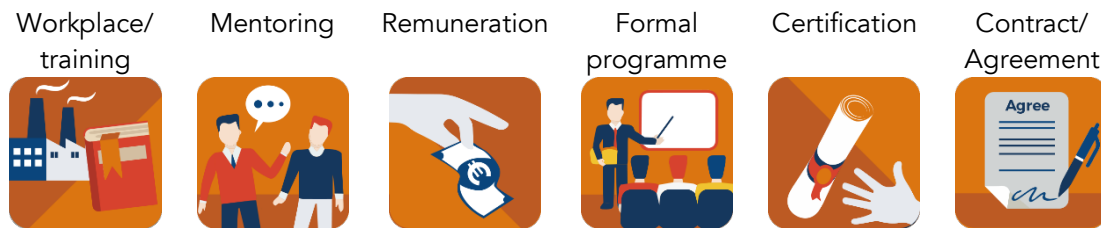


CASE STUDY P08.2 | Universidad Complutense de Madrid (ES)

Authors: Lucila FINKEL

Suitability of this case to the ApprEnt definition of HEA: 100%



Description of the model:

In recent years, Spain has approved new regulations that aim to implement a new model of active employment policies, embodied in the Spanish Strategy for Employment Activation 2014-16 (EEAE). It is especially important to mention the publication in September 2015 of Act30/2015 regulating vocational training for employment which attempts to face the changes needed to modernize the production model and place Spain on a sustainable path of growth thus generating stable and quality employment for all.

Dual training was also reinforced with a new regulation on certain aspects of the training and apprenticeship contract. Despite the low number of this type of contracts (not more than 1%) there has been a significant increase of 25% since 2014, coinciding with the new regulatory development. Regional authorities may initiate public calls for validation of non-formal and informal learning, depending on local or sectoral labour market needs. These procedures empower citizens to engage in further learning and acquire full qualifications. Demand for recognition may be driven by company needs, social partner requests, or minimum qualification requirements from sectoral regulatory bodies.

Adults with no qualification may have their skills recognised or acquire a formal qualification through training. Key competences tests for advanced VET programmes and professional certificate access have been developed. Online or virtual learning environments and platforms are being developed to ease access to VET programmes. Reform in 2015 aims to increase CVET quality and improve the management of public funds dedicated to training for employment to prevent fraud. This is to be guaranteed through accreditation of VET providers and by offering training leading to formal qualifications. Monitoring training outcomes, including transition to employment, will also support training quality; for this purpose, a common training database is under development. Social partners and regional authorities participate in CVET quality assurance.

Possible Learning Schemes For Apprenticeships In Spain:

- ▲ VET system with compulsory training module in working centers;
- ▲ Dual VET or apprenticeships: dual training + contract or scholarships + learning agreement;
- ▲ Continuing vocational education and training programmes (CVET) in the employment system resulting in certificates of professionalism or diplomas;
- ▲ Institutions of higher education: permanent or continuing education programmes (with or without dual training schemes); industrial doctorates (Torre Quevedo Scholarships); official degrees with long internships programmes.

Strengths and Weaknesses:

The strength and at the same time the weakness of the apprenticeship system in Spain lies in its current flexibility: since it is not well defined, it currently encompasses different formulas, as described. Besides, one must point out the high qualification of the teaching staff in our country and the great space of improvement in fostering the links between the education system and companies, without losing the autonomy, quality, and plurality of the system.

Good Practice:

Objective of the Master's Degree

The aim of the Master's Degree in Auditing and Accounting is to prepare, both academically and professionally, future accounting experts and account auditors. For the latter, it seeks to meet the conditions that the Institute of Accounting and Auditing of Accounts establishes for the theoretical training programmes of auditors and the passing of the first phase of the examination process for legal access to the practice of auditing.

Methods of Teaching and Learning

External internships in companies represent a nuclear part of the academic curriculum "It is very important that the students are not going for coffee for the boss" (Coordinator).

Students have explained to us the activities they usually carry out: visit to clients, annual accounts, and circularisation of banks of suppliers – which means that students directly participate in the audits. They consider that without these internships there would not be a proper learning process, or not the one required in order to acquire the necessary skills.

Students enjoy a training process adapted to the real world of the company, something that, in general, they value very positively. This learning process is carried out in an extraordinary way by the collaborating companies (for example, they teach Excel for Audit). They also have an internal training program in the auditing companies.

These companies offering external curricular internships also take part in the teaching activity. The assessments of external internships are carried out both by the University and the companies; the courses given by companies are also evaluated in the same way. External internships are initially carried out within the company. Here, after a period of one or two weeks, student intern come into contact with customers.

Supervision and Mentoring

Two tutors, one from the University and the other from the company, are assigned to the student throughout the programme; the university tutor is responsible for the internship. In

addition, students usually work directly with a senior auditor, who accompanies them in the learning process. What has been learned is incorporated in the University's own platform called GIPE (Integral Management of External Internships), where all the information related to the management of the internships and the activities developed by the students is collected. In the final report, students have to detail their daily activities, what they have learned, in which way they have contributed to the company, etc.

Selection Criteria

To be admitted to the master it is necessary to possess at least a B2 level of English, to provide both the curriculum and the transcripts of the academic record, and to hold a degree in Business Management, in Accounting, in Finance, a double degree in Law-Business Management, or in related fields. These requirements appear on the web page and in Verifica, a very specific template of an academic CV for accounting. The companies have also established a specific selection process for student interns, which takes into account group dynamics, personal interviews, tests, and English assessments. In addition, some companies include an accounting exam. Other companies only receive the CV of those students whose internships have not yet been assigned.

Level and Target Groups

Advance training for young people with previous training in accounting and finance and with a high level of English (at least B2).

Type of Business Cooperation

The collaboration is based on the agreement between the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) and the companies. Besides, this includes an annex signed by the student, the company and the academic coordinator for the internship program.

Strengths:

- ▲ The master's degree has been approved by the ICAC (Institute of Accounting and Audit of Accounts, responsible for creating the account regulations). Passing the master's degree is equivalent to the first examination of the ROAC (Official Register of Auditors), that is, students are exempted from having to complete the first exam. For this reason, this master's degree has to and does incorporate external quality practices.
- ▲ Employability: students usually find work before finishing the exam. The job placement rate is very high, due to the high rotation rate of the sector.
- ▲ Companies provide students with an aid for their internships (remuneration). This has been a commitment of this master since its inception, something that is uncommon for other master's degree. In large part, it was achieved thanks to the prominent role in accounting studies of some of the professors that launched the master, who ensured the contacts with important professionals in this business sector.

Weaknesses:

- ▲ The program is only suitable for small groups of students.
- ▲ Auditors carry out a qualified, tailored selection of students. This is one of the reasons for the limited number of students selected. It is also the reason why students are exclusively young. It is not possible to choose students with a lot of experience, since it is only possible to give 12 credits for the internship. Therefore, last year, only 22 have entered the master's degree and 19 have remained, in the face of a 308% demand,

according to the coordinator. The requirements are very specific and dependent on the needs of the companies.

- ▲ For the coordinator of the internship programme, the more difficult task is to look for companies offering opportunities to all of the Master's students.
- ▲ The stipend or financial aid that companies ensure to the students varies according to the company (from € 300 to € 800); this clearly influences the student's satisfaction.
- ▲ Students join in the peak period of the audits and work on very specific aspects of that period, thus not having the chance to experience other periods that may be also interesting for their overall training (e.g. tax months)
- ▲ Despite its added value, the Master provides training for a very specific sector: students do audits and many remain in consultancy.
- ▲ It is difficult to establish cooperation and ensure the participation of some companies. Primarily, they want to present themselves to the students; however, some are willing to take part in the teaching aspect of the collaboration.

Feedback from users:

The Master enriches the more generic's theories and specific knowledge obtained during the bachelor's degree. Students are very satisfied with the Master's job placement rate.

The interns' work can be very intense, there are many demands, and sometimes tutoring time is not enough: "from tutoring to tutoring, it is as if one year passes", says a student. Sometimes, students are assigned job roles and tasks inappropriate for an internship.

Some students complain about not covering some important working aspects, such as tax procedures. According to the coordinator this is due to the client-company relationship based on confidentiality and decision-making.

Throughout the auditing processes carried out for the client company, student interns relate to the clients as auditors, thus improving their know-how, their relationship skills, etc.)

Relevance and Transferability:

Although this case study refers to an HE experience, it is necessary to take into account that it is a very specific sector and profession, which require a particular profile. Despite its short history, the Master's evolution has been very satisfactory. For the people interviewed, the master has a perfect combination of theory and practice. However, thanks to the modifications suggested by the Quality Commission, it will gain in quality.

In the next academic year, a change will be made in the placement of the internships, because they will move from the second semester to the third one (the master's degree is one and a half years). The renewal of the accreditation has paralyzed the change requested by the companies in the Evaluation Commission. The internships in the second semester were good because after the internships in the companies, they improved their theoretical knowledge. However, students were more burdened because for their third semester they had extended the period of curricular internships by signing an extracurricular internship agreement with the University Office in charge. The fact that they continue their internships while having to attend face-to-face classes in some cases even led them to fail a subject.

The change will help the students to be more theoretically prepared and to feel a sense of belonging towards the University, especially before their incorporation to the company.

All the interviewees believe that the master's degree is transferable to other sectors whenever professionals and companies are available and a selection of students is made, where the student's profile is the one he or she wants from the company. Within professional sector presenting fewer opportunities, it may be unfeasible. In this regard, it is evident how the Master's degree impacts its students' job placement rate and their overall employability by companies.

The sector to which it is addressed is important for the employability of the student and the success of the Master's. The university-company relationship is important, and for the university is crucial to be considered the first option for companies when it comes to hiring students.

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