employers in the vocational area you deal with. You might use this as a means of finding images, examples and information which you can use in your teaching
sessions. This can be anything as simple as using images and logos on PowerPoint slides or handouts, or simply referring to new products and services that well known employers are producing.

But imagine the benefit to the students if you could actually get them into the workplace, seeing the materials and processes they work with or the types of customer they support.

Engaging with an employer can help you to achieve this. Let’s now look at examples of some simple activities that can help you deliver up to date content.

The following three tables present a range of employer engagement activities which focus on different aspects of student support. This can include supporting workshops and laboratories which form formal parts of the curricula. Likewise, more flexible forms are presented, such as visits to companies, job shadowing opportunities, etc.
Table 1:
Employer engagement activities directly linked to training/subject delivery:

The simplest of activities are those which help individual teachers to ensure that what they deliver is up to date and is illustrated with interesting and current examples. The activities listed in this table are quite simple and can be organised on a one to one basis between an individual teacher and an employer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>How the school benefits</th>
<th>How the employer benefits</th>
<th>How the student benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer providing material/resources</td>
<td>Broadens the range of materials and equipment that the school can use. Ensures that what teachers are using is relevant and current.</td>
<td>Simple, low time cost way of helping a vocational school to be more effective in what it delivers.</td>
<td>Makes learning more relevant if they can work with current material and equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class visit – one day</td>
<td>Makes the vocational subject more engaging. Can help to highlight relevance of curriculum. What was seen during the trip can be referred to at a later date by the teacher when illustrating particular points.</td>
<td>Employer can engage with a large number of individuals at one time. Relatively simple for the employer to organise. Can inspire students.</td>
<td>Provides student with a scenario that makes the learning more relevant. Seeing people in the workplace can inspire them. Helps to illustrate the nature of the career they might want to enter into.</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer presentation</td>
<td>Helps to make the vocational subject more interesting by having a different voice and viewpoint presenting.</td>
<td>Useful career development tool for the employer to send a member of staff to a school to represent the organisation.</td>
<td>Student gains knowledge from people doing the job in the real world. Can help students to understand what is expected of them when they try to enter the workplace. This may be in terms of the qualifications they need, the type of role or even specific technical subject they will be required to present.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| Employer representative | The presentation may focus on a specific, technical subject, or focus on explaining what employers expect to see on a CV, typical career paths, and case studies of individual career routes. | Employer can help to ensure that students have a genuine understanding of what is expected of new trainee employees, such as, experience, salary rates etc. | Helps the employer to decide if they want to engage with the school and potentially work with them in the future. |}

| Individual work experience | Can help considerably with students who may find classroom based activity a challenge and those who are more focused on entering the workplace. Work experience is also a great way to ensure that young people in the workplace and thus help them to develop new skills which increase their employability. | Work experience can be developed on a short or longer term basis, providing the individual the opportunity to job shadow individuals or groups who can demonstrate particular skills. | Can help considerably with students who may find classroom based activity a challenge and those who are more focused on entering the workplace. Work experience is also a great way to ensure that young people in the workplace and thus help them to develop new skills which increase their employability. |
Table 2
Activities which require more complex working relationships to be formed:

The activities listed in Table 2 require more careful planning and organisation. They will require individual or more likely, groups of teachers to work together to create a longer term activity. These activities are likely to require on-going discussion with individual or groups of employers.

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<th>How the student benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Careers event</td>
<td>Careers events represent a very good way of exposing students to a wide variety of employers and are a direct means of helping them to recognise the range of career opportunities that may be open to them. Careers events also help the school to be viewed as a proactive component of the local economy.</td>
<td>By attending one or a series of careers events, employers can promote their businesses as being an ‘employer of choice’ for students finishing their studies and seeking to enter employment.</td>
<td>Students are provided with an opportunity to meet and be inspired by a large number of potential employers.</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Class activity, over a few days</strong></td>
<td>Working with a vocational teacher, an employer may work to develop an activity that can be worked on over a period of time in the workplace. This could include having a group of students working in a place of work, working with employees in the office areas, helping the employer to present a new product to clients.</td>
<td>Provides an enhanced way for vocational teachers to provide students with a high quality learning experience that is relevant and realistic.</td>
<td>Employer gets to understand more about the school and the students. Can help to develop a more realistic understanding of their area of work. Can help to motivate members of the workforce who are keen to work with young people. Helps ensure that the employer is seen in a positive light by potential future employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class project</strong></td>
<td>Employer works with vocational teacher to set a task or series of tasks that reflect common workplace challenges and activities. This could include developing a project plan, developing a marketing campaign etc. To work best, the project needs to reflect real challenges faced by the employer. The employer can become involved with the assessment of the students' work. Students can also be invited to present the outcomes of their project to a panel of employers.</td>
<td>Vocational teacher, working with the employer, can develop learning and assessment activities that tie in and reflect a number of different components of the vocational curriculum. This can help motivate the students and help to increase their level of achievement.</td>
<td>Employers can help develop tasks which might help bring new ideas. Also helps the employer to build a longer term relationship with the school. Staff members may also find involvement with the activity motivational and helpful to their own personal development.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3
Activities associated with the planning and preparation of delivery

These activities are focused on the development of the teacher. They are based on the premise that teachers can also benefit greatly from being brought up to date in regard to vocational content and subject matter. The table also describes activities that may be more cross sectorial in their focus, i.e. focusing on general employability skills, which can be applied across all industries, rather than focusing on individual vocational subjects.

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<tr>
<td><strong>One to one meeting with a local employer</strong>&lt;br&gt;Vocational teacher arranging meeting with a local/relevant employer to the industry that their vocational programme is related to.</td>
<td>Helps the teacher to find out about current/emerging working practices. Helps to highlight the specific skills and knowledge that the employer and their industry sector look for and value.</td>
<td>Employer has an opportunity to assist a local school. Helps to ensure that potential employees of the future have an accurate picture of their business and its activities.</td>
<td>Students benefit from increased knowledge of the teacher. Benefit from the up to date information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff development</strong>&lt;br&gt;Working with employers cannot only provide benefits to what students learn, but also can assist with the development of individual teaching staff. For vocational teachers, a period of work experience back in the workplace, can help to ensure that they are up to date with current working practices.&lt;br&gt;Work experience for teaching staff can also help to cement the reputation of schools with local employers.</td>
<td>Work experience placements for vocational teachers can act as a great motivational tool by ensuring that teachers are up to date and have the opportunity to develop positive working links with local employers. Work experience placements can also stimulate the teacher to consider new scenarios to use as learning tools and activities.&lt;br&gt;In general, work experience placements act as excellent professional development activities.</td>
<td>By providing and supporting work experience placements for local vocational teachers, employers can have a direct impact on the quality of vocational teaching that is delivered within schools.</td>
<td>Although students do not experience the work experience placements directly, they do benefit from the increased knowledge and skills that their teachers gain. This is through ensuring that work activities set reflect current best practice and through teachers referring to their own, new experiences to illustrate key points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting with specific target audiences/campaigns</td>
<td>Employer engagement activities which target specific learning and employment issues can help to engage more closely with students who may have previously been excluded or were not excelling in their studies.</td>
<td>Individual employers or industry sectors can use partnerships with vocational schools to help address key issues that may affect their abilities to deal with particular skills shortages.</td>
<td>Creative employer engagement programmes that target specific student groups and issues can help to broaden the mind of students and help them to recognise employment opportunities which they had perhaps not considered before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some instances, employer engagement activities may wish to focus on specific issues that are of interest to both employers, schools and society at large. This may include issues such as getting more women into work, dealing with literacy or numeracy issues, encouraging the take up of science and/or technology based subjects. In these instances, activities may be organised across a number of different vocational and non-vocational subjects and different sectors of employment, encompassing both the private and public sectors.

All of the engagement activities highlighted so far focus on helping to deliver specific learning outputs and may be organised by an individual vocational school, focusing on the needs of individuals and groups of students. This can be on a one off basis or part of a wider programme. The text has highlighted where employer engagement can have a direct, positive impact upon how an individual employer may benefit through helping with attracting high quality candidates in the future. However, if this effort is multiplied across the whole of an industry, the impact may also be multiplied.

The example from Technical School Uzice demonstrates how employers and schools can work together to create a curriculum and jointly implement it.
Example 3:

Technical School, Uzice

The project started when seven local companies that manufacture quality furniture identified enormous challenges in the future due to a lack of qualified workforce who could produce items to the standards required.

Working with the school, a new three-year educational programme was developed. This included the development of a new educational profile called ‘furniture operator’ who would manufacture furniture incorporating skills associated with carpentry, upholstery, and furniture finishing and lacquer application.

To assist with the implementation of the new programme, representatives from the companies meet students who will enrol at the beginning of the first year of vocational education. Prospective students interested in the course also have the opportunity to spend two days of the week in the workplace to understand more of what it is like to work in this environment.

During the second and the third year of vocational programme, the companies help by providing trainees with the occupational training. This can be for up to three days each week.

A team of experts from the companies together with vocational teachers and other recognised experts in this specialised field designed the curriculum, directed incorporating learning outcomes which clearly defined the specialist knowledge, important skills, attitudes, (work competences) demanded by the labour market and institutions of higher education.

When completed, successful students are able to carry on with their studies and personal development through scholarships within the participating companies.

Due to the success of the furniture manufacturing programme, the school now plans to develop a similar type of scheme for employers across the metallurgy and mechanical engineering sector.
DEVELOPING AN ENGAGEMENT
WORKING AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL

We have already identified that working practices, manufacturing methods, etc. are moving at a fast pace. The impact of this is that the vocational curriculum and the vocational schools tasked with delivering it also need to be able to change to make sure that employer requirements for the new entrants to the workforce are met. This presents the challenge for curriculum planners and developers as to how the curriculum can be updated and keep pace with the requirements of the workplace.

In these instances, employer engagement strategies also play an important role. It is acknowledged that individual school teachers working at a local level are unlikely to have the need to engage with local employers to help devise new curricula at a national level, however it is useful to highlight the methods that may be used as the employers they work with may feel that they want to have an active role in helping to influence new curricula and qualifications that are developed.

PLANNING THE CURRICULUM – WORKING AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL

In each country, a group of individuals will be responsible for planning and designing the curriculum that is used. This is likely to be a centrally organised organisation, perhaps part of a government ministry or other state body with the responsibility for managing the vocational curriculum. For individuals and organisations involved with these activities, a key consideration will need to be which employers will be involved with the development, how will they be engaged and how can their commitment to any development project be maintained.

As a result of the changing industrial picture, economic and skills development agencies, schools and teachers need to be able to find out what the current and future skills needs of the workplace will be in the near future. By establishing this knowledge, training programmes and qualifications can be developed which truly prepare an individual for the workforce. Most importantly, it ensures that individuals can be effective in the workplace, with the knock on affect being that business or organisation performs to a higher standard.
Example 4:

Barnet and Southgate College, North London, England

Barnet and Southgate College acts as a local vocational training school, supporting a wide variety of vocational subjects and industry sectors across North London. A core programme is the colleges work to provide ‘Traineeships’ for young people aged 16–18 who are seeking structured learning within a workplace environment.

One local employer, Nationwide Computer Services, worked with the college to offer work experience placements on a number of occasions before. The local manager was particularly keen to explore the Traineeship model, with its added work based assessment requirements, which would bring benefits for both his business and the trainee.

The manager speaks enthusiastically of his trainee, and is happy with the contribution he made: ‘He made a positive impact. We got a bright, focussed young person with an interest in the subject area who gained a variety of skills’. In fact, the trainee made such progress in a short space of time that he was snapped up for a Higher Apprenticeship immediately.

Alongside the 161 hours’ work experience offered to the trainee as a Junior Technician, the College also helped him to achieve a string of qualifications including a short qualification which recognised the students’ progress in developing employability and personal development skills and another reflecting progress in working with information technology.

For the manager, the appointment process was pain free. ‘When selecting someone who will enter your work environment, it is important to gain as much information about that person as possible. Barnet and Southgate College closely monitored and evaluated potential candidates for the role. I received good guidance and support and the ability to interview the candidate and get good background information on him.'
CONSULTATION/EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT METHODS

To engage with employers, curriculum designers or those responsible for planning programmes of learning may choose to use a range of different engagement and consultation methods. They can choose to use individual methods, although it is more likely that a combination of methods will be most effective.

Working groups

Employer working groups are a mechanism for gathering information regarding skills, in an effective way. Gathering a group of employers around a table to discuss specific skills issues can generate a large amount of information which you can use to influence the development of qualifications or curricula. The employers who attend can either be from a specific industry if it is sector related skills issues that are being discussed, or from a range of sectors if it is more of a cross cutting theme that may be of concern, i.e. dealing with supervisory management skills, or knowledge about finance.

In some countries within the Western Balkans, these working groups are organised centrally in the form of ‘Sector Skills Councils’ or ‘Sector Committees’.

Working groups (e.g. Sector Skills Councils) may be formed on a regional or national basis, but in these instances, consideration should be given to travelling distances and time.

Membership of working groups should represent a cross section of employers within a particular industry sector. This includes representation from micro through to larger businesses. It is likely that micro and small businesses will face the biggest challenge in committing to attend a working group due to time pressures and the lack of cover. Therefore, any consultation work should also incorporate methods which enable micro and small businesses to be fully engaged. This can be through online questionnaires, telephone interviews, etc.

Critical to the success of working group based consultation is that the members who attend can genuinely represent their organisation and understand the subject matter being discussed.

It is recognised that it can be hard to encourage individual employers to commit and to attend working groups. Therefore, to give them confidence that their time will not be wasted and that the working group will be of benefit to their business, it is important to provide them with an accurate brief as to what you want to achieve. This can be in the form of a briefing paper or agenda. Employers may also be encouraged to attend should
they see the benefit of cross sector networking, having the opportunity to meet colleagues from other businesses who do similar jobs to themselves and who face the same challenges.

In the field of tourism and hospitality, most countries of the Western Balkans have developed a variety of methods of co-operation between vocational schools, educating staff for this economic area and the business sector and individual employers. An example is the VET school from Niksic and from Tirana where specifically mentioned activities of employers in which students participate.

**Example 5:**

Secondary school of economics and hospitality, Niksic

Secondary school of economics and hospitality in Niksic has developed an organisation entitled the ‘Association of Social Partnership’. This is a committee, set up by the school to foster closer working relationships with employers and other community based organisations including local government, economic entities within the city, the Tourist Organisation of Bar, the Regional Employment Service Centre, the Council of Parents and other interested vocationally oriented institutions.

The main mission of the Association is to encourage the development of market-oriented education. The school expects from the partner organisation the willingness to clearly articulate their needs and, accordingly, involve themselves in the creation of enrolment policy and amendments to the open parts of the curriculum. The association will also act as a forum for helping to promote career opportunities for students.
Example 6:

Hospitality and Tourism Academy, Tirana

Hospitality and Tourism Academy from Tirana currently has relationships with hotels and restaurants when it comes to staffing and training. They are currently training the Front Desk, Bar and Restaurant’s Staff of a hotel and a chain restaurant. Students have implemented and gained knowledge during the course and this has been reported from the employer who is extending the training for more in-depth knowledge and skills.

Temporary or standing groups?

If developing a new curricula or vocational qualification it is likely that this will be a short term, time bound project activity. In this situation, it is likely that the working group may only need to meet on a periodic basis for the duration of the project. However, you might want to consider the benefits of establishing a working group that sits on a more permanent basis, perhaps meeting once every four to six months; a standing group.

Standing groups may be of benefit in supporting the development of new curricula/qualifications or acting as advisory councils for local schools. In these instances, the standing groups can be used to consult the views of employers on a wide range of issues. This is already the case where the structure of ‘Sector Councils’ has been introduced.
For curriculum/qualification design, standing groups may be used to check on the on-going suitability of new curricula content, using the employer representatives to highlight when significant industry change requires changes to be made. Typically, the role of ‘Sector Council’ type organisations is to:

- review the list of occupations that are relevant to their sector
- review the job descriptions for the still relevant occupations and for new occupations
- identify knowledge and skills required to perform the jobs outlined within occupational profiles
- develop qualification profiles and find out whether there are related VET programmes to support them.

A good example of working together VET schools and employers is VET school of textile and leader design from Novi Pazar which shows that this co-operation can overcome the frames of realisation of regular practical work and can bring mutual benefit.

**Example 7:**

School for textile and leather design, Novi Pazar

To achieve better partnership with employers, students from the School for textile and leather design at Novi Pazar undergo practical training in the companies that have signed the co-operation agreements with the School. Those companies provide mentoring to the students (teacher-mentor and employer-mentor. The School has made certain changes to the co-operation model it has with employers, and named it ‘The Mentoring in the Realisation of Practical Training’. The goal of this model is to develop students’ professional competencies and abilities that are part of their educational profiles, as well as to prepare them for their further professional development. After the two-year implementation period of this model, it can be concluded that the realisation of the practical training is more efficient. The essence of this model is the process in which both the teacher from the School and an employee from the company track the development of each student, and determine the student’s workflow accordingly. This is an integrated model that combines the traditional ‘one on one’ (individual) model with the ‘group’.

‘The road towards the successful partnership was very tough at the beginning, the employers were criticising us for the minimal level of knowledge and skills our students had, as related to the employers’ needs.
The students, and, also, the teachers, were not adapted to the companies’ manufacturing process, so, during their practical training at the companies, the students only did menial and inadequate work. With time, as we modernised as a school by getting new equipment and through various professional training our teachers received (IT, mentoring, operating the modern machinery, etc.), the employers’ attitude shifted, slowly, but surely. They saw that we were interested in making our students good and diligent workers and useful members of our community.

For supporting the delivery of the curriculum/qualifications in local vocational schools, standing groups made of employers representing local industry may act as a useful bridge and access point to assist with organising other employer engagement activities.

**Example 8:**

In England, many secondary schools are seeking employer representatives to sit on their board of governors. This is a non-paid role, and is encouraged to ensure that schools have a continuous link with local industry. This relationship helps to inform the school as to local and/or national issues and opportunities that they may wish to engage with.

Governor/non-executive director roles are typically organised on a three or four-year basis with the industry representative being required to attend up to four meetings at the school per year.
Employer online/paper based consultation methods
As has been described above, sometimes getting a group of busy representatives from industry around a table can be challenging due to travel and time commitments. In these instances, other communication methods should be considered should you wish to gain their input into your work. The most cost effective amongst these is the use of email based consultation, where a simple questionnaire can be distributed directly to individuals who are most likely to provide you with an informed view. Of course the success of this method of employer engagement depends on the access that you have to an up to date and reliable series of email contacts. In these instances, it is suggested that working through your immediate network of contacts may bear positive results.

This may include seeking contacts through colleagues, examining articles in trade journals or, in the case of individual schools wanting to consult this way, writing to parent connected with the school.

Other forms of media
Individuals wishing to reach employers, either for consultation activities or to support more direct forms of employer engagement, should also consider the use of digital forms of media. Online networking tools that are free to use, enable individuals to establish a profile describing who they are, their role and professional interests. These tools are becoming ever more popular, enabling individuals to quickly and easily form work based networks.

Online discussion forums can also be of use. Teachers might consider joining online discussion forums related to their vocational subject area. This can help them to develop industry links and also identify what the current skills issues are affecting the industry sector.

To create face to face dialogue, free to use internet based communication/video conferencing tools can also be considered. These are of particular use if you need to discuss ideas and points with individuals or groups who may not be able to travel to a central point. This not only saves time for the employers but also you.

Working with employer/industry representative bodies
So far we have explored how new links can be made with employers and the methods that can be used to engage them with the work of individual schools or as part of significant consultation projects. But, industry does not work in isolation. Employers and industry representatives come together for a variety of reasons in order that they can work to develop solutions to common problems or to represent a voice of industry to government or other agencies.
When planning employer engagement activities, these types of networks can often prove to be very useful. In these instances, networks between employers have already been developed and the infrastructure is in place which can then be used to make contact and engage with a number of individuals.

In some instances, existing business networks may be those which already have a direct interest in people development issues. This may include networks of professional human resource and training managers, union based organisations or those linked with promoting careers in their industries. Other networks may be industry specific, acting as trade associations concerned with promoting their industry both internally and overseas. Finally, some networks may be based at a regional level. This may include a local chamber of commerce or other group which represents employers within a particular town or region.

Due to the political and economic history of the Western Balkan countries, it is recognised that some of these existing or potential networks may be in their infancy. Therefore, an opportunity exists for vocational teachers, vocational schools and other vocational education agencies to take part in the formation and establishment of the agenda of such bodies/networks at the early stage.

Should a local or national employer network be available to you, you will need to consider how they can best assist you in achieving your aims and objectives, but more realistically, how you can work together to address a common issue. One way in which such groups can help relatively easily is by passing on information about your engagement aspirations to other members of their networks. This may be achieved through producing a newsletter or article that can be posted on a website or via the networks communication methods.

Online discussion forums can also be used by the group providing a very simple, quick and effective way of publicising your message/invitation for engagement with individuals and groups of employers. In this case, the vocational teacher can be the agent for starting the dialogue.
Example 9:

Apprenticeship Development Task Force, England

Across the UK, Apprenticeships are an important vocational skills development programme targeted at young people aged between 16 and 24. They are used across all sectors of industry and combine formal theoretical learning at a local college or training provider combined with practical training received on the job. All apprentices are employed by their employer and therefore the programme requires vocational colleges and providers to work very closely to support the requirements of the employers as well as those of the apprentices.

Since 2015, the apprenticeship scheme has undergone significant reform to ensure that its focus and content is far more employer led. As a result, employers at senior levels have taken the responsibility to stimulate the development of these programmes for their industry sectors.

To ensure that the visitor economy sector is ready and in a strong position to deliver a series of newly develop apprenticeship standards by Spring 2016 and to maximise its investment in apprenticeships, an ‘Apprenticeship Implementation Task Force’ was established. This group included representatives from employers, vocational training providers and other agencies that help fund apprenticeship programmes.

The task force is chaired by senior Human Resources Director of Tesco Bank, and is made up of 34 leading employers and eight industry associations from the hospitality, retail, travel, tourism and passenger transport sectors.

The main priority for the task force is to ensure the government recognises how employers want apprenticeships to be implemented. The visitor economy sector has a compelling case for government, with the capacity to deliver high volumes of apprenticeships to help meet its three million target and sustainable plans for how the quality of apprenticeships can be regulated through employer-led governance to achieve outstanding results.

The task force’s focus is on the three industries, (retail, hospitality and travel), that have communicated their plans for employer-led apprenticeships to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the government department responsible for enabling the apprenticeship scheme in England. However, it also includes representatives from the wider sector, including passenger transport, as it’s important to start and proceed with this journey together.
The task force has six clear objectives over the next six months:

1. retail, hospitality and travel apprenticeships ready to launch in spring 2016
2. sector-led governance agreed by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)
3. sector apprenticeship strategy agreed and supported by government
4. employer councils for retail, hospitality and travel established to manage the quality of apprenticeships in their respective industries
5. targeted apprenticeship campaign implemented
6. firm collaborative partnership formed to deliver the sector apprenticeship strategy.
HOW TO DO THE GROUND WORK TO AVOID WASTING TIME?

We have now assessed what activities can be used to engage with employers, and have explored how they may be consulted with on a wider level. But, before these methods can be applied, thought needs to be given to identify what you want to achieve by engaging with employers and assessing what can realistically be achieved. In this section we will explore some of these questions.

**Being realistic – what do you want to achieve?**

We have already recognised that employers and individuals working within local businesses are busy people. They have their businesses to run. Therefore, whilst they may be willing to help you and may have an interest in engaging with your school and its students, their time may be very limited. The impact of this upon your plans is that you will need to reflect on what the priorities and objectives are of implementing an employer engagement activity. Are you hoping to build a longer term relationship to support a series of sophisticated activities, or are you hoping to plan and organise a simple class visit or invite a speaker from industry to speak to your students?

It is suggested that in the first instance, the simpler activities may work best. This gives employers an opportunity to support your work, but without overcommitting their time. It also gives the employer a chance to understand more about the school, the needs of the students and what you are hoping to achieve in the longer term.

Other considerations you will need to take into account at this point and which need to be answered include:

- What do we want our students to learn from this activity(s)?
- Do I want to develop an engagement activity that covers common learning needs?
- Do I want to develop an engagement activity that is targeted at specific learning subject matter for a whole class?
- Do I want to develop an engagement activity that is designed to meet the needs of specific students or small groups of students?
• Which teaching and learning activities will best meet these needs?
• What resources might we need? – Do we need to organise travel, staff uniforms, protective clothing, etc.?
• How can I check that learning has taken place?

In relation to the actual skills/knowledge that you want to develop, you will need to consider:

• Do you want to develop entrepreneurial or employability skills?
• Do you want to provide students with the opportunity to ‘learn by doing’ and to learn from experts doing the job already?
• Are you seeking to raise levels of achievement within assessments?
• Are you seeking to increase the students’ commitment to learning, their motivation and self-confidence?
• Do you want to develop the students understanding of the career opportunities open to them, gaining a perspective from an impartial and informed source of information and guidance?
• Do you want to address wider subject matter such as increasing students’ understanding of economy, enterprise and the structure of business organisations and how they work?

**Example 10:**

Chemical and Food Technology School, Belgrade

The Chemical and Food Technology School offers a number of vocational pathways to its students with the food technology pathway being particularly strong due to the number and variety of local businesses working in this field. The school has engaged with and worked with approximately 30 employers to a point where employers have actively participated in the implementation of the curriculum. This has helped to ensure that what students learn is directly related to real work requirements and prepares them better for employment.

This engagement includes the development of the final matriculation examination which involved consultation with and according to the requirements of employers.

The school initiated the contact with the employers and worked to gain their commitment to playing an active role in the creation of the curriculum, its evaluation and implementation.
The most significant positive aspects of co-operative working have been:

- students developing a greater level of practical skills
- students find it easier to enter employment immediately after graduation
- employers’ involvement with exam design ensures that current professional competence is assessed.

**Developing a strategy/plan**

Once you have assessed and identified what you want to achieve through your employer engagement activity, you will then need to consider what you need to plan and put into place. You will be keen to ensure that the activity(s) are a success, therefore time will be needed to produce a plan or ‘strategy’.

The strategy or plan does not need to be a complex or even a lengthy document. What it should do, however, is specify what you want to achieve, specify the practicalities that need to be covered and any other considerations that need to be accounted for. This can include travel arrangements, larger events that the activity may tie in with, or even simple items such as the amount of hours a student can work in a day.

By developing such a document, you will have a great deal of useful information that can be passed on to the employer and which can also be used to act as a check list for what has been arranged and those points which still need further organisation.

An example of the structure for such a plan is provided at Annex A.
Hospitality and Tourism Academy, Tirana

The Hospitality and Tourism Academy in Tirana was established to provide support for the local hospitality industry by providing employers with qualified staff and serves as a bridge between the employers and hospitality and tourism trained professionals. The academy is currently training the front desk, bar and restaurant staff for a number of local hotels and a regionally based restaurant chain. The academy is also supporting the employers by offering the Train the Trainer courses.

One of the biggest challenges for the academy is understanding the gap that exists between what employers expect and the capabilities of young people when they enter work placements or on the job training activities. In particular, young people have a poor perception of what the industry can offer, however there is an increasing interest from employers to increase the professionalism of their staff and better benefits packages are now being offered to help attract motivated young people.
It is all very well having a plan, but there comes the point when time and effort actually needs to be spent in contacting employers, gaining their initial commitment and then developing a relationship that lasts. If care is not taken, a great deal of time and effort can be wasted in trying to develop these important links. The following section presents some ideas as to how a structured approach to gaining employer commitment can be achieved. It is presented in a five step approach:

**Step 1: Approaching and engaging the organisation**

**Step 2: Developing the relationship**

**Step 3: Preparing students and colleagues**

**Step 4: Delivering the activity**

**Step 5: De-briefing, follow-up and evaluation**
### Step 1. Approaching and engaging the organisation

The first step is to establish a relationship with an employer. This requires that the right organisation and the right person(s) are contacted to make employer engagement happen:

- Find out what you can about the organisation.
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this business/organisation the right one to approach</th>
<th>Do your research. Use the internet or local media to find out about the business/organisation</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask colleagues and other contacts if the school already has a link with this organisation</td>
<td>You need to know if other staff at your school or perhaps other vocational schools who deliver the same vocational subjects have worked with the same employer</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Consider who the best person to approach is.
  
  | With small businesses/organisations it is suggested that you approach the ‘manager’ | Ring to confirm their full name and contact details and a suitable time of day to speak to them. | Notes: |
  | In a large business/organisation there are several people you may consider approaching | Human resources/personnel manager General manager | Notes: |

Examples from VET schools in the Western Balkans show how employers are directly involved in the educational process in VET schools. Each of these schools has developed some specific form of co-operation but all have the same goal – to better educate and train students for specific jobs.

**Example 12:**

**Tafil Kasumaj vocational school, Decan**

At Tafil Kasumaj vocational school in Decan, vocational teachers are contacting former students and former teachers who now work in and lead some of the businesses that correspond to their VET programme. This has presented a simple and effective way of approaching employers and developing an effective relationship.
Example 13:

Secondary School for Mining, Tuzla

The Mining School itself was established in 1956 upon request of ‘Kreka’ mine as an essential facility for training its future mining workforce. Until 1992 the school worked very closely with the school. However, this relationship broke down between 1992 and 2010.

Through the efforts of the school, a new dialogue was formed with ‘Kreka’ together with other mines and employers in the area. The objective of this work was to help establish a new apprenticeship for miners that would assist young people to enter employment in this sector.

To establish this new programme, the school engaged with a wide variety of project partners. Activities included:

- co-operation with parents to explain what the apprenticeship would offer
- financing of necessary personal protection clothing and equipment for students
- the planning of practical training to take into account where the students lived
- co-operation with labour unions within employer companies
- developing a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ which was signed by both the school and the employers, to ensure that partners understood their relative obligations.
- organisation of transport for the students.

School insisted that employers take the obligation to hire only persons with adequate training from mining school when employing new personnel, as prescribed by Law on Mining.

As a result of this work, the school has been able to improve the practical training segment of the programme by giving students direct access to up to date equipment and production process. Students also acquire practical knowledge at the very source and acquire working habits, thus preparing themselves for future work in their profession.
Example 14:

Sotu Gorgi Naumov, Bitola

At Sotu Gorgi Naumov, in Bitola contact was initially with employers through personal contacts. This was further enhanced by the lead vocational teacher for the relevant subject area meeting with the employers. The employers were briefed as to what the school needed in regards to the purpose of workplace visits, when they hoped to visit, outlining the specific needs of students, travel details, how food would be catered for, insurance of students in case of injury, contact telephone numbers, etc.

Example 15:

VET school ‘Vukadin Vukadinović’, Berane

At VET school ‘Vukadin Vukadinović’ in Berane the school and employers worked together to form a ‘Partnership Agreement’ which set out the focus, content and obligations of the different partners. This has helped to improve the management of the work experience activities and ensure that they fit into the schools vision of quality implementation for practical training.
Wider co-operation activities are planned for the future. This includes exploring further the opportunities that may be available in other parts of the local labour market, and monitoring start-ups of new companies to help identify their emerging labour force needs. As of last year, the school started hosting ‘Open Door Days’ to enable employer to visit and find out more about what the school can offer. This is planned to be a regular event.

- Prepare the information that the employer will want to know. Much of this will be generated when you have developed your engagement plan/strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why do you want the business/ organisation to help you?</th>
<th>Consider how this fits in with other activities the school may be involved with.</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you think the business/ organisation can help you?</td>
<td>Talk about the subject, knowledge and experiences that you want the students to gain rather than referring to specific learning outcomes and components of the curriculum.</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you want to achieve from the partnership?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you want to work with the business/ organisation?</td>
<td>Avoid using educational jargon. Ensure the employer knows the ages of the students.</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time will the employer have to commit?</td>
<td>Be clear about the timing of the day/event. Prepare a timetable for them.</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can other employers get involved and if so, how many?</td>
<td>This may only apply to larger organisations.</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will the business/ organisation benefit from the partnership?</td>
<td>Highlight the positive aspects of engagement for the employer.</td>
<td>Notes:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 2. Developing the relationship**

Once contact has been made it is time to bring the activity together. The following steps will support you in doing this:

- **Time.** Give yourself plenty of time to work through this phase as your contact may have to consult colleagues whose diaries are already full.

- **Planning sessions.** Organise face-to-face planning sessions if you can as this makes a difference to the overall outcomes. Try to hold the sessions in school so that employers can become familiar with the surroundings. If they have time, show them around the school so they can see where the activity is likely to take place.
• **Discuss their needs.** What resources might they want to help deliver their session/activity. This could include a room layout or presentation materials for a simple talk or presentation or health and safety requirements if students are visiting their workplace. Discuss what their expectations are. Confirm the timings of the sessions based on what time they can give you.

• **Supporting employers.** Hopefully employers will be happy to work with students and see it as part of their personal and professional development. They may be highly skilled in their own field but they are not teachers. Be as supportive as you can during the planning and development process. Help them to develop their sessions and offer advice on techniques and approaches that will engage students. After all, you work with them every day, so pass on your experience and knowledge to them.

• **Keeping things simple.** Avoid using educational jargon. Explain as simply as you can what it is that your students need to understand. Then you can discuss the terminology, vocabulary and concepts you would like employers to use so that the students can see the links with the other parts of their subjects.

• **Be clear about names.** Ask your employers how they wish to be introduced to students, taking care to use the right names, job titles, etc. Clarify how they should refer to you in front of students too.

• **Be clear about roles.** Reassure your employers that they will not be left in sole charge of a group of students – if that is not what you have agreed. Let them know that you or other staff will be there to provide support and that you are the one with the responsibility for managing your students’ behaviour. Where possible give employers the option to meet students before the activity.

• **Document what you have agreed and planned.** A starting point for planning the activity is to use the following checklist to make sure that nothing is left to chance. Develop a ‘project agreement’. Most employers regard organising, planning and delivery an activity as a project. It helps to have a project agreement so that everyone is clear about what is happening and why, and who is responsible for doing what and by when. Alternatively, you may find it is acceptable to put all of the information in an email.
Example 16:

Vocational Secondary School Tesanj

The Vocational Secondary School Tesanj started its partnership with employers some ten years ago, and made the first steps towards co-operation with employers in the local labour market.

This started with the ‘Mann-Hummel’ company from Tesanj. A meeting was arranged with the company’s management where representatives from the school presented their ideas for co-operation. Soon after an agreement of co-operation was signed by both parties which defined a common road map for activity, i.e. an action plan and obligations of both sides.

The school committed to train 180 qualified metal workers for the company (metal processing and cutting) in the period between 2010 and 2018. The employers need for a refreshed labour force was reflected in the age of their current employees (average age of 55). For the school this presented a great challenge to prepare the students for employment with such a prestigious company which belongs to the most successful businesses in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The school committed itself to provide expert, high quality training to students in partnership with the employer and to prepare them for work in the company. The training was carried out both in school and in the workplace so that our students could acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences required by the employer. The curriculum was designed in line with local needs (30 per cent of curriculum was changed). The school is now proud to have been able to provide employment for around 80 students with the partner company.

More recently, and building on this success, co-operation was established with a further ten employers. Building on earlier, positive experience, co-operation agreements were signed by the employers and by the school. Activities now include a range of different types of engagement with local companies including student exchanges, work based projects, co-operation at local community level, etc.

Co-operation with partners led to a better co-operation with parents and students from the wider area, as well as with other institutions and organisations, and the NGO sector. The school has gained a better reputation and became recognisable throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The number of students enrolled at the school is now increasing, and interest for new professions and vocational subjects offered to partners is now growing.
The school is assisted by a School Advisory Council which was established by the employers, local community and employment agency. Thanks to this co-operation, a partnership has now been established with a school from the EU (Velenje, Republic of Slovenia), allows for level IV students training for professions of mechatronics technician and IT technicians to be trained in modern technologies.

Students have the opportunity to go for free training after completing second year within the school. After completing their education in Slovenia, students get the Europass certificate, and upon their return to their home community are expected to contribute to the development of the community with their new knowledge and skills.

Initially, the main barrier to employer engagement was lack of trust of employers who did not have enough faith in educational institutions. Through the partnership, the school was able to convince them that co-operation could lead to outcomes which were mutually beneficial to both all of the partners.

As a result of this work the school has had several contacts with additional partners with the first steps being made by the school staff members. Later, due to the successful co-operation with Mann-Hummel, other companies have offered to co-operate with them. The School Advisory Board has also helped to establish these links.
Example 17:

Economic High School ‘Ymer Prizreni’, Pristina

The staff at the school organised the provision of ‘Professional Internships’ with seven local companies in the Prizren region. The internships were all in the economics field, equipping the students with the opportunity to develop direct experience of work with a range of employers needing these skills.

It was very useful for students to see how actual work was done within the businesses. Seeing work, production, and work culture was very useful for the students and to provide them with a general perspective on what it is like to be engaged in daily work.

To develop this successful partnership the school had to rely on the commitment and good will of the employers involved and therefore care has been taken to organise and manage the relationship effectively.

The school is now planning to expand on its programme in order to provide more students with the opportunity to develop work experience and to ensure that the internship programme is an ongoing and permanent part of their vocational education and training offer.
Step 3. Preparing students and colleagues

Students need to be made aware of what they can expect of the activity and how it is supporting their studies. This may be through individual teaching sessions with a group of students or an assembly. If through an assembly, you can brief other teachers that may be involved at the same time. Ask for volunteers to meet the visitors and to escort them to and from the location where the activities are due to take place. Likewise, if visiting an employer's premises, having some colleagues/volunteers who can help you can help ensure a smooth running event.

Provide the students with name badges so that the employers can interact more easily with them. You will need to let your colleagues know the content and purpose of the activity so that they can support students as necessary.

If implementing a more complex activity, it is likely that you will need the support of colleagues. At the planning stage, ensure that time and resource is allocated to briefing and preparing colleagues for what they need to do. This should cover the aims and objectives of the activity, the timing, and enabling them to understand what you want to achieve from the activity. You should also use this time to explore how the students linked to colleagues can also benefit from the planned activities.

Step 4. Delivering the activity

With good preparation the activity should run smoothly. However, it is always worth double checking the following:

- Do you have the right facilities and materials needed to deliver the session?
- Is someone ready to meet and greet business visitors? Make sure that someone is at reception to greet your visitors when they arrive. If possible involve a senior member of staff.
- Is catering provided? If the activities last the whole day, lunch is an ideal time to do a quick review. How has it gone from your side as a teacher? How has it gone from their side? What feedback, if any, have you already had from students? Is there anything that needs to be altered for the afternoon session?
- Do you have a camera? Use your camera to record the event. The photos will come in useful later for newsletters, school website, displays, etc. which will be of benefit for both the school and the employer.
Step 5. De-briefing, follow-up and evaluation

De-brief

Once the activity is over, employers will wish to discuss how things went and if what they have done is successful.

You may choose to ask the employers to fill in feedback forms as this demonstrates that you are keen to build on best practice and constantly improve what you are doing. Take the opportunity to discuss the possibility of future involvement with the school so that they can take the request back to the company and plan for the future.

Acknowledge the employers’ contribution to the success of the activity and, if possible, ask a senior member of staff to present them with a certificate of thanks or at the very least, send a formal letter to the individual and their employer thanking them for their time and commitment.

Finally, ask employers if they would be happy for you to write a report or article about their activity for a school’s newsletter/ website or local media. If you do this, make sure that you give them the opportunity to review and comment on the article before it is published. This will raise awareness among parents and the local community of your partnership activities with employers. It will also raise the profile of your employer’s organisation and help to reinforce the benefits of partnership to the employer.

Example 18:

Ali Myftiu Professional School, Elbasan

The Ali Myftiu School collaborates with a wide variety of local businesses and enterprises to provide 12th and 13th grade students with both skills-based instruction and vocational training through the provision of internships. Each internship provides students with an opportunity to receive 15 hours of instruction per week in local places of work.

When in the workplace, students are monitored and assessed by their vocational teachers. A formal evaluation is also implemented at the end of the internship where the employer is asked to provide feedback and comment.
Since implementing the programme, the school has noticed the increase in skills that students have been able to develop in addition to an increase in employment opportunities.

To form the partnerships with the local employers, the school initiated the dialogue finalising details as to what employers were required to offer and the support that the school would provide. This was documented in the form of a formal agreement between the two.

Follow up

Try to arrange a telephone meeting with the employer(s) soon after the activity so that you can review it in more detail once you have had a chance to reflect on it. Did you both feel that it met your objectives? How do you know? What feedback have you had? Is this something that you could develop and repeat in the future?

You should also consider seeking the feedback of individual participants from the employer who took part in the activity. This can help you to ensure that any future activities can be promoted on the basis that they are of value to the employer as much as they are to the school and students. A simple questionnaire distributed to representatives from the employer who took part can help with this. An example of a questionnaire has been presented at Annex B.

Evaluation

It is great to share your evaluation results with the employer so that they can share them with the manager and colleagues. It really makes a positive impact and they feel valued for investing their time, energy and resources in your school's activity.
Through this guide we have explored a number of simple techniques and processes which can help to develop employer engagement activities which can greatly enhance the learning experience of your students. At first glance it may appear that some of these activities can require you to complete a great deal of extra work on top of what is already a busy day. However, by careful planning and a little effort, a hugely positive impact can be had by both your students and you yourself.

Some of the ideas for activities will need the commitment of a team of teachers and employers. Other are relatively simple to organise, i.e. a local employer coming in to speak to your students. Therefore, it is suggested that in the first instance you start with the simple activities and then, once you have some experience and contacts, progress on to the more technical and time committed activities.

As a simple summary, remember the following key points:

1. **Define your objectives.** Be clear about what you want to achieve for both the students and the school. But don’t forget to consider the benefit to the employer. Your school activity could act as a great personal development tool for employees.

2. **Be imaginative as to where you can find your business contacts.** A local telephone directory or the internet will of course be a good place to start, but don’t forget that your colleagues, parents of students and other local networks can be a great means of getting your foot in the door. Social media can also play an important role. In the longer term, social media can also help to publicise your work with local employers.

3. **Plan, review and plan again.** You will want to ensure that your employer engagement activity is a success for the school, the students and the employer. Therefore, ensure to allocate sufficient time to plan it in detail. Ensure that you review your plan with colleagues and the employer(s) to check that everyone is happy with what is being proposed and knows what they are required to do.
4. **Publicise what you have achieved.** By publicising the achievements of your students and the success of employer engagement activities, employers can soon see the ‘win win’ dimension of working with schools. It can also help to encourage other employers to engage.

5. **Review and build on success.** Review what you have done to learn how future activities can be improved. Make sure you gain feedback from the employer to make sure that the experience is a positive one for them too.
Annex A:
Sample Strategy / Planning Document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead contacts</th>
<th>Teacher details</th>
<th>Employer details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School address / job title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main email</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative email</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best time to contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best contact method</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative contacts</th>
<th>Teacher details</th>
<th>Employer details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main email</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative email</td>
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<td>Best time to contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best contact method</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Project details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the activity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which subjects does it link to?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the objectives of the activity for the employer (and employees)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are the students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many students are participating in the activity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will the employer do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What will the school do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What resources will the employer bring with them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of space will the employer need if visiting the school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When will the activity take place?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the employer need a car parking space?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the employer have any specific dietary or other needs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Action Plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>By when</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Annex B:

**Sample employer evaluation form**

In order for us to review and develop our (the schools) employer engagement activities with you, we would value your thoughts and comments regarding the recent activity that you and your colleagues took part in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enough time was allocated for developing the partnership / activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for the partnership / activity was done in an effective and efficient way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understood how my/our involvement would support students’ learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity has helped to raise awareness of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My company/industry/what it does/ how it does it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job role and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skills, qualifications and experience required in my profession</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job opportunities in my company/industry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This activity helped me to further develop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionally and/or personally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My knowledge/understanding of the school environment and the education system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My confidence in talking to and working with young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How else might you be able to assist the school in employer engagement activities?
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The British Council team would like to thank all the teachers, school leaders, administrators and industry experts who so willingly gave up their time to participate in writing this publication.

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