Employer Programme for Hospitality and Tourism

In partnership we shape the future of Hospitality and Tourism

Partner: TEI CRETE

Intellectual Output 3: Recommendations Report

Coordinator:

TEI Κρήτης
Τεχνολογικό Εκπαιδευτικό Ίδρυμα Κρήτης

Partners:

CYPRUS HOTEL ASSOCIATION

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Abbreviations

EPHT……………………………	Employer Programme for Hospitality and Tourism
OECD…………………………...	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
H&T……………………………	Hospitality and Tourism
HEI……………………………...	Higher Education Institutions
TAMK…………………………...	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
EP………………………………..	Employer Programme
ENA……………………………..	European Needs Analysis (report)
TEI Crete………………………..	Technological Educational Institute of Crete

RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

I. Executive Summary

The recommendations report is written with the purpose of helping educational institutions (academics as well as students) along with employers "fully realise the value of strategic, long term and intensive partnerships" (Wilson, 2015: 1). These three key-words are the foundation of a successful, contemporary and sustainable partnership programme in tourism and hospitality.

The research team has revised the relevant literature in the field, and has drawn conclusions from the empirical evidence generated so far under the 'Employer Programme for Tourism and Hospitality' (henceforth EPHT). In the current setting, the empirical data has been derived from two sources of evidence. First, the recommendations report draws material from best practice cases of vertical cases of strategic partnerships in hospitality and tourism across Europe. A vertical strategic partnership involves stakeholders across the various sides within a specific market or industry. Second, the report was informed from the results of a quantitative survey across stakeholders in three countries in Europe (Greece, Cyprus and Finland). Participants were graduates with experience from employer programmes, academics involved in employer programmes, and employers that have participated in employer programmes in hospitality and tourism. Overall, 320 responses were collected and utilized in the survey questionnaire.

II. Description of the Methodology to Reach the Recommendations Report

Central to the formulation of the recommendations report is the elaboration of the methodological underpinnings of the document and the plan described herein. In the next few paragraphs the research team will illustrate the particular framework with the support of the relevant literature in the field.

Currently, establishing a competitive advantage based on a transactional approach and transactional relationship (as used to be the case) may lead to a confrontational and adversarial relationship between 'partners'. Instead, a partnership structure that is being based on grounded theory, focusing upon the identification, description and explanation of all interactional processes among stakeholders within a partnership, could magnify the joint benefits accruing to this symbiotic relationship. According to OECD (2006), Bantham *et al.* (2003), Pietras and Strormer (2001) and Mohr and Spekman (1994), the grounded theory approach leads business partners to develop joint competitive advantages over competitors. So, the driving force behind the development of the recommendations report is the generation of an alternative source of competitive advantage through a new partnership structure. In turn, the 'new' partnership structure should be supported through a strategic (holistic), long term and intensive in nature relationship.

The next step in the process is to identify the specific activities that are inherent within successful partnerships, as opposed to transactional exchanges between firms. Thus, instead of focusing upon the analysis of one off incidents (transactions) between firms, what we are interested in as part of the methodology is to identify and evaluate the activities or attributes that may lead to (and possibly ensue) a successful interrelated relationship. The basic argument here is that these activities (i.e., marketing and promotion activities, funding mechanisms) operating at different levels, could offer different types or 'degrees' of cooperative business behaviour in the hospitality and tourism sector. In other words, the recommendations report will create a matrix of constructs (attributes), each with a different 'degree level'. In turn, the combination of these constructs and their 'degree levels' will produce of continuum of relationships or partnerships, each leading to competitive advantage. This is also the framework that has been adopted in both the literature and the marketplace. Given that what really the recommendations report discusses is a new *mondus operandi* in the hospitality and tourism sector, the document is essentially delineating the fundamentals of an organisational innovation in the tourism and hospitality sector (Ivascu *et al.* 2016, Draghici *et al.* 2015, Othman and Omar 2012). The identification of the attributes/constructs could serve as the theoretical blocks for the organisational innovation to develop.

IIa) Levels and Types of Engagement

As described in the Best Practices Report, Wilson (2015) conceptualises Employer Engagement as a ladder and he describes the different levels that range from an advisory relationship to a strategic partnership. It has to be noted here that one level, or step, does not necessarily or automatically lead to the next, neither that the included levels are exhausting. There can also be combinations of activities that hereby are presented as belonging to different levels. This 'ladder' or continuum of employer engagement is not meant to be followed rigidly. It is a stylized model that illustrates a progression from less intensive forms of engagement—such as advisory boards or contract training—to more intensive ones, such as development of pathways or partnering for sectoral workforce initiatives".

II(b) Building a new culture

The recommendations report is written to help educational institutions (academics as well as students) along with employers "*fully realise the value of strategic, long term and intensive partnerships*" (Wilson, 2015: 1). These three key-words are the foundation of a successful, contemporary and sustainable partnership programme in tourism and hospitality. The ***strategic*** nature of an employer programme (this terms will be used interchangeably with the partnership programme), is the methodological cornerstone of this project, and the theoretical foundation of the recommendations report (Wilson *et al*. 1996, Pizam *et al.* 2013, Ivascu *et al.* 2016). Essentially, it implies that all stakeholders engage within a co-operate relationship/partnership, as opposed to a transactional one (Wilson *et al.* 1996). Implicitly, strategic relationships relate to organizations with interdependent objectives, goals and visions. This interdependence is necessary for the alliance / partnership to operate in the first place (Wilson *et al.* 1996).

The ***long term*** perspective of the employer programme relates to the fact that the designed partnership should be of a continuous nature, as opposed to a series of one – off, unilateral incidents (usually from academia's side towards employers). The focus here is on cultivating long term cooperation, as compared to short term transactions (Wilson *et al.* 1996). Finally, the ***intensive*** nature of an employer programme relates to the fact that the employer programme envisaged should be based upon a continuous, in depth dialogue between stakeholders. All these three key underpinnings of the visionary employer programme should build a multi level ladder of partnership and associated benefits (for stakeholders).

According to the Lumina Foundation (Lumina Foundation, 2014), efforts to bring these stakeholders closer together could facilitate eliminating the 'perceptions gap' that exists in the tourism and hospitality sector, as a result of the skills mismatch that has long been identified in this field (Ivascu *et al* 2016, Christou 2002). The key message drawn from the recommendations report is that academics (and institutions), employers and students should work together in a multi-level, interdisciplinary and interrelated business environment. Academia cannot function without committed students, students cannot develop without employers' support, and employers cannot operate without skilled workforce (graduates). Hence, the objective of the recommendations report is to move one step further from current practices and describe a holistic system of academic partnership programme in the tourism and hospitality sector. In this respect, the current approach has utilized a number of different sources to achieve the aforementioned objective.

The proposed EPHT should be characterized by flexibility with respect to stakeholders' degrees of participation, commitment and contribution. All types of tourism and hospitality companies and organizations are welcome to join the consortium. However, each company presents different characteristics and capabilities and thus commitment and contribution can vary among employers/industry partners. Thus, the proposed EPHT should be developed and structured in a way that will facilitate participation of all types of tourism organizations and moreover should provide incentives and gains to all kind of stakeholders in accordance to their capabilities and willingness to contribute in the consortium. Moreover, the EP should allow for a gradual development of the cooperation between the program and its members. Therefore emphasis should be given on the importance of building and cultivating a new culture among partners (as described already).

In terms of the particular methodology applied in order to reach to the recommendations report, this is described as follows: The recommendations report draws heavily from two other documents (intellectual outputs) in the EPHT project; the European Needs Analysis (ENA) report, and the Best Practices (BP) report. Initially, the ENA report was based upon primary quantitative data that was collected through a survey questionnaire. This survey questionnaire that was administered in three countries across Europe (Cyprus, Greece and Finland) was administered in all three type of stakeholders (academics, employers and students), and approximately 320 responses were collected. The survey questionnaire enquired participants about their role, contribution, participation in an employer programme as well as other issues pertaining to the feasibility and management of an employer programme.

The Best Practices (BP) report was based on secondary information that was gathered from the examination of different types and cases of employer programmes in tourism, across Europe. Each one of these BP was then evaluated against a set number of criteria in order to evaluate how closely it resembles an employer programme. Essentially, the information derived from the ENA report describes how the three types of stakeholders envisage their role and participation in an EP. Whereas the BP report describes current practices within EP in the field right now. In the BP report, 10 cases have been examined overall. Based on the information from these two sources, the recommendations report aims to provide a matching between what is actually happening at the moment and what the three types of stakeholders would like to see in order for a successful EP in tourism and hospitality to materialise. The contribution of the recommendations report focuses on the application and implementation of existing practices in the field, existing practices modified according to the information provided at the BP, or completely new/innovative practices in the field.

III. Summary of the European Needs Analysis Report

During the first phase of the project a European Needs analysis report has been developed, which sought to investigate the needs of key stakeholders of an employer programme for tertiary educational institutions offering programmes in hospitality and tourism (i.e. hospitality and tourism industry, educational institutions-administration, faculty and students). The identification of needs is a process of describing a gap between the existing cooperation and the desired cooperation, including forms of cooperation, specific activities that could be organised, benefits installed for each stakeholder group and methods of implementation

The objective of the needs analysis report was set twofold:

- At first, it aimed to identify and record the current situation with respect to the forms of existing collaborations between the H&T industry and the HEIs offering programs in hospitality and tourism, in the three partner countries. Furthermore it sought to assess the effectiveness of these collaborations, in order to shed light on the needs of the stakeholders for an effective employer programme that will take into due consideration existing good practices in order to establish successful partnerships.

- The second objective was to reveal the aspects of a perceived successful employer programme. In other words, after identifying the gaps in the partner countries, the next step was to identify the needs, expectations, desires and priorities, that different stakeholders have from an employer programme in H&T and to reveal commonalities and differences between the partner countries, if any.

With respect to the main outcomes of the Needs Analysis Report, the research revealed the urgent need for an up-to-date, modern, efficient and effective employer programme in the H&T sector. The first important point highlighted by the stakeholders in all partner countries was the need for further involvement of the H&T industry in education.

A detailed examination of the forms that existing cooperation undertakes showed that in general, in all three countries, internships and practical exercise are the most common forms of cooperation between HEIs offering programmes in H&T and H&T enterprises, Moreover, the fact that several stakeholders who participated in the research were not aware of existing forms of cooperation, is a call for an employer programme that will be visible and will raise awareness among those stakeholders who will in turn be able to make the most of it. The "traditional" forms of cooperation, i.e. internships and practical exercise, have been indicated by all types of stakeholders as the most preferred ways to build cooperation between academia and the H&T industry.

Concerning the effectiveness of existing cooperation, it is interesting to note that academics and students were generally more critical of the current cooperation than industry representatives were. This can be explained through the fact that industry representatives usually are not as involved as HEIs are in such activities. Furthermore, in all three countries, there seems to be a lack of sufficient and effective communication, which hinders successful partnerships. The majority of industry representatives and students believe that the best way to achieve efficient communication and mutual understanding between partners of an employer programme is meetings/fora held on specific time intervals where employers and representatives of H&T tertiary level educational institutions can meet and discuss their needs, insights and ideas. In general, it was surprising that communication through online tools was not a very popular response by any category of stakeholders in any country.

An important aspect of the research concerned gains, incentives and contributions for, and by different stakeholders. Constant updating of the industry needs, which leads to more relevant teaching and research, were considered as possible gains in all three countries, along with access to ready skilled workforce, skilled interns, training provision to employees by Tertiary Level Educational Institution staff (e.g. in marketing, management), commissioned research (i.e. research on a specific topic and/or setting indicated by a business according to its needs), possibility of developing an applied research programme in the business, access to raw data provided by employers, enhanced employability of graduates and access to industry-standard resources.

Concerning administrative and operational issues, in Finland, all stakeholders seem to favor a full partnership between the H&T industry and H&T HEIs, while in Greece, there seems to be a higher level of mistrust, rendering the work to be done by the EPHT consortium more challenging. Finally, in Cyprus, even though the majority of industry representatives and students responded that they would like a programme where "partners exchange services and plan different activities together", academics and HEIs' staff do not share this opinion, as their majority responded they want a programme where partners merely offer different services to each other.

With respect to funding and resources, the majority of stakeholders in Finland, suggested that the employer programme be sustained through regular funding by HEIs. Some academics also argued that it could be self-sustained via membership and registration fees. In Greece, on the other hand, the aforementioned mistrust seems to be confirmed again, as the majority of industry representatives believed that the programme should be funded by HEIs, while HEIs' representatives, including students, argued that funding should be provided by the industry (employers). Finally, in Cyprus a more balanced picture emerged; employers favoured the option funding though "donations by employers", while most academics argued that funding should be provided on a regular basis by the HEIS. Finally, the majority of students suggested donations from HEIs as the preferred way towards sustainable funding of an Employer Program.

Finally, as far as management of an Employer Program is concerned, a clear picture was acquired in Finland where all stakeholders would preferably trust the coordination of an E.P to the HEIs. In Greece, there was no clear suggestion, since both H&T employers and HEIs have been chosen as the appropriate bodies for EP coordination. Finally, in Cyprus, as in Finland, HEIs are also trusted more by all stakeholders, followed by employers. In Finland, academics are equally spread across all possible responses. On the other hand, students and employers show a clear preference towards "an advisory group with representatives from all stakeholders that will have a consulting role to the coordinator", in the role of whom, Finnish respondents prefer the HEIs. The same response prevailed also in Greece, for all stakeholder categories. Finally, in Cyprus, even though the same response was the most popular among academics and HEIs' staff, students and industry representatives had a different opinion. They believe that the management should be trusted on "a steering committee with representatives from all stakeholders that will have a decision making/strategy setting role".

In a comparative light, the situation in the three countries was not found to be very different, which makes the design and application of a common employer programme in all these countries a feasible objective. The needs, stances and attitudes may be combined in a common program, as there is no significant divergence between responses in Greece, Cyprus and Finland. It has to be noted though that it seems that in Finland, existing cooperation is more effective and wide than in Greece and Cyprus, and this is demonstrated by various results in various items in the questionnaire, as well as from the focus groups' and interviews' results. Overall, however, the comparison between the countries revealed the need for further involvement of the industry in H&T education.

IV. Summary of the Best Practices Guide

According to a recent study by Gallup for Inside Higher Education (Gallup and Lumina Foundation, 2013), there is a profound divergence among stakeholders (employers and academics) regarding graduates' competencies when entering the workforce in the tourism and hospitality sector. This predicament implies that there is currently a considerable 'distance' as far as what employers and academics regard as desirable graduate skills in tourism and hospitality.

The purpose of the Best Practices Guide was to bridge this divergence on graduates' educational competences through the examination of a number of employer programmes in Europe and internationally. The examination and analysis of these employer programmes could reveal best practices and approaches to either disseminate at a wider audience, or adapt to existing conditions and predicaments. Additionally, the Best Practices Guide aims to improve the collaboration between educational institutions in hospitality and tourism or other industries and the employment market. The evaluation of the case studies presented at the Best Practices Guide is set against a set of eleven (11) criteria, selected by the consortium and identified in the relevant literature.

As far as the empirical findings from the analysis of the Best Practices in employer programmes, the report indicates that there is a continuum with respect to the type of employer programmes in operation currently. At the one end are holistic or strategic employer programmes (such as the ones by Hosco and TAMK). These employer programmes represent a stated objective to cultivate long-term relationships approaching employers in the context of specific plans, opportunities, and objectives, rather than on a spot basis, when the college needs assistance. At the other end of the spectrum there are employer programmes that are best defined as a set of activities that are loosely connected to each other, offer piece-meal solutions and short term focus. In terms of the activities that are more popular/appear more frequently among employer programmes (either holistic or activity based), these include the following:

- Networking activities;
- Job search opportunities;
- Consulting and advisory services
- The provision of Master classes/ Guest lectures/ workshops
- Mentoring
- Internships and placement services and opportunities

In turn, a number of selective activities and component parts have proven quite significant in the examination and evaluation of the aforementioned employer programmes. First and foremost the report stresses the importance of communication, which emerged as one of the most important gaps in collaborations between HEIs and the H&T industry in the countries of the consortium, according to the results of the comparative European research implemented by the project. It is noteworthy that most of the best practices presented here, do not follow a systematic or regulated way for communication between partners and in most cases, the initiative for communicating is taken by HEIs. Moreover, many of the interviewees stated that they adapt their communication styles and channels for communicating, depending on their interpersonal relationships with each partner. This is not necessarily a weak point for an Employer Programme, as it could act for its benefit. Given that many interviewees also said that the establishment of deep partnerships takes time and patience, communication styles should be adapted to the context of each partnership.

Other innovative practices and activities that may benefit the EPHT programme include *inter alia*:

- The *frequent and informed revision of courses* (mostly every year) after a consultative process that usually involves all stakeholders. This could engage employers (actual and prospective ones) more actively with the programme, academia and prospective employees (for example alumni could represent both employers as well as employees in this process).
- The systematic and structured evaluation of employer programmes. The majority of the holistic employer programmes initiated a systematic, well – grounded and effective evaluation process that involved all relevant stakeholders. This can facilitate EPHT efforts a great deal since it will provide the necessary impetus for continuous improvement and added value in its programme.
- A personalized approach coupled with mentoring and shadowing opportunities (for selected cases). Combined these two activities together could offer added value to employer programmes since they can be tailored made (depending on availability of resources and design of the programme) to graduates' needs and profile. Differentiation and specialization then can vary according to programme and/or partnership requirements. In shadowing's case, this could be a win – win situation for all stakeholders, since it could be used to reward and recognize excellent academic performance, offer employers added value services, matching them with the best students, whereas academics and institutions set the foundations for a life-long relationship with the graduate and the professional.

V. Recommendations

V.1: Administration of the EP

V.1a: Type of System:

The 'type of system' attribute relates to the sum of activities and actions within an employer programme. According to the relevant literature in the field (Bolden 2011, Bolden *et al.* 2010, Wilson 2015), employer programmes could be classified within a continuum (although the categories can be distinctive or overlapping, depending on the context's nature). Wilson (2015), conceptualises Employer Engagement as a ladder and he describes the different levels that range from an advisory relationship to a strategic partnership. At the one end of the ladder, the partnership could take the form of an advisory board, whereas at the other end of the ladder the partnership could take the form of a partnership for sectoral workforce initiatives.

i. The need identified:

The evidence from the Needs Analysis Report revealed the need for a mindset change, in order for an employer programme to effectively bridge the gap between the worlds of academia and H&T industry. In addition, the need for new strategic partnerships and the necessity for employer engagement has been identified. With respect to the type of the system, there is a widespread consensus among the participants in the survey that participation in an EP should be voluntary and that benefits should be accruing incrementally to participants.

ii. Best Practices identified:

The evidence from the Best Practices guide indicates that in reality employer programmes take a number of different forms. Most often, these are grouped into the following categories: (a) Certification schemes (training for vocational and training skills), (b) advisory – placement schemes (offering placement and job opportunities to participants) and (c) strategic partnership (holistic system of partnership, including evaluation mechanisms).
In particular:
(a) The case of Hosco can be considered to be a system integrating several activities such as networking activities, placements, learning activities and recruitment. Hosco.com supports students and professionals in their networking, learning and recruitment efforts. This system fulfills several of the evaluation criteria established by the EPHT project, since this is a systemic program that cultivates long term relationships, is mutually valuable and applicable in the H&T industry; however it cannot be characterized as a comprehensive and intensive system, since it functions as a medium that connects students with the industry, focuses solely on employability activities and does not engage employers in a variety of issues and activities, such as curricula development, skills needs analysis, etc, neither empowers employers to develop and assume leadership roles in their partnership. This practice can be applied by the EPHT, only if it is modified and adjusted to engage employers in activities that are related to curriculum development and advancement of the graduates' skills and capabilities.
(b) The Employer Programme of the School of Hotel, Resort and Spa Management, University of Derby can be characterized as a system, as it offers holistic solutions to students. It is in a position to equip them with a wide range of knowledge and skills, as it combines many activities, with the most important being “real world learning” philosophy. It satisfies most of the evaluation criteria set by the EPHT project and moreover it is an existing practice that can be adopted by the EPHT since it suggests *levels of partnership that are incremental*, where the highest level is being achieved with some employers, who are very engaged with the university, while with others a more basic level of collaboration is maintained.
(c) The same idea applies in the case of the TAMK employer programme, which suggests that an EP be divided into two levels. On the one level, a basic partnership will be developed, that gives a company the experience of cooperating with the academic institution (e.g. an organization can commission students to do many kinds of work. The commissions are carried out as part of their studies, and may take the form of project studies or a final thesis. A company in this level of partnership can also provide practical training placements for students (the cooperation can later be deepened into a multidisciplinary and extensive advanced partnership). On the advanced level a partnership agreement is being developed that can include more services, such as: a long-term partnership activities, student team, key account person, information services, R&D funding, innovation services and institution's facilities. This is a system that fits the vision of the EPHT, and could be applied without serious modifications, as long as sustainability it terms of funding and resources could be secured.
(d) Nottingham University Business School programme offers a variety of activities and

services that are mainly related to students' soft skills development and enhancement of their employability. However, the system was based mostly on initiatives taken by one person (the employee assigned by the University), and thus it cannot be characterized as a system that builds a partnership among stakeholders and develops a strategic direction for the EP.
(e) London Career Clusters: This project empowers active participation of employers by including them in the project's steering committee. This is considered to be a good practice that can be applied by the EPHT, since a steering committee enables engagement of all stakeholders and the development of a long-lasting partnership.
(f) Graduate Employability Project (Edinburg Napier University): The GEP is a system, as it combines a very wide range of activities, which are assessed and delivered in a holistic manner. Its aim was to increase employer as well as student engagement and as such, it could be adopted by the EPHT.

iii. Our Recommendation:
Considering the information provided above, we recommend that employer programmes and/or schemes could offer activities that belong to different levels. The proposed EPHT should be a system characterized by flexibility with respect to stakeholders' degrees of participation, commitment and contribution. It should be developed and structured in a way that will facilitate participation of all types of tourism and hospitality stakeholders on a voluntary basis, allowing for various levels and forms of cooperation and encouraging strategic partnerships. Moreover it should provide incentives and gains to all stakeholders, in accordance to their capabilities and willingness to contribute in the partnership, and thus a membership system should be developed.

V.1b: Governance (Management & Coordination)

The old model of industry engagement was based on a conflict of objectives, since industry partners were looking for cheap labour, while academic institutions were interested in securing internship and job opportunities for their graduates. Previous experience has also indicated that the effective engagement of the industry through a relationship management approach requires the existence of a strategic decision on behalf of the academic institutions (Solnet et. al., 2007).

(i) The need identified:
The information from the Needs Analysis Report indicates that all stakeholder categories in Cyprus & Finland proposed HEIs as their preferred alternative for the EP coordination. On the other hand, in Greece, employers have been indicated as the most suitable partner to coordinate the Program. With respect to the management of the scheme, Finnish students and employers show clear preference towards "*an advisory group with representatives from all stakeholders that will have a consulting role to the coordinator*". The same also applied in Greece, for all stakeholder categories. In Cyprus, even though the same response was the most popular among academics and HEIs' staff, students and industry representatives believed that management should be trusted on a steering committee with representatives from all stakeholders that will have a decision making/strategy setting role.

(ii) Best Practices identified:
Conversely, things were much cleared in practice (examination of best practice cases), whereby the results from the best practices reveal that academic institutions are the most appropriate partner/body for the coordination and management of the EP. In particular, the ***coordination and management of the Tampere University of Applied Sciences Programme was found to be the responsibility of the university***, where existing staff was assigned with

the coordination of the activities in each faculty. A similar rationale was applied by the ***Kajaani University of Applied Sciences (KAMK), where the Careers Office of the University was responsible for the coordination*** of all activities that had to do with Employer Engagement, Practical Exercise, Internships, etc. In addition, at the KAMK, each study programme also had a person responsible for coordinating such activities within the department. However, coordination of the Programmes at these two Finish Universities did not satisfy few of the criteria set by this research, since the employers were not involved in the management and coordination process, a fact that would not encourage employers to develop and assume leadership roles (***"empowering"***), nor would it allow for systematic monitoring and administration, a prerequisite for ***"quality assurance"***. On the contrary, the management and coordination procedure applied by the **Graduate Employability Programme of Edinburg Napier University** offers an incredibly valuable input regarding evaluation, administration and monitoring of an Employer Programme. Its project management based methodology has proved very effective in managing such a programme. The Steering Group that was formed for management and coordination purposes had cross-university representation and oversaw project planning, budgets, progress updates, sharing of good practice and dissemination. Meetings of the Group were held approximately every 2 months.

(iii) Our Recommendation:
Based on the best practices presented above, it can be concluded that ***the GEP of the Edinburg Napier University is a best practice that could satisfy the needs of the EPHT,*** and thus it is recommended that management and coordination of our EP be assigned to a Steering Group which will consist of representatives from all stakeholders involved, and will be monitoring the EP based on Key Performance Indicators.
In particular, it is suggested that the Employer Programme be administered by a project coordination team in each academic institution (consisting of academic and administrative staff of the Tourism / Business faculty), using the support of the Liaison / Career office in each of the three participating academic institutions. However, since the proposed EP needs to satisfy the criteria of being ***"strategic", "empowering"*** and ***"sustainable"***, in a way that it will lead into a stable and meaningful partnership between HEIs and H&T businesses, it is suggested that ***a Steering Group*** be appointed (consisting of one or two representatives from each stakeholder category), which will have a consulting and monitoring role to the project coordination team and moreover will be in charge of the EP planning and coordination and will have a decision making and strategy setting role.

V.1c: Structure and Resource Requirements

(i) The need identified:
According to the results in the Needs Analysis report, respondents indicated that there is a great split among participants. On the one hand, participants in Cyprus and Finland indicated that HEIs should be more appropriate in running an employer programme. On the other hand, Greek participants mentioned employers as the stakeholder most suitable in running an employer programme in tourism and hospitality, albeit with a small percentage difference from HEIs. Overall, HEIs seem to be the option of preference although with a small margin from other stakeholders (employers).

(ii) Best practices identified:
The above-mentioned points are also reflected in the results derived from the Best Practices analysis. In particular, t***he Careers Office or the Liaison Office of the HEIs have been identified as the preferred hubs for the coordination*** of all activities that are related to

Employer Engagement, Practical Exercise, Internships, etc. So, the focus when it comes to structuring and organizing an EP in tourism and hospitality ***remains with the academic institutions***. And probably rightly so, provided their expertise in the matter. This is as a ***best practice that can be utilized by the EPHT***, ***although it should be modified***, even if it's not from the inception phase of the EP, ***since a structure based on a HEI's Career Office could not easily accommodate for a Steering Group or Committee***, which has been identified as the appropriate unit for the EP Management and Coordination.

(iii) Our recommendation:

In terms of the coordination of efforts within an EP in tourism and hospitality, the evidence from the needs analysis and the best practices case studies indicates that certain tried and tested tools and approaches could also be applied in the current case. Hence, the report's recommendations revolve around a number of already existing solutions for the structure of the body responsible for running the EP scheme, which will be analyzed in detail during the next step of this research (IO4-Operational Manual)

- During its inception phase, ***the EPHT could be incorporated in the Careers Office/ Liaison Office of the partner institution***. This is a tried and tested approach that could be considered as a safe option. This would be an easy and costless way to utilize the resources that the HEI has allocated to the Career Office, including, trained personnel / consultants, technicians, software and system engineer, administrative staff etc. At the same time the network of companies that participate in the existing "Practical Training/Internship" Program could be used a starting point for the development of the EP consortium. The Careers Office personnel/consultants would be responsible for the coordination of all activities that have to do with Employer Engagement, Practical Exercise, Internships, etc.
- Over the next stages of its development, the EP is expected to have sufficient funding to support its operation, through the membership scheme, donations and sponsorships, etc (as described in the funding and contribution sections). This is also a tried approach that has experienced success in practice. At least one full-time employee and one part-time/trainee should be assigned to coordinate all everyday activities, as well as promotional activities, while a member of the faculty should be responsible for overseeing and reviewing the planning procedure and the evaluation/monitoring outcomes.
- The management of the EPHT will be the responsibility of a Steering Committee where all partners will be represented (H&T industry representatives, HEIs, students/graduates). The Steering Committee will include senior-level representatives from all stakeholders involved (each partner organisation). Industry representative will participate in the steering committee according to their level of partnership.

V.1d: Funding

(i) The need identified:

Evidence from the European Needs Analysis Report indicates that ***respondents prefer a self-financed employer programme***, mainly from tertiary-level educational institutes and to a lower extent by the H&T companies. In particular, respondents' opinions focus on two issues: firstly, there is widespread belief that ***self-sustainability via regular membership/ participation fees has been identified as the most popular alternative*** among all three partner countries for funding the EPHT. A second source of funding could also come through ***donations*** from employers / H&T companies, as well as from the HEIs.

(ii) Best Practices identified:

As far as the current practice in the field, the analysis of the best practices suggests that external funding is the '*dish of the day'* for employer programmes in hospitality and tourism. In particular, best practices reveal the following funding opportunities and external sources:

- British Universities, i.e. Nottingham University Business School and Univ. of Derby, as well as Kajaani University of Applied Sciences provided support to their programmes through internal funding and staffing of the relevant departments. The Liaison Office of the Athens University of Economics and Business is also being sustained through University funding, rendering its operations dependent on the University's availability on resources. Morover, this practice does not satisfy the widespread belief of the research participants that favors self-sustainability of such systems, nor does it satisfy the criterion of long-term survival of the Programme (***"sustainability"), since the programme depends on HEIs' availability of resources.*** Thus, this practice ***could be adopted by our EP only in combination*** with other identified practices.
- The programme introduced by Tampere University of Applied Sciences was ***funded by the government***, a practice that could not always prove beneficial for the survival of the EPHT, since most countries in Europe have cut public funding for HEIs, as a result of the current Financial Crisis. Thus, governmental support is also a practice that should not be adopted as the main funding option for the EPHT.
- The Univ. of Ioannina Liaison Office does not depend its operation only on public funding; companies' donations by partner companies are also a significant source of financing for its Mentoring Programme, a practice that indicates an effort towards the development of a ***closer cooperation*** between the academic institution and the employers, which is the main objective of the EPHT.
- The London Careers Cluster Project was a mentoring programme that was funded through its initial phase by the European Social Funds rendering its operation non-sustainable upon completion of its inception phase. A similar situation can be identified with respect to the EPHT, whose development and pilot testing is being financed by the European Union, yet its survival will depend on the availability of public financing and donations by H&T employers.
- Finally, Hosco.com is a self-sustainable organization, as it is ***funded by the membership fees*** provided by its members. It does not rely on external funding. In this sense, it promotes sustainability principles

(iii) Our Recommendation:

The development and transformation of an employer program from a plain "arms-length" relationship that requires low levels of commitment, to a long term strategic partnership that provides long-term benefits to the participants, cannot be achieved and sustained in the long run without provision of a systematic and regular source of funding. The above mentioned ***best practices could be utilized in the case of the EPHT, yet not separately but in combination***. More specifically the following financing practices should be adopted if it is for the EP to be ***sustainable in the long-run***:

- Initially, the Employer Program will be funded throughout its inception and pilot-testing period (Sept 2016- Aug. 2018) by the respective EPHT Erasmus+ program, which provides for necessary funding for the development of the platform and the relevant training for the academic /administrative staff that will be initially involved.
- After this phase is over, it is expected that the first period of the EP operation will be ***funded through the academic institutions which will provide for the necessary facilities and personnel and necessary tangible resources***. At the same time employer/industry *donations*, albeit not on a regular basis will be sought after; the companies that are already involved in a formal or informal HEIs' network will be initially contacted by the respective members of academic staff. However, ***long-term sustainability of the EP won't be achieved***

unless a membership system is introduced, which will allow for different degrees of involvement and support on behalf of the employers: industry partners that already have a closer relationship to the institution are expected to participate as “preferred partners”, contributing with a higher membership fee, in exchange for privileged gains (e.g. priority with respect to interns and academic research outcomes), while other forms of donations / sponsorship will be available to “basic members” in the network. (The contribution on behalf of the HEIs with respect to administrative staff and facilities is considered as a pre-requisite).

V.2: Planning for the EP

(i) The need identified:
According to the Needs Analysis report there is no uniform approach among the partner countries with respect to how EP activities should be planned & implemented: Greece & Finland suggested that EP partners offer different services to each other (there is an increased notion of exchange), while stakeholders in Cyprus suggested that partners exchange services & plan different activities together (increased notion of co-operation). Moreover, in Greece, there seemed to be a higher level of mistrust between HEIs and the H&T industry, rendering the work to be done by the EPHT consortium there more challenging. Overall, the practices proposed at the ENA report indicate that one could devise a suit of planning and implementation techniques.

(ii) Best Practices identified:
The BP Guide does not provide specific information on how the various systems plan their activities and what process is being followed in their strategic planning. The only best practice identified comes for the ***University of Derby***, where an ***annual forum organized by the university***, that aims ***to bring academia closer to the industry***. In particular employers from the Hospitality Industry meet with programme leaders and discuss about current trends and needs in the H&T industry and then the curricula are shaped to reflect that, while overall programme planning is also influenced by this process. This practice can be utilized, however it needs to be modified in order to meet the requirements and the criteria set for the EPHT: the analysis so far has indicated that the EP needs to be developed as a holistic system and not just a sum of activities, that will be characterized by a strategic, long-term orientation (“***strategic***” and “***continuous***”). As a result, a strategic planning process should be proposed, that would provide for all types of activities, in a way that will secure substantial engagement by all stakeholder categories (***“intensive”*** and ***“empowering”***), as well as ***mutual contribution*** and ***mutual benefits.***

(iii) Our recommendation:
Based on the analysis of the information from both the needs analysis and best practices reports, one could recommend that each tertiary-level educational institution introducing the ***EPHT system should design the planning cycle tailor-made to the specific requirements of the partnership, in a way that a long-term strategic partnership between tertiary-level educational institutions and the H&T industry will be enhanced***. In particular it is suggested that regular monitoring of the planning and implementation process through a set of standardised research/surveys/focus groups takes place, in order to be constantly up to date with the ever changing needs of the industry. These focus groups/surveys should be organized and supervised by a project coordinator, i.e. a member of staff at the HEI who would be in charge of the evaluation and planning procedures. In addition, an annual forum should be organized by the HEIs, where employers from the H&T Industry would meet with

programme leaders and exchange ideas about current trends and needs in the industry. The EP activities should then be shaped to reflect those changes (e.g. academic curricula should be adjusted according to the identified skills need, topics and ideas for research could be suggested, the outcome of which would provide valuable data and information to the industry partners, etc.

V.3.: Activities to be offered – Contribution of stakeholders

The activities offered by the system will be developed based on the contribution each stakeholder category is willing to make into the Employer Program. Thus the recommended activities in this report need to be based mainly on the results that came out from the Needs Analysis Report, with respect to ***how*** and ***how much*** each stakeholder category would be ***willing to contribute*** into this system. The recommended activities to be included in the EPHT will be the outcome of the "matching" of the suggested contributions by each stakeholder category, while the activities that came out from the identified best practices will also be considered.

(i) The need identified:
The contributions different stakeholders categories are willing to make, as identified by the needs analysis report, will be presented hereafter:
a: Employers / Professionals
As far as professionals' contributions (activities to be offered) in the system are concerned, the ENA report indicates that they would like to contribute in the following ways:
1. Job shadowing opportunities
2. Provide guest speakers from industry
3. Provide work experience and/or practical exercise programmes to students
4. Organize student visits in their organization

b: Academia/Academics
As far as academics' contributions in an EP, the ENA report indicates that they would be willing to contribute in the following activities:
1. Organize Industry Days in their Institution, as well as Industry Visits
2. Facilitate/organize work practical exercise programs
3. Provide teacher placements in the industry

c: Students
With respect to what type of contributions students are willing to make in the system, the needs analysis report indicates that they would like to contribute in the following ways:
1. Participate in industry visits
2. Participate in research & surveys for improvement of curricula
3. Participate in work experience/practical exercise programmes
4. Participate in thematic workshops and seminars

(ii) Best Practices identified:
A thorough analysis of the best practices that have been presented in the relevant guide provide a very broad range of activities that could be incorporated into our proposed Employer Programme. The best practices identified could be slit into two categories:
(i) on the one hand there are systems that offer a range of activities that satisfy a very specific objective. More specifically, ***Hosco.com*** and the ***Liaison Office of the Athens University of Economic and Business (Greece)*** have a relatively narrow scope (compared

to the one that is being proposed by the EPHT), which is related to employability and talent recruitment. The activities offered by those systems include mainly: ***career fair organization, counseling services to students, alumni skills enhancement through training and seminar organization, networking, "institution's ambassadors", recruitment and internship positions, consulting and advisory services for employers.*** The services offered by the ***Liaison Office of the University of Ioannina (Greece), i.e. networking and workshops for mentors and mentees,*** satisfy mainly the needs of a mentoring programme, (which is the main goal of the University's Liaison Office); however the above mentioned activities could also be adapted by our system, to complement the rest of the EP activities.
(ii) In addition, the best practices guide also presents a few more holistic systems, such as the ***Graduate Employer Programme of the Edinburg Napier University (GEP),*** the ***Nottingham University Business School Programme (NUBS)*** and the Programme offered by ***Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK***). More specifically, the GEP project has a significant impact on the University's curricula: in order for the university to improve graduates' employability, a systematic effort towards ***reviewing and re-designing the academic programmes*** has been initiated, according to which academic time has been bought out to provide academic leadership around ***curriculum change*** and to consult with employers and professional bodies. In addition, the programme has enhanced employer engagement practices through the following activities: ***increased employer presence on campus, employer networking events, placements and internships, employer mentoring***. An additional set of activities that would satisfy the needs for both academics and employers, as these have been indicated by the ENA and the qualitative research, is ***consultancy services*** that are being offered by the TAMK programme.

(iii) Our recommendation:
In order for the most important EP activities to be chosen, one should take into consideration the criteria set by the best practices guide, according to which the programme should be "***wide ranging***", meaning that a large number of diverse methods/activities need to be incorporated and a wide variety of employers should be engaged in the system. Moreover, the EP should be characterized by a ***strategic orientation***, i.e. the ultimate goal would be to develop a strategic, long-term partnership among stakeholders and should be ***mutually valuable***, i.e. meet the objectives of all stakeholders, in order to secure their mutual contribution. Thus, several of the above mentioned best practices should be adopted, but should be modified in a way to fulfill the programme's criteria set by the consortium.
More specifically, our proposed programme could utilize several of activities suggested by Hosco.com and Liaison Office of AUEB and Liaison Office, that facilitate employability of graduates and cover employers' need for skilled interns/ employees. Further on, the practices suggested by the ***GEP (Edinburg Napier University), TAMK and Nottingham University Business School Programme satisfy the needs of our EP,*** (as these have been identified by the Needs Analysis Report) ***and thus can be adopted by our proposed EP***, although it may not be feasible for certain activities to be developed from the outset. Recommended activities include:

- Placements and Internships
- Guest Lectures and master classes from the industry
- Organization of work experience/practical exercise programmes to students
- Field trips - Student visits in employers' premises
- Organization of thematic workshops and seminars
- Organization of Career Fairs
- Counseling services for career building and career decision-making
- Employer networking events

- Mentoring activities
- Job shadowing
- Inter-school competitions
- Curriculum development
- Commissioned work by students (e.g.research, theses, etc)
- EPHT Ambassadors

Finally it has to be noted that, although the system should offer a broad range of activities in order to fulfill the EPHT goals, at the same time it should allow for partners to decide their degree of participation into these activities and commitment into the partnership, especially when it comes to the commitment of the employers.

V.4: Incentives for participation in the EPHT – Reward Mechanisms

V.4a: Professionals / Employers

Another key element of a strategic partnership relates to the incentive mechanisms and the possible reward systems (and expected gains) accrued to stakeholders. The quantitative element aside, qualitatively it makes sense within a partnership to have an effective and efficient incentives and reward structures. As far as the expected gains from cooperation are concerned, the nature of the partnership implies that the rewards accruing for each type of stakeholders are of equally significant.

(I) The need identified:

With respect to the rewards accruing to the **professionals/employers**, the evidence from the European Needs Analysis report indicates that this group of stakeholders would be motivated through the following rewards/gains:

- Access to skilled and trained interns and employees (save time and money)
- Ability to influence academic curriculum (and thus, the supply of employees with the right mixture of skills and abilities)
- Personnel professional development
- Publicity for their services and operations
- Status and Reputation
- Commissioned research (i.e. research on a specific topic and/or setting indicated by a business according to its needs)

As far as the rewards accruing to **academic institutions and members of academic staff**, the evidence from the ENA report indicates that this group of stakeholders would be motivated through the following rewards:

- Career advancement through research performance - Possibility of developing an applied research programme in the business
- Build professional relationships
- Gain access to industry data to facilitate own research programme
- Enhance student visibility (and improve quality of intake)
- Curricula development and improvement
- Improve industry and/or market knowledge

The final group of stakeholders in the EP relates to **students**, and in particular the type of rewards they would like to receive for their contribution into the scheme. According to the ENA, student participants identified the following four (4) key areas as the main types of rewards they would like to receive due to their participation in the EP:

- Scholarships
- Employability (professional development)
- Personal development (improvement of life skills and CV)
- Get to meet and work with prospective employers
- Work / professional experience

(ii) Best Practices Identified:

In practice, the evidence coming from the Best Practices report, confirms the input from the ENA report. Several best practices have been identified, which present a pool of gains and rewards that could be selected and combined in a way that would fit to the proposed strategic partnership and would meet the objectives of the EPHT.

- In the case of **Hosco.com** network, the rewards accrued for institutions and employers are mainly related to opportunities for matching the needs for skilled interns and employers with talented graduates and young professionals. This is a significant gain for both employers and students and one that would keep both groups active in the system. Similar gains are being offered by the programme that has been developed at the **AUEB Liaison Office** (Greece). Additional gains in this case included: consulting and career counselling for students, assistance in applying for scholarships, seminars on "how to succeed in job search". However, "matching" labor supply and demand is only one of the EP's objectives and thus ***this practice needs to be modified in a way that would offer a broader range of rewards***. The same is true with respect to the **Mentoring Programme of the Univesrity of Ioannina**, and the Programme offered by **Certi-MenTU**, both offering the chance to the employers (mentors) and to students (mentees) to expand their network, to get to know the needs of the current labour market (students), as well as to get in contact with fresh ideas and innovative perspectives (employers). ***The above mentioned practices do not satisfy several criteria that have been set by the consortium with respect to the EP's objectives and structure***, since the EPHT needs for a more "systemic" and "comprehensive" programme, that offers more activities and rewards and engages more actively and intensively all types of stakeholders.
- British Universities' Programmes offer a wider range of activities, as presented in the previous section and, as a result, the rewards and gains for all stakeholder categories are multifaceted. The Programme developed by the **University of Derby** aims at creating stronger bonds between academia and the industry that goes beyond just networking and matching employability needs and preferences. Along these lines, gains for academics and students include up-to-date curricula, successful graduates, guest speakers for masterclasses and demonstrations, opportunities for workplace and placement learning, opportunities to develop workplace-relevant skills. On the other hand, employers, have access to interns and skilled graduates, while through their participation in curricula development and improvement, benefit from graduates' up-skilling. In addition, the **Nottingham University Business School** had launched a quite successful Employer Programme, that aimed at facilitating active contribution of all stakeholder groups and secured benefits and gains to each participating stakeholder. The important aspect of the programme is that it went beyond just offering Career Office services, since it was linked much closer to skills development and skills the students needed to help them develop themselves. However, it lacked focus on curricula development, as academics did not participate actively in the programme. As a result, ***this is a practice that can be utilized by our EPHT, but it needs to be modified to provide more obvious gains to academic staff***, in order to encourage them to participate more actively in the system. This particular aspect of academic staff engagement has been ***successfully address by the Graduate Employability Programme developed by***

Edinburg Napier University: academic staff time had been bought out to provide academic leadership around curriculum change and to consult with employers and professional bodies. This approach had been very successful in raising awareness amongst academics and provided some space for them to engage in curriculum review.

- Finally, the respective programmes that have been developed by the **Finish Universities** go one step further in maximizing the benefits and gains for all stakeholder categories. In particular, the cases of **Tampere University of Applied Sciences** and Kajaani University of Applied Sciences Employer Engagement Programmes, provided employers with various benefits through their participation in the cooperative activities, including: access to skilled workforce, commercial advantage as well as higher status and reputation, access to the university's facilities and updated knowledge, training for their employees by academics and commissioned research on particular topics that were of interest to the employers. Academics on the other hand were provided with the opportunity for developing an applied research programme in the business, had access to raw data and industry-standard resources provided by employers, benefited from constant updating of the industry needs that leads to more relevant teaching and research and to updated curricula and finally gained enhanced status and reputation. Students, who are expected to be the main beneficiaries of the employer engagement activities, gained: internships, networking, professional experience, enhanced employability, vocationally relevant curriculum, access to industry-standard resources, opportunities for workplace and/or placement learning and opportunity to develop workplace-relevant skills. Thus it is ***suggested that the EPHT adopts the best practices identified at the Tampere University of Applied Sciences and the Kajaani University of Applied Sciences***.

(iii) Our recommendation:

On the basis of the two types of research conducted, namely the Common European Needs Analysis and the Best Practices Guide, it was clearly identified that all three stakeholder categories are expected to gain a broad range of benefits. However, the various gains are expected to be linked to each stakeholder's level of engagement. The higher the level of engagement between the HEIs and the H&T employer, the more the benefits for both sides.

- **For H&T employers,** participation at the EPHT initially implies efficient resource allocation. At the very basic level of their participation they could utilise interns and trainees in order to benefit from more skilled employees. At the premium level of involvement, professionals would have the opportunity to "shape" the provision of skills and knowledge through their involvement with the development of curricula, according to their own needs and requirements (limited ability though). At the same time, the could get access to specialised resources and facilities (convention centres, venues and research labs). For those professionals that participate as full partners, participation at a highly visible, successful and active partnership implies that they could gain in terms of status and reputation (intangible advantages focusing on corporate social responsibility), access to academic as well as professional networks (this could lead towards greater promotion, marketing and advertisement opportunities), training for their employees by academics and commissioned research on topics that are of particular interest to the industry. It could also imply increased opportunities for networking (again this may lead to commercial advantages and opportunity to enter into new and diverse markets).

- **Academics** would also enjoy certain rewards from participating in such an Employer Programme; however such benefits would accrue again on an incremental basis, according to their degree of commitment and involvement in the partnership. Initially, the rewards and incentives for academics could translate into enhanced student skills and employability, better/improved links with employers and professionals, as well as enhanced reputation and recognition among peers. Furthermore, academics could enrich teaching material (data to develop case studies, update curricula), or at best get support to develop their own teaching and research portfolio (provided of course that it sit in parallel with employers' objectives). A more active participation could lead into increased opportunities for networking, as well as funding coming from commissioned research and projects for the industry.

- With respect to the benefits accruing for the **students** that participate in an EP, these would also depend on their willingness to contribute time and effort on the activites that are offered within the context of an EP. The basic level of rewards accruing to students from their participation at an employer network mostly relate to the fact that these incentives or expected gains are experienced by students immediately as they become members of the system and refer to their access to funds (salary) as interns or trainees, access to scholarships, as well as the opportunity to develop communication and social skills. Students that decide to engage themselves more into this partnership would benefit through future rewards related to professional development, opportunities for travelling around the world, certificates and awards to recognise skills and expertise, access to top professionals in the industry, increased or improved employment prospects, professional networking. Finally, students could get the opportunity to assess from within whether job and employment opportunities in the sector aligns with personal / life progression path. This level of engagement could help them to set up personal goals for the future.

The following table summarizes the recommended benefits the EPHT should offer to all three stakeholder categories, according to the matching between the European Needs Analysis and the Best Practices identified internationally:

Table 1: Suggested gains per stakeholder category

Stakeholder Group	*Recommended benefits accruing from their participation in the EPHT*
Employers	• Ready skilled workforce • Access to a skilled graduate workforce • Commercial advantage • Status and reputation • Access to knowledge, facilities and services • Training provision to employees by Tertiary Level Educational Institution staff (e.g. in marketing, management, etc.) • Skilled interns • Commissioned research (i.e. research on a specific topic and/or setting indicated by a business according to its needs)
Academics/ HEIs	• Access to raw data provided by employers • Constant updating of the industry needs, which leads to more relevant teaching and research • Current and relevant curricula • Enhanced employability of graduates • Vocationally relevant curriculum • Access to industry-standard resources • Possibility of developing an applied research programme in the business • Status and reputation • Funding through commissioned research
Students	• Networking • Internships & Practical Training opportunities

	• Career Development Counseling • Professional experience • Enhanced employability • Vocationally relevant curriculum • Access to industry-standard resources • Opportunities for workplace and/or placement learning • Opportunity to develop workplace-relevant skills • Sponsorships and awards

V.5. Achieving efficient & effective communication channels

The foundation for every successful partnership in the tourism and hospitality sector is the existence of efficient and reliable communication channels between stakeholders.

(i) The need identified:
From the European needs analysis report it became clear that communication is of outmost importance, while at the same time all stakeholder groups indicated a perceived deficit of efficient communication among them. Possible ways of tackling this issue have also been revealed: the majority of respondents indicated as most important and effective means of communication within an employer programme *the organization of meetings and fora* during specific times within a period, where stakeholders from all parts of the industry can get together, discuss, plan and evaluate certain activities or the system as a whole. Indicatively, respondents at the ENA report expressed a preference towards systematic day meetings, as well as systematic meetings during internship periods. On the contrary, it was surprising that communication through online tools was not a very popular response by any category of stakeholders in any country. This might be a result that can be traced to the need for face-to-face communication, which can help avoid misunderstandings and different interpretations, while at the same time it may be traced in the mistrust towards online media.

(ii) Best Practices identified:
The evidence from best practices indicates that stakeholders take up a number of activities both structured (annual events and fora), as well as unstructured (emails and phone calls) to improve communication channels. From this perspective, the best practices guide summarises in a very efficient manner the initiatives that need to be planned to improve communication efficiency within the consortium. As a starting point, one has to mention that communication channels appear to be divided into two broad categories that pretty much sum up all the possible ways one can communicate within a partnership.
On the one hand, there are the *unstructured* means of communication within a partnership, as suggested by Tampere University of Applied Sciences, where communication does not have a systematic form, even though it is perceived to be effective: depending on the relationship, each partner is approached in a different manner, which can be very effective, as it is a tailored approach based on the needs and particular conditions of each partner. The communication tools being used include emails and phone calls. Same communication tools are utilised by the London Careers Clusters.
On the other hand, more systematic ways of communication have been identified that included face to face communication during events held on a regular basis. In particular, communication among partners at the Liaison Office of the Athens University of Economics and Business is achieved mostly through the events, which are usually organised by the university. Similar communication tools have been applied by the KAMK, although no

systematic way of regulating communication was identified, while it was mentioned that it is up to the person responsible to communicate and to choose the appropriate channels for communication. Finally, the same rational is applied by the Liaison Office of Ioannina with respect to their mentor program, where communication between mentors and mentees is the implemented through face-to-face mentoring session on a monthly basis, while other forms of communication are also encouraged.

(iii) Our Recommendation:
Communication channels among partners should facilitate collaboration and assist the partnership in achieving its objectives. The above mentioned best practices should be combined and there should be flexibility in choosing the communication channel that best fit in each case. These could include:

- communication through events usually organised and held at the university compound (e.g. career days and employers' visits to universities), regular meetings as part of the programme of studies. During these annual forums/ career days/business fairs and tourism related conferences, employers from the Hospitality Industry could meet with faculty members, programme leaders and graduate students is an occasion for communication.
- monthly cluster meetings taking place at either the university or at an employers' venue, this means the development of fora (i.e., advisors' committee meetings), where stakeholders could discuss on an open agenda or at specific issues, participation at international or bilateral organisations and groups (applies to all stakeholders – i.e., students having access to international associations, or employers' professional bodies).
- Communication through emails which would assist efficient distribution of information among partners, as well as phone calls, whenever needed, to provide more personalized information and guidance.

V.6: The Platform

The platform is an online tool, a "virtual place" where higher education institutions, students, teachers and employers will be given the opportunity to link the education provided, to the employers' market and thus improve the quality of education and its responsiveness to the needs of the labour market.

(i) The need identified: the evidence from the European report suggests that the existence of a dedicated electronic platform could be perceived as an effective communication and networking tool among stakeholders. In a way, the availability of the platform could facilitate both effective and efficient flow of information and knowledge, as well as a means to better and deeper networking activities.

(ii) Best Practice identified: The information derived from the Best Practices case studies indicates that such efforts are rare and complex in their operation. Hosco.com is the only best practice that utilizes such a platform for the communication among stakeholders. The structure of the website, which acts as an online platform is simple and provides several tools and activities to all relevant stakeholders (students, employers, institutions), including: search jobs, explore companies, services for employers, services for students, services for schools and faculty, HEI's ambassadors, etc. The first tab, entitled "search jobs" includes job positions from all around the world, in a structured manner. The second one lists the companies that are partners in Hosco. The "get advice" page includes dozens of articles on career coaching, industry insight, etc. However, this practice does not fit with the main objective of the EPHT, which is to build a strategic partnership between H&T industry and the HEIs and not just to facilitate networking among partners that will enhance graduates' employability and will facilitate recruitment of more skilled personnel by the H&T organizations. Moreover, the platform groups the offered services according to the target group (i.e. students, employers), a classification that indicates a system which does not enhance cooperation among stakeholder group, but rather considers each group as having distinctive needs and objectives. Thus it does not satisfy the criterion of securing “mutual contribution” and “empowering” employers to develop and assume leadership roles that would contribute to the development of “systemic” EP, which would consist of interrelated parts, as opposed to fragmented activities.

(iii) Our recommendation: Combining the above-mentioned information, the recommendations regarding the design, structure and management of the platform are based on a mixture of current (existing) and new (innovative) features, i.e. our recommendations will be ***based on an existing practice (Hoscco.con) that needs to be modified in order to meet the criteria set for the EPHT***. In this respect, the platform should build a network that will facilitate constant and systematic communication between employers, students and academics and optimize the way students/graduates, schools and companies meet and interact. It should support students and professionals in their networking, learning and recruitment efforts and at the same time assist HEIs placement and alumni management strategies. Moreover, the structure of the platform should be simple and functional, offering the following tools and activities, among others, to all relevant stakeholders (data availability and level of information and services will vary according to stakeholders' participation): practical training and job offers, academic program development (curriculum design, guest lectures, student projects, job shadowing/mentoring), consultancy / training services and research, events (industry visits and open days, competitions, etc)

Accessibility to the platform and availability of services to stakeholders should be in line with the respective degrees of engagement and contribution in the partnership. That is, preferred partners that have participated more actively in the consortium and have contributed in a steady basis with more energy and resources (e.g. funding, time, human resources) will be given access to advanced services, including for example priority in choosing trainees and skilled graduates, access to research outcomes, etc. This stratified accessibility approach is essentially a new and innovative approach to existing practices in the field. Industry partners/employers with lower degrees of commitment to the consortium (basic membership) will have free access to limited data and services only. Hence, all the essential ‘search options’ within the platform could be provided as a basic package to everyone (in order to increase visibility and coverage). However, when it comes to specialized resources and solutions, not yet widely available to the sector (such as list of ambassadors, ability to link to third party clients/students, or even access to databases) these should be made available to those with the greater commitment to the partnership (preferred membership).

V.7: Evaluation / Quality assurance

Monitoring and evaluation processes are of an utmost importance, if it is for the EPHT to be successful and to provide significant gains and rewards to all stakeholders, in a way that they will be willing to continue their support in the program and their commitment in the partnership.

(i) The need identified:

The European Needs Analysis report emphasized on the need for frequent evaluation by all stakeholders for the success of the programme to be ensured. In particular the ENA emphasizes upon three main issues: Initially, it is suggested that stakeholders meet regularly to discuss matters and new developments through brainstorming sessions. Secondly, an integrated evaluation of activities by all stakeholders within an online system has been proposed (e.g. online evaluation of curricula by all stakeholders, online evaluation of placement programmes by students, academic institutions and employers etc. Finally, the need for regular implementation of research / surveys / focus groups in order to be constantly up to date with the changing needs of the industry has been revealed. There have also been arguments in favour of the evaluation activities being performed by a steering committee as a possible alternative.

(ii) Best Practice identified:

In turn, the evidence from the BP report indicated that in most cases the issue of evaluation and quality assurance had not be addressed systematically. In fact, one of the most common weak point of the Best Practices identified was related to the lack of a systematic evaluation procedure, which at best, referred to incomplete evaluation 'systems' and processes. All identified practices propose ways to evaluate single activities, such as mentoring, internships, practical training, etc. Evaluation methods include: the completion of feedback forms by mentors, mentees, students and employers (applied for example by the Liaison Office of the University of Ioannina, as well as the Liaison Office of the Athens University of Economics and Business – Greece); visits to companies that employ interns; setting targets to interns and monitoring the progress and the achievement of those targets. More specifically

- The Employer Programme evaluation process applied by the Nottingham University Business School included the completion of an evaluation feedback form after each session or activity by the students and/or the employers in order to see what went well and what did not.
- The London Careers Clusters - Accommodation and Food Service programme used KPIs such as number of people attending the pilots, as well as questionnaires that evaluated each pilot after its completion.
- The evaluation process of the practical exercise at the Tampere University of Applied Science (Finland) required the mentor/supervisor of each student to monitor the process and gain insights both by the student – mentee and the employer during the practical exercise. At its end, both the mentor and the mentee were asked to evaluate the process through forms, designed especially for the programme. An even more detailed and systematic evaluation of the practical training was also applied by the KAMK (Finland) which involved and took into due consideration the opinions of all parties and various aspects of the activities implemented. It also systematically monitored the progress and the results of the activities as the key performance indicators were decided at the beginning of the practical training. The procedure included among others a formal agreement, a detailed monitoring plan, a journal were the relevant indicators were recorded on a daily basis, visits to the employers' facilities, completion of questionnaires by respective parties and a final report submitted by the students upon completion of their training.
- There was only one relatively complete evaluation procedure identified by the BP guide, which was applied by the Edinburgh Napier University's Graduate Employability Project. GEP had appointed a Steering Group to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the activities implemented. The Steering Group had cross-university representation and oversaw project planning, budgets, progress updates, sharing of good practice and

dissemination. Meetings of the Group were held approximately every 2 months. Evaluation and monitoring sub-structures were also set up early in the life of the project and used, where possible, already existing evaluation and monitoring fora. Monitoring against Key Performance Indicators was another evaluation methodology employed by the GEP. This was characterized by systematic collection and analysis of data which was fed back into planning processes and delivery enhancements, including:

- Student participation data
- Student feedback gathered via post-workshop or event feedback sheets
- Specific surveys devised to capture more in-depth data on the value and impact of particular interventions and programmes
- Mechanisms designed to capture the views of other stakeholders, such as academic staff and employers.

(iii) Our recommendation:
Since our proposed Employer programm aims to create a more strategic and long-term partnership between HEIs and the H&T employers, with more interelated activities that will create benefits for all three stakeholder groups, it is proposed that ***the EPHT evaluation system will use an existing best practice (that of the GEP of Edinburg Napier University) which will be modified*** so as to encompass all activities provided by the EPHT and evaluate them in a more systematic and holistic way. Each one activity (e.g. career days, students' internships or job shadowing, guest lectures etc) should be evaluated (according to the process and KPIs set at the planning stage) right after its completion and the results should be used to as a means for new planning and system improvement. A Steering Group where all types of stakeholders will be participating would be appointed to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the activities implemented. The Steering Group could even have cross-university representation and should be in charge to oversee project planning, budgets, progress updates, sharing of good practice and dissemination. It should meet on a regular basis, set the KPIs according to which activities will be monitored and evaluated and utilise the results and feedback received by stakeholders.

V.8: Critical Success Factors

The final attribute / structural element of an employer programme that needs to be considered in the recommendations report relates to the critical success factors featuring in the programme. Critical success factors will ensue the longevity and sustainability of employer programmes.

(i) The need identified:

- *One* of the most crucial factors in the success of the employer programme is the strong commitment of the participating stakeholders. Thus, the Needs Analysis makes a strong case towards a genuine interest and strong commitment if it is to develop a successful and sustainable employer programme.
- The *second category* of critical success factors relate to availability of resources and production factors. These are specified in the form of financial (public) resources, time, and personnel to support the employer programme initiative.
- *Finally*, the report identifies a set of other significant factors such as strong planning and management, tangible benefits for all, and a strong sense of evaluation.

(ii) Best Practices identified:

The evidence from the Best Practices guide focuses primarily upon the active engagement and support of all stakeholder categories. Additionally, the guide indicates the need to employ the appropriate personnel with the right mixture of skills and expertise. The guide also makes note of the need for a systematic and appropriate evaluation *methodology*, as well as the requirement that all stakeholders participating in the scheme should receive benefits in equal fashion. The availability of resources (money, time, personnel) has featured in the discussion, but not as significantly as it was originally anticipated. More specifically, the critical suceess factors identified by best practices that have been rated as most suitable for the development of the EPHT are as follows:

- Hosco.com: the development of an online system / platform where a plethora of successful partners participate and contribute.
- University of Derby: Building the system gradually, i.e. start from very small actions, low level of commitment and take it step by step on the next level.
- Nottingham University Business School: The ability to understand each group's distinctive needs and to develop a system that enhances mutual advantages for all partners.
- London Career Clusters: Active engagement and contribution by schools and employers.
- GEP – Edinburg Napier University: The breadth of activities and the systematic evaluation methodology
- Tampere University of Applied Sciences: Securing "*partnerships*" not just cooperation, with competent partners
- KAMK: Securing a minimum amount of resources and having patience in building such relationships.
- Liaison Office – AUEB: Offering a personalized, tailored approach and hosting career fairs and relevant events on a regular (yearly) basis.
- Mentoring Program - Liaison Office UoI: The innovative feature of the program, which has attracted the interest of many companies.
- Certi-MenTU project: Appropriate promotion of the training and certification to employers and educational institutions

(iii) Our recommendation:

Building upon the critical success factors identified by the best practices guide, it is suggested that in order for a successful and sustainable EPHT to be developed, the system should embrace as many from the existing aspects as possible, i.e. our Employer Programme ***should modify existing practices in a way that will satisfy as many of the criteria set by the consortium as possible.*** The proposed recommendation offers a holistic approach to the factors that would ensue the long term sustainability of the employers' scheme and include:

- <u>Availability of funding and financial resources.</u> Without those, the partnership will not manage to survive. This could mean that funding is being secured from the government (public purse), or through the partnership (private purse).
- <u>Employment of appropriate personnel</u>: this is of paramount importance to the success of the employer programme, since it has been revealed by both report that the existence of experienced and focused individuals would contribute to the programme's successes tremendously.
- <u>Evaluation of partners' activities and processes</u> on a regular basis if it is for the employer programme to meet its objectives and to satisfy each stakeholder group's needs.
- <u>A proper project management plan</u> with clearly identifiable milestones, deadlines and roles within the partnership: the effective project management will in turn ensue tangible benefits to everyone in the partnership. Related to the project management, the evidence

from the preceding reports indicated that strong planning associated with establishing a strong ethos of common goals and objectives is also quite useful for the successful establishment of an employer programme.

- The ability of the programme to offer tailor made and customised solutions to its stakeholders. Implicitly this means that stakeholders can offer / design customised incentives to attract partners, and this customised approach is maintained throughout the programme.
- Finally, the partnership should offer active engagement to all stakeholders in order to support the notion of distributed leadership, identified earlier on in the report.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Developing successful partnerships between the H&T industry and HEIs cannot happen overnight. It requires a continuous effort and commitment from both the employers and the academia (faculty, administration and students), and thus it takes years for the establishment of such partnership. In addition, trust between industry partners and HEIs faculty and administrators is a crucial factor in forming and maintaining these partnerships, while commitment with respect to providing resources (tangible and intangible) on a steady basis is also a crucial success factor. However, it is worth the effort, since it is partnerships among stakeholders, rather than simple co-operation on particular projects, that allows both sides to leverage their combined knowledge of labor markets, skills, pedagogy and students (Schmidtke, 2012). Neither employers, nor educators can accomplish their goals in the labour market alone. To sustain long-term strategic partnerships with employers, ongoing, two-way communication is critical in supporting active participation and building commitment and shared vision (Wilson, 2015).

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