EDU4TEX 2.0

Educational Pathway to Attract Youngsters for Textile Careers

EU-Program: Erasmus+, KA2, Strategic Partnerships for School Education

Coordination: Huddersfield & District Textile Training Co Ltd (UK)

Duration: October 2017 – March 2020

Trend Report

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2   ABOUT THE PROJECT

The EDU4TEX 2.0 project is bringing together schools and businesses to develop a new approach to promoting the textile sector to teachers, careers advisers and young people. The project will enhance the curriculum by developing new learning content to illustrate the variety of activities and attractive careers in textile companies, providing new opportunities and developing new partnerships between the industry and education.

Early project activity includes research into students' aspirations and career preferences and the future skills needs of companies across the sector. Practical classroom sessions will be developed, supported by resources and teaching packs that link closely to the school curriculum. These will illustrate and demonstrate the wide range of science and technology based activities and occupations that exist across the sector. New relationships with companies will be created to facilitate reciprocal visits and company placements.

EDU4TEX 2.0 is delivered by a selection of European schools and industry organisations working together to develop and test new approaches to providing sector information to students using a wide range of media. Practical activities will be developed in partnership with textile companies. Teaching and learning packs will be created to ensure the information complements both the school curriculum and educational framework. These materials will be tested by schools in the four participating regions supported by a series of visits to companies and schools.

Our overall ambition is to improve the level of students' and teachers' knowledge of opportunities within the sector by providing new learning materials and organising practical activities both within and outside the classroom. This will serve to change perceptions about the modern textile industry, opening up new career options and providing new opportunities for young people.

3   PROJECT OUTCOMES

- 5000 potential users informed about the project (general public),
- 3000 end users (career advisors, teacher and students) reached via direct contact and dissemination actions,
- 100 career advisors informed about the project,
- 100 tutorials & professional kits distributed,
- 200 students engaged in the Career Events,
- 4 Awareness Sessions: Textile Days
- 75 attendances in the final seminar.

4   METHODOLOGY

The 4 business partners developed and deployed a questionnaire comprised of 11 questions regarding skills needs/recruitment/training etc. to be used with local businesses. The desired outcome was to identify similarities and differences between the partners' local industries.
 The 4 business partners, Citeve (Portugal), Centrocot (Italy), Aitex (Spain) and The Textile Centre of Excellence (UK) disseminated their questionnaires through various platforms using various contact methods.

The exercise took place between February and March 2018. Citeve used the 'Lime Survey' platform

supported by emails and personal contact, with a response level of 24 companies. Centrocot used a different online platform 'Google Form' plus telephone and personal contact with a response level of 22 companies. Aitex sent three 'rounds' of emails backed up with telephone contact with a response level of 9 companies and the Textile Centre of Excellence disseminated their online questionnaire via 'Survey Monkey' backed up with three rounds of emails to member companies with over 50 responses.

5   SURVEY FINDINGS

Due to the differing level of responses, partners' results have been analysed individually, along with percentage comparisons of results:

Question 1: "In cases of new staff recruitment, do you require particular competencies?"
Aitex reported 67% of their companies *do* require particular competencies, the only partner where the majority of respondents identified prior competence as a 'must'.

94% of Centrocot respondents stated they did *not* require particular competencies when recruiting, suggesting companies preferred to recruit staff who they could train 'from scratch'.

63% of the Textile Centre of Excellence respondents similarly reported they did *not* require specific competencies, many suggesting that the right attitude to work was the key factor in recruitment exercises.

The Citeve response was split equally with 50% of respondents stating they *did* require particular competencies.

The differences between the responses from the partners' local businesses are interesting. The reason for the differences will be explored in detail as the project proceeds and could be related to the availability of qualified potential employees in the local marketplace, the availability and quality of the sector-based vocational training that exists in each region and/or the cost of providing vocational training to the company.

Question 2: "How difficult do you find it to fill vacancies?"
All 4 partners' responses indicated a significant issue regarding filling technical vacancies.

Aitex reported 43% of their companies surveyed found it difficult, compared to around 15% for filling other vacancies such as higher level, lower level, new entrants, or a general problem.

More than half of the companies surveyed in Italy also reported severe difficulties compared to filling lower level or higher level vacancies. Centrocot suggest this
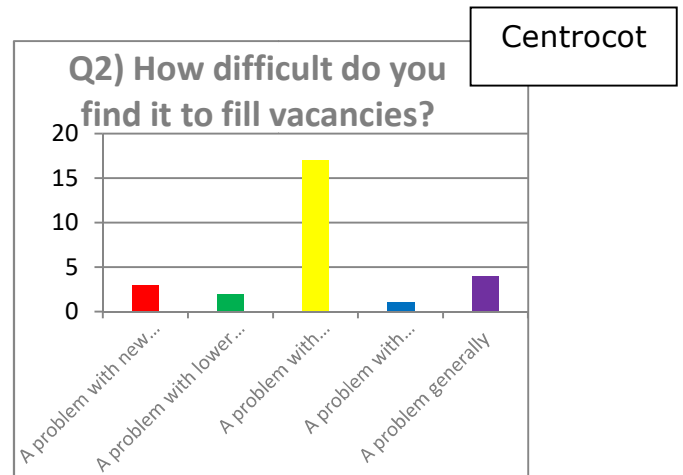
could be affected by shifts from a technical to fashion pathways within the education system.

In the UK, 38% stated they had a problem generally at filling vacancies, the highest percentage from the answer options. The next highest was with regards to filling technical vacancies although 20% of companies in the UK stated they do not find filling vacancies a problem.

The project will provide opportunities to compare how technical vacancies are advertised, and the level of training and support offered to technical recruits.
CITEVE???

Question 3: "How do you advertise your vacancies and/or recruit new employees?"
Companies across the 4 regions use a variety of different advertisement methods. Surprisingly, across all 4 regions very few companies appear to use their own website to advertise vacancies. In the UK, none of the 59 companies surveyed use their own website, along with 5% of those surveyed in Spain, less than 10% of companies in Italy and only 1 company of those surveyed in Portugal stated they advertise using their company website.

Both Citeve's and Aitex's highest scoring areas were via a Job Centre or career service. This area also scored highly for Centrocot and The Textile Centre, however, Centrocot's most popular route of advertisement was via recruitment agencies and external websites.

The Textile Centre of Excellence had a high amount of companies stating "Other" which merits further research.

Question 4: "Do you have any contact with schools, colleges or universities in order to attract new entrants?"
Both Aitex and The Textile Centre research results suggested that companies rarely, if ever have contact with schools, and both suggested they did not experience significant issues with filling vacancies.   By contrast, both Centrocot and Citeve reported that most companies did have contact with students "sometimes".

Question 5: "How often do you promote within your company?
From the research gathered, results suggest companies promote people internally 'wherever possible' and 'sometimes'.

It is rare that companies never promote people internally, as shown in the UK where only 4 of the 59 companies surveyed stated never.
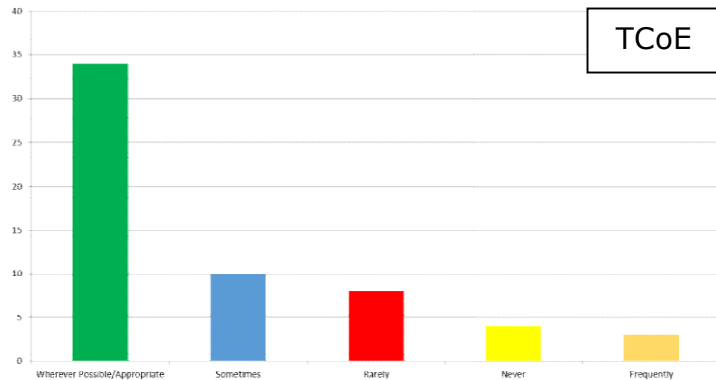
Question 6: "Do you believe your workforce is sufficiently skilled?"
Both UK and Italy reported that generally, they believed their workforce was sufficiently skilled, the area where they believe staff are least sufficiently skilled was technical areas. This correlates with the data which suggests technical vacancies were difficult to recruit for.
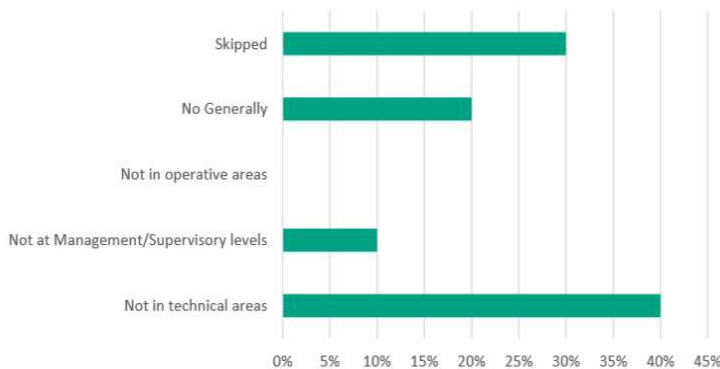

Aitex's data to the left shows a comparison between companies who believe they are not sufficiently skilled in technical areas and those in operative areas.

This data is consistent in all four regions.

UK's sample of 6% reporting 'no generally', compares to 20% of companies in Spain.

Question 7: "Do you use external providers to train your workforce?"

Three of the four regions had very similar data with more than half of their companies 'frequently' or 'sometimes' using external providers.
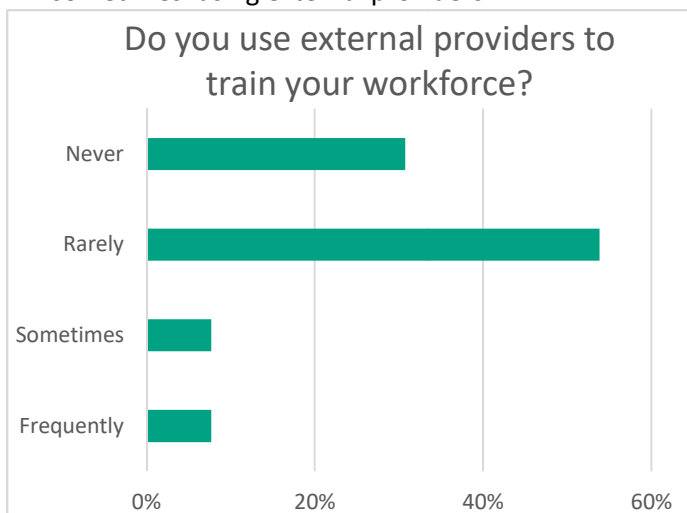

Spain reported different results where over 85% stated that they 'rarely' or 'never' use external providers (see data chart to the left).

Question 8: "Do you have a structured internal training programme?"
Clear differences between regions in this area. Both the UK and Portugal's data showed 62% and 58% of companies do not have a structured internal training programme. This is interesting where the UK reported 63% of companies do not recruit using particular competencies which would suggest an internal training programme might be in place – although in-house training could be viewed as informal.

Italy's results showed 77% having an internal training programme (see data chart to the right). It is believed that this refers to 'health and safety at work' training, which, in Italy, is compulsory. This could be the reasoning behind such a disparity in data between the Countries.

It would be useful to understand the base standard and compulsory training required in each region to then understand what training is offered above and beyond. This could have been interpreted slightly differently in each c when answering this question as some may have included compulsory training, whereas, other companies may not.

Q8) Do you have a structured internal training programme?
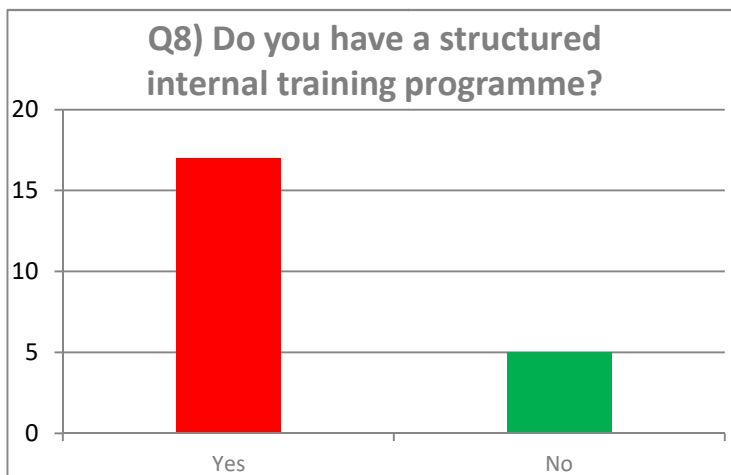
Question 9: "Are there any skills gaps where you're unable to source the right training provider?"
Technical training provision is universally difficult to source. Centrocot and The Textile Centre of Excellence report that their companies have a problem in this area, with 54% of the UK companies surveyed facing this issue, and 50% of the companies in Italy equally facing this issue.

Interestingly, 29% Aitex companies stated that they were unable to source the right training provider for entrant/apprenticeship level employees, although only 11% suggested they had trouble recruiting new entrants.

In contrast, Citeve reported that only 8% of companies cannot find the correct training provision for this level, compared to 92% who believe they already have the right training provider. Clear opportunities for transfer of good practice evidenced.

Question 10: "Would your company support a campaign to improve the image of the industry?"
The majority of companies surveyed in all 4 regions stated they would be happy to support a campaign to improve the image of the industry.
Aitex's data showed that 100% of companies would be happy to do this, 78% of companies surveyed in the UK, and 80% in Italy would support this.

Citeve (right) showed slightly more conflicting answers, but the majority still opted for supporting a campaign (56%).

It would be interesting to be able to understand why respondents said no, which may require further research.

Would your company support a campaign to improve the image of the industry?
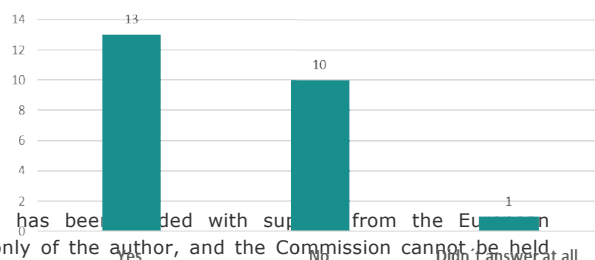
6   FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

In addition to the questionnaire, the business focus group in the UK also organised focus groups of businesses to discuss the issues.

The Textile Centre of Excellence organised three focus groups, which provided valuable insight into the way companies perceive the image of the sector alongside ideas for potential improvement. The groups established a platform for sharing experiences of image, perception, recruitment barriers, school involvement and parental views as the Centre's team facilitated discussion and invited ideas on how to address the issues.

The focus groups provided a useful platform for discussion about various sector issues and responsibilities. Questions were raised about who should be responsible for improving the image of the industry, how that would work in practice and whether or not the image really was a barrier to recruitment. Interestingly, a number of the delegates suggested that the exchange of views within the groups was refreshing and enjoyable and asked if future meetings could be initiated where companies could informally exchange views and ideas.

Key contributions to the focus groups included:

"We should move forward with a very consultative approach to attracting new talent to the industry. I do think the key starting point is revamping the outsider's perception of the industry as tired & old fashioned, if we can couple this with some targeted, hands-on training courses hopefully we can take a few steps on the road to addressing the looming skills crisis. From Company x point of view, the Technical Dyeing side of the business is where we need to bolster our talent pipeline to ensure that we have some well trained staff to back up those with the long term experience. On a company-wide note, we do need to give consideration to the fact that we have a workforce whose average age is well over 45 and that we will find ourselves with more & more staff who are either looking to retirement or no longer able to carry out the more physical aspects of the shop floor roles. Although I'm no longer responsible for Company xs recruitment, I can safely say that they would be interested in any moves to establish a practical Menders training facility.

HR Director, Bradford.

"We need to establish a skills pool. My staff constantly tell me that they would love to see more people with technical skills joining the company. When I search for people with technical skills, I can't find any. The talent pool is drying up and if we are to remain sustainable in the UK, we must act now to develop the skills we need in the industry. We also need to review the use of block release training programmes, once the centrepiece of the BTEC training schools".

Managing Director, Denby Dale.

"We see the same names appearing on job applications, it's like a merry-go-round. Job Centre's sift applications and send those candidates that are deemed to be work ready. We're not looking for academic high fliers, just hard workers. If we can find the right type of candidate with the right work ethic, we can do the rest".

Operations Director, Huddersfield.

"To succeed in my business, I need people with a creative outlet. I'm not looking for the next degree educated fashion designer, I'm looking for someone with the practical and business skills to succeed in production manufacturing. Our garments are worth tens of thousands and I have two fabric menders that are 81 and 88. I can't replace them because there is no interest in becoming a mender,

yet it's the highest paid position in my firm. Working to develop a skills pool where people are trained prior to starting work is simply not happening. Schools, Colleges and Universities are not creating the manufacturing staff of the future, they're creating a supply of designers in a sector with limited demand. I need people with the right passion and enthusiasm for this job.

Owner & Director, Leeds

"Our approach to engaging young candidates has changed significantly over the years. We now engage directly with local schools and run week-long taster sessions in school holidays. We expect young job seekers to give up their time – it provides us with an overview on their appetite and commitment. We hire around 3 or 4 from each taster week we run and we constantly replace our workforce in this way, giving young candidates the best support they need by working with, and learning from, our skilled operatives. Our staff turnover is low and we accredit that to the success of this system".

HR Manager, Meltham

"The most alarming intervention for my business was when I realised that over 25% of our workforce was in the last 5 years of planned employment. This made us change our recruitment model and our overall approach to engagement with young people. We now have a solid structure in place, where all training at every level from operative to Director is mapped out with a formal training and learning journey. Our productivity has increased and motivation to succeed is noticeably higher".

Managing Director, Holmfirth

7   CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The research exercise was a valuable first step in understanding the starting points of the partners and illustrated the different approaches in each region, the similarities and the differences which clearly indicate the potential for collaborative activity and the transfer of effective practice.

All partners participated in the activity enthusiastically and produced good quality results.

Further analysis will be possible through the remainder of the project activities. Proposals for the joint development and delivery of the school based projects and the development of learning materials and teaching kits will also assist partners to compare, contrast and collaborate on effective practice.

The research and associated activity has demonstrated clearly that the sector is facing a number of significant challenges in an increasingly competitive environment. The lack of contact between businesses and schools might be unsurprising but it is alarming. The barriers to delivering technical skills in the workplace, along with the rising age of the workforce must be addressed if the sector is to remain competitive. This project can demonstrate the value of putting the right tools in the hands of teachers and careers advisors, creating content that complements and fits neatly with both the educational framework and school curriculum. The delivery of practical, educational projects alongside closer links between schools and the industry can do much to change the perception of careers in the sector.