



Learning Model

FOR THE INCLUSION OF NEET YOUTH IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Social
Innovation 
Initiative



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YouthPioneer

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

NEET youth (Not in Education, Employment or Training) represent a diverse group of young people across the European Union, each facing unique circumstances, barriers, and life trajectories. Despite this diversity, NEET youth can still be broadly defined by a few shared characteristics:

- They are not currently employed (i.e. [unemployed](#) or [inactive](#) according to the [International Labour Organisation](#) definition);
- They are not participating in any form of formal or non-formal education or training;
- They are typically aged between 15 and 29 years old.

[Eurofound \(2016\)](#) further categorizes NEET youth into several sub-groups to reflect this internal diversity: re-entrants (those planning to return to education or work), short-term unemployed, long-term unemployed, young people with an illness or disability, young carers, discouraged youth, and others who do not fit neatly into these categories. Some leave school early without the qualifications or support needed to continue their education or enter the labour market. Others struggle to find their first job due to a lack of experience, guidance, or opportunities, especially in rural or economically disadvantaged areas. Mental health challenges, family responsibilities, or caring roles, particularly among young women, can also limit access to work or education. Discrimination, migration background, disability, or belonging to marginalised communities can further reduce their chances of inclusion (Eurostat, 2025).

The situation varies across regions. In Romania, rural poverty, limited access to quality education, and the effects of labour migration reduce opportunities for youth, particularly for young women who often carry early family responsibilities. In Italy, persistent regional disparities, especially in the South, intersect with underdeveloped career guidance systems and insufficient links between education and the labour market. In Greece, high youth unemployment, the legacy of economic crisis, and widespread mental health challenges contribute to a sense of disengagement and reduced future opportunities. Spain continues to see regional inequalities, where structural disadvantages in areas such as Andalusia and Extremadura accompany limited job opportunities and low trust in public programmes (OECD, 2024). Bulgaria faces strong rural-urban divides, barriers to vocational training, and persistent discrimination affecting Roma youth and young women. In Cyprus, many NEETs

remain invisible within national systems, often unregistered or disconnected after military service or higher education, making outreach and support more difficult.



Figure 1. YouthPioneer partner countries

Despite local realities varying between countries, the challenges that NEET youth are facing are recognised across the European Union, and numerous initiatives have been launched to address them, even though the scale and focus vary between countries. At the EU level, a target has been set, for NEET average to decrease to 9% by 2030. In 2024, the EU average stood at 11.0%, but progress is uneven: some countries have already met the 2030 goal, while others continue to face significant challenges (The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 2021).

Countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Cyprus, represented in the YouthPioneer partnership, continue to report high or moderately high rates of NEET youth (**TABLE 1**).

Bulgaria	Cyprus	Greece	Italy	Romania	Spain
12.7	12.9	14.2	15.2	19.4	12

Table 1. NEET rate (15-29 y.o.) (%), 2024). Source: Eurostat (2025)

Romania has the highest NEET rate in the EU at 19.4%, nearly four times higher than the Netherlands. The situation differs by various factors, such as gender or environment. Rural youth are especially disadvantaged: NEET rates in rural areas exceeded those in cities by over 17 percentage points in Bulgaria and nearly 19 points in Romania. Despite notable progress in reducing NEET rates between 2014 and 2024, challenges persist especially in Greece (-12.5 pp) and Bulgaria (-11.3 pp). Young people with low or medium education levels, young women, and those from low-income or migrant backgrounds are disproportionately affected. In Greece and Italy, for example, NEET rates among youth with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education exceed 17%, while young women in Romania are over 11 percentage points more likely to be NEET than male youth (Eurostat 2025).

	Bulgaria	Cyprus	Greece	Italy	Romania	Spain
Women	14.8 (b)	14.1	14.7 (b)	16.6	25.2	12.1 (d)
Men	10.7 (b)	11.7	13.8 (b)	13.8	14.0	11.9 (d)

Table 2. NEET rate (15-29 y.o.), by gender (%), 2024). Source: Eurostat (2025). Legend: (b)=break in time series, (d)=definition differs.

This is the situation which provided the context for YouthPioneer. Co-funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), YouthPioneer is a European initiative designed to support and empower young people aged 15 to 29 who are not in employment, education or training. The project offers a structured, personalised and tested pathway for NEETs to re-engage with the labour market and is inspired by the **success of the following initiatives:**

Jove Valor and YOPEVA

Jove Valor was a structured job integration programme developed by Fundesplai and implemented in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, aiming to facilitate NEETs' transition into the labour market through a paid professional contract (6–12 months) that combined on-the-job experience, formal training, mentoring, and guidance. Scaling this initiative across Spain, Portugal, Italy, Romania, the Netherlands, and Sweden, YOPEVA introduced a multi-actor, multi-dimensional methodology, involving public authorities, employers, and community organisations. In continuation, YouthPioneer promotes the involvement of multiple actors in attracting and retaining NEET on the labour market, setting a replicable model and showing the importance and impact of a coordinated approach.

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) and StartUp2

EYE refers to an EU-funded transnational business exchange scheme that supports aspiring entrepreneurs (with a business plan or less than three years of experience) by matching them with experienced host entrepreneurs in another European or partner country, for a limited period of time. StartUp2, while also focused on entrepreneurship, supported the development of transversal skills of new and host entrepreneurs, through on the job training and capacity building. YouthPioneer draws from EYE and StartUp2 the idea of guided mentorship and structured entrepreneurial learning, as well as using project development as a tool to strengthen agency and soft skills.

Intermediary Organisations (IOs) played a crucial role in matchmaking, funding disbursement, and support. In the context of YouthPioneer, EYE serves as a source of inspiration for entrepreneurial mentoring.

REBUILD

A youth empowerment initiative aimed at enhancing civic engagement, project design capacity, and green transition participation among NEETs and marginalised youth in the post-COVID-19 context. Its core tools included a step-by-step facilitation guide for youth workers and a manual equipping young people with project design, implementation, and communication skills, serving as a strong foundation for structuring the project design phase of the YouthPioneer model.

YouthPioneer brings together insights from these past initiatives and builds on their lessons to create a model that can be adapted and reused across different contexts. It doesn't aim to impose a single way of working, but rather offers a strong starting point for designing local strategies

that help NEETs reconnect with the labour market. The model encourages flexibility and adaptation to cultural and contextual differences.

We encourage readers to explore the projects mentioned above and use what's most relevant to your local reality. Whether for inspiration or to complement what YouthPioneer offers, these approaches can provide support in building something that fits the local context.

1.1 WHY THIS LEARNING MODEL? WHO IS IT FOR?

The YouthPioneer Learning Model (YLM) was developed to offer a flexible, collaborative, and tested approach to working with NEETs. It provides practical guidance and tools for local authorities, NGOs, youth organisations, educators, and employers who wish to implement the YouthPioneer programme.

The model is particularly relevant for those working in:

- Youth services and outreach,
- Local employment or social inclusion programmes,
- Non-formal education and vocational training, and
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and private sector engagement.

1.2 Core principles

1.2.1 BUILT ON PROVEN PRACTICES

YouthPioneer is inspired by other successful European initiatives (mentioned earlier), which have demonstrated a positive impact in supporting NEET youth to continue their studies or enter the labour market. They are referenced multiple times throughout the document, wherever they are relevant.

1.2.2 MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

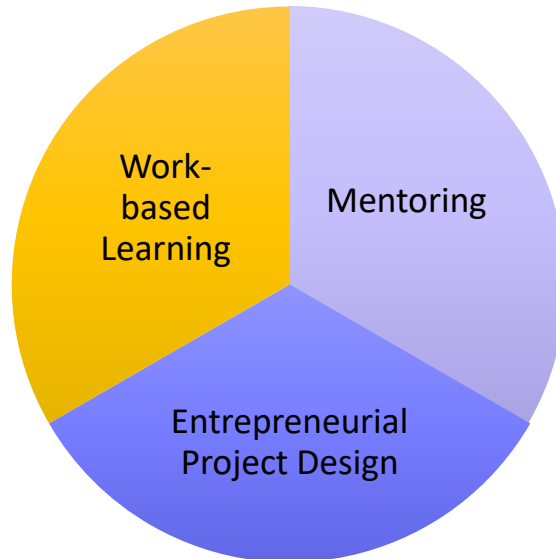
YouthPioneer brings together public institutions, businesses, and third sector organisations to co-create and implement solutions. This model promotes shared responsibility and stronger, sustainable support systems for NEETs.

1.2.3 YOUTH-CENTRED

The programme places the needs, interests, and aspirations of young people at its core. It recognises the diversity among NEET youth and promotes a tailored, flexible approach, supported by individualised development plans. One-to-one mentoring is a cornerstone of this approach, as well as the involvement of youth workers as mentors and youth organizations as learning environments.

1.2.4 MULTIDIMENSIONAL METHODOLOGY

YouthPioneer integrates three core components:



- **Mentoring**, guidance and support centred around the needs and objectives of the NEETs, as defined together at the start of the mentoring and according to the evolution throughout the programme.
- **Work-Based Learning (WBL)**, supervised and designed experiential learning (learning by doing) in professional environments that make connections between their personal aspirations and potential career paths.
- **Entrepreneurial project design**, following hands-on training that equips NEETs with the tools and mindset to create, plan, and present their own initiatives and to transform ideas into structured projects, introducing entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

1.2.5 BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED

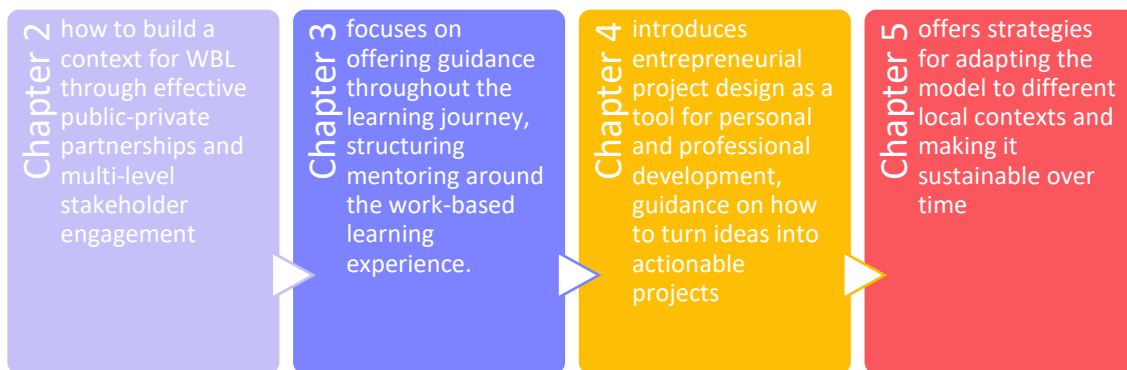
YouthPioneer creates mutual value for all actors involved:

- It offers practical opportunities, personal growth, a renewed sense of purpose and higher employability for NEETs.
- It complements corporate social responsibility actions, allows companies and employers to shape youth development, and strengthens their role as inclusive actors.
- It builds on existing efforts by public institutions and local communities to address youth unemployment, promote lifelong learning, and improve cooperation between sectors. At the same time, it supports local development by strengthening ties between young people and their communities, encouraging participation, and contributing to more inclusive and sustainable local economies.

1.3 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This guide is designed to help readers understand, adapt, and implement the YouthPioneer Learning Model in their local context, whether they are part of a youth organisation, municipality, company, or education provider. It offers:

- A step-by-step structure of the YouthPioneer model, from building partnerships, to mentoring and organising an experiential learning programme.
- Examples and tools drawn from tested European initiatives.
- Practical tips to support planning, implementation and adaptation, as well as evaluation of results.



Each section is there to help readers adapt YouthPioneer programme to their own setting.

The document can be read from start to finish or navigated directly to the chapters most relevant to the implementation team's role or needs. Each chapter includes a **readiness checklist** to help readers assess where their organisation stands. For more concrete details on YouthPioneer steps, processes, and stakeholder roles, please refer to the **YouthPioneer Action Plan**, which complements this Learning Model.



1.4 YOUTH PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING MEASURES

For NEETs under 18 involved in YouthPioneer activities

1. Definition and rationale

1.1 Who is a minor?

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), YouthPioneer recognises all individuals under the age of 18 as minors. The initiative is designed for young people aged 15 to 29, therefore participants under 18 are entitled to additional safeguards due to belonging to a vulnerable group.

1.2 Why safeguarding matters

Minors who are not in education, employment, or training may already face challenges such as social exclusion, poverty, limited family support, migration, or discrimination. YouthPioneer is committed to ensuring that all project activities involving minors are carried out in a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment, free from harm, neglect, or abuse.

2. Core protection principles

YouthPioneer programme implementation team adhere to the following safeguarding principles:

- Prevention of abuse, exploitation, and harmful behaviour is a shared responsibility across all project levels (zero tolerance); while we cannot control what happens within host companies, we ensure safeguards through a designated contact person, a signed child protection protocol, and ongoing monitoring of each young person's wellbeing.
- Transparency, accountability, and timely reporting of concerns.
- Respect for privacy, dignity, and the evolving capacity of the minor.
- Commitment to inclusive, rights-based engagement.

3. Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Local child safety officer

Each programme coordinating entity must appoint a local child safety officer to monitor compliance with national and YouthPioneer child protection policies and liaise with child protection authorities when necessary.

3.2 Programme-level oversight

Each organizing entity is fully responsible for implementing safeguarding measures in line with national laws and institutional policies. Coordinating organization makes sure that measures are aligned across all the actors involved, shared good practices and addresses punctual questions or concerns. All staff and volunteers working directly with minors must be informed of safeguarding measures before engaging in YouthPioneer activities.

4. Safe behaviour and good practice

All programme staff, mentors, trainers, volunteers, and associated personnel must:

- Treat all minors with respect, dignity and fairness.
- Refrain from physical, emotional, or sexual misconduct.
- Avoid private communication with minors outside official and approved channels.
- Not engage in mentoring or project-related activities while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Share photos, videos, or personal stories of minors only with the prior written consent from a legal guardian.
- Honour a minor's right to opt out of activities at any time without pressure or consequence.

5. Consent and participation

Before involving any minor in project activities:

- Written informed consent must be obtained from their legal guardian.
- Assent from the minor is also required, respecting their right to understand and agree.
- Separate consent must be collected for use of photos, videos, or personal data.
- Consent forms must clearly state the activity's purpose, scope, and the minor's right to withdraw at any time.

6. Reporting and response

In the event of suspected or reported abuse:

- Concerns must be reported immediately to a member of the YouthPioneer local team. As an alternative, reporting can be done to relevant external and objective authorities – a list of useful contacts should be shared with the youth (child support organisations, children's helpline, social workers, etc.).
- All reports will be treated confidentially and handled in a way that protects the young person's dignity, safety, and emotional wellbeing.
- Every incident will be documented and followed up in accordance with institutional procedures, with careful attention to avoid further harm, retraumatisation, or unjust blame.

1.5 GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

While building private-public and multi-stakeholder partnerships, as well as while organising and implementing actions, it is important to adopt a gender equality and non-discriminatory approach. This should be done by taking a number of measures throughout all the phases that ensure that the specific needs of each person involved are taken into account and respected, and ensure their access to all the opportunities offered, among which are:

- Arranging events, trainings, meetings, and any other action in a way to allow for a gender-balanced, non-discriminatory, and inclusive participation
- Involving sessions on diversity, equality, and inclusion for all stakeholders and target groups involved in any type of action organised, as well as for the internal staff working in the organisation and delivering such actions
- Picking up facilities that ensure access for people with reduced mobility
- Adopting a person-centred approach by incorporating gender, diversity, and inclusive analysis in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all the activities
- Ensuring that external actors and organisations involved, as well as target groups selected, follow a gender equality and non-discriminatory approach, already from the selection process
- Using inclusive and non-judgmental language in all internal and external communication with all stakeholders and target groups
- Using inclusive visual and audio representation (i.e., include subtitles for people with hearing impairments, use copyright-free images, include audio transcription for visually impaired persons, etc.)
- Balancing the participation of all groups of people in all actions and activities, as well as in the selection of the internal staff working in the organisation, and the implementation of such actions and activities

Finally, it can be useful and advisable to have a gender equality and non-discriminatory policy with all the measures clearly stated to be shown to every actor involved in every step, and to which all of them must comply.¹

¹ The list of measures to be taken is only illustrative, more measures can and should be added where a lack is noted.

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Chapter 2

CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM FOR WORK-BASED LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES (WBL): PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATIONS
AND MULTI-LEVEL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



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CHAPTER 2

Creating an ecosystem for Work-Based Learning opportunities (WBL): public-private collaborations and multi-level stakeholder engagement

2.1. COMMON TYPES OF WORK-BASED LEARNING IN EUROPE

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is an educational approach that integrates practical work experience with formal learning. It allows learners to develop skills, knowledge, and a professional attitude through real workplace environments. This method bridges the gap between theory and practice, making education more relevant to the labour market demands.

Work-Based Learning is not just about gaining technical skills, but also soft skills: understanding workplace culture, learning about teamwork, communication, and responsibility, building confidence and motivation, and connecting personal aspirations with existing or new career paths.

Across Europe, Work-Based Learning takes a variety of forms. Common types include:

- **Apprenticeships:** Structured programmes where learners split their time between school-based learning and paid work in a company. Apprenticeships often lead to formal qualifications and are well-integrated into national education systems in many European countries.
- **Internships:** Short-term placements, generally for university students or recent graduates, often voluntary. They give young people practical experience and networking opportunities, but may not be part of a formal qualification.
- **Work placements:** Practical work experience that forms an integral part of a formal school-based or vocational training programme (such as VET). They are typically mandatory, longer than internships, and linked to specific learning outcomes required for a qualification.
- **Job shadowing:** Short-term opportunities to observe professionals in their daily work. Often used to help young people explore possible career paths.
- **Project-based collaboration:** Partnerships between education providers and companies where learners work on real-world projects or challenges set by employers.

The structure and emphasis of WBL vary across European countries, reflecting differences in education systems, labour market needs, and policy frameworks. Despite these national differences, there is growing recognition at the European level, for example, through EU initiatives like the European Alliance for Apprenticeships² and recommendations from CEDEFOP³, that WBL is a powerful tool to help young people transition into the labour market. It allows learners to acquire technical skills, but equally important, to develop transversal competences such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and an understanding of workplace culture. Employers highly value these qualities and often contribute to long-term employment success.

² European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EaFA): An EU initiative that promotes the quality, supply, and image of apprenticeships across Europe, and supports partnerships between governments, businesses, and education providers.

³ CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training; an EU agency providing research, analysis, and policy support to improve VET systems and align them with labour market needs across Europe.

2.2. BUILDING STRONGER PUBLIC-PRIVATE AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

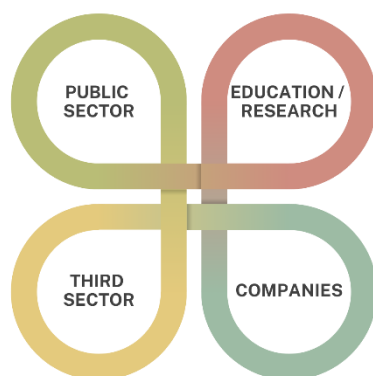
A strong network of stakeholders is essential to delivering effective multi-level projects. YouthPioneer, for example, brings together actors from different sectors, public bodies, companies, NGOs, youth organisations, and youth workers, who each contribute in different ways to supporting NEETs on their pathway to employment.

What could be the roles of these multiple actors? Public institutions could provide the funding, frameworks, and coordination needed to establish and sustain WBL opportunities. Companies can offer real workplace environments and opportunities for young people to gain practical experience. NGOs and youth organisations are able to reach NEETs engage participants, offer guidance, and provide continuous support before, during, and after placements. Youth workers play a frontline role in mentoring and empowering participants throughout the process (these roles are explored further in the next section).

A multistakeholder and multi-actor approach is particularly valuable because it creates a more holistic and flexible support system. When institutions, companies, and third sector actors work together, they can combine their strengths, experience, and knowledge. In this way, WBL activities are not developed in isolation but are connected to real job opportunities and supported by a wider ecosystem.

The experience of Jove Valor and YOPEVA (mentioned in the Introduction) shows how such partnerships can work. The project used a Triple Helix model, involving vocational training centres, employers, and public bodies. Building on this, YouthPioneer expands this approach by introducing a fourth actor: **the third sector**. This fourth actor includes NGOs, youth organisations, and youth workers, who bring essential insight and experience from working directly with young people, particularly those facing additional barriers to employment. Their involvement helps ensure that the project remains inclusive, flexible, and responsive to the real challenges faced by NEETs. NGOs and youth organisations play a crucial role in outreach, engagement, and ongoing support, while youth workers provide hands-on mentoring and help young people reflect on their development throughout the WBL process.

While young people are not always seen as formal actors in this model, they are the main beneficiaries and their active involvement in shaping the initiative is essential. Consulting them through consultations, feedback sessions, and participatory activities ensures the project reflects their real needs and aspirations. This participatory approach is explored in more detail in the



following section, where the roles of civil society and the involvement of young people are further defined.

In YouthPioneer, partnerships between public bodies, employers, youth organisations, and youth workers ensure that NEETs not only access WBL placements but also receive the support they need to succeed, from mentoring and career guidance to practical workplace skills. This cooperation also helps strengthen the project's sustainability and improve its long-term outcomes.

To support effective collaboration between public and private actors, it is recommended that a simple public-private collaboration strategy be developed at the local or project level. A template is provided in the [Annex 1](#) to help partners define their shared goals, contributions, joint activities, and coordination mechanisms.

Figure 2. The Quadruple Helix Model

2.3. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING FOR MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS AND LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

Establishing meaningful collaboration between different stakeholders requires a clear understanding of which actors are involved and how they contribute to the project's objectives. Stakeholder mapping ([Annex 2](#)) is an essential first step in this process. It enables project teams to identify relevant stakeholders, clarify their roles and interests, and determine the most effective ways to engage them. It is an ongoing process that should be revisited as the project evolves.

2.3.1 TYPES OF STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

COMPANIES AND EMPLOYERS (SMALL, MEDIUM, AND LARGE)

Businesses, whether small, medium, or large, can offer real-world job environments where NEETs can develop relevant skills. The size of the company often influences the scope and structure of the opportunities they offer. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) might offer more personalised, versatile learning experiences, while larger corporations can provide structured, often well-supported training programmes. Companies, on the other hand, are not only offering young people practical experience but are also investing in the future workforce, ensuring that the skills of their potential future employees align with companies' needs.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND PUBLIC BODIES (MUNICIPALITIES, EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

Local authorities and public bodies, such as municipalities and employment services, play a vital role in identifying NEETs, offering guidance, and connecting them with WBL opportunities. These bodies are often responsible for providing funding and overseeing initiatives like youth employment schemes, apprenticeship programmes, or internship initiatives that aim to create pathways to employment for young people. In some cases, they may manage national or regional employment support projects that specifically target NEETs. However, limited resources, bureaucratic constraints, and fragmented coordination can hinder the delivery of consistent support. Close collaboration with employers, NGOs, and youth workers helps public bodies overcome these challenges and ensure more effective pathways into the labour market for young people.

NGOS AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

NGOs and youth organisations support young people facing additional barriers such as social exclusion or lack of qualifications. These organisations often act as intermediaries, helping to connect NEETs with employers and facilitating access to WBL opportunities. Their involvement is especially important where public services are limited, ensuring that young people have access to programmes that promote inclusion and equal opportunity.

YOUTH WORKERS (MENTORS)

Youth workers provide direct, individualised mentoring for NEETs throughout their WBL journey. Their support begins even before the placement, helping young people explore their aspirations, identify strengths, and set realistic goals. During the WBL experience, they can offer personalised guidance, conduct regular assessments to ensure the pathway remains aligned with the young person's development, and support them in navigating workplace challenges. Youth workers also provide emotional support, help build confidence and motivation, and ensure that each WBL experience is tailored to the individual's needs. After the placement, they assist participants in reflecting on what they have done and learned, helping them draw conclusions and define their next steps. Their role is essential to making WBL a positive, meaningful, and sustainable experience for NEETs.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Vocational schools and training centres are crucial for connecting young people to the labour market through WBL programmes. They ensure that training is aligned with companies' demands and provide VET students with the skills and qualifications needed for employment. For young people facing barriers to employment, these centres also offer pathways back into education and further training. They help identify potential NEET participants, assess their readiness for WBL, and match them with suitable businesses and opportunities.

Beyond formal education, vocational institutions provide training and orientation sessions that prepare NEETs for work placements and workplace expectations. In this way, they serve as a bridge between the education system and the labour market, helping young people develop the practical skills needed to succeed in their chosen careers.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people are at the centre of the WBL process. WBL is most effective when young people take ownership of their learning. However, those facing barriers to employment often struggle with low self-esteem, limited education, or complex life circumstances, which can make engagement difficult. In this context, the support of youth workers or mentors is vital, as they help guide young people through these challenges and encourage their continued participation.

2.3.2 LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Not all stakeholders will have the same level of involvement throughout the project. Mapping levels of involvement helps clarify expectations and ensures that each partner contributes where they can have the most impact.

Typical categories include:

1. Core Partners: involved in project design, strategic decision-making, funding, and long-term planning
2. Delivery Partners: directly involved in project delivery
3. Support Partners: contribute specialised services or resources
4. Influencers and Enablers: help create a supportive environment, advocate for the project, or influence relevant policies (e.g., chambers of commerce, regional authorities, education ministries)

Once the main stakeholders are identified and their levels of involvement are clarified, the next step is to actively engage them and cultivate strong, lasting collaboration throughout the project (visit [Annex 2](#) for the stakeholder mapping template).

2.4. ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Strong, well-managed relationships with all stakeholders are essential to sustaining effective work placement and collaborative projects. The challenge is to attract partners, demonstrate the value of their involvement, and maintain their engagement by aligning the project's goals with their interests.

2.4.1 HOW TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN STAKEHOLDER COMMITMENT

Stakeholders are more likely to stay engaged when they see clear mutual benefits:

- Companies gain access to a skilled, diverse talent pool and opportunities to shape workforce development.
- Local authorities can advance social and economic goals, such as reducing youth unemployment, supporting local businesses.
- NGOs and youth organisations can further their missions around youth empowerment and inclusion.
- Youth workers benefit from professional growth and enhanced capacity to support young people.

Public recognition of stakeholder contributions, through newsletters, social media, and events, reinforces their role and highlights their importance in the project.

Offering capacity-building and networking opportunities, such as training workshops and knowledge-sharing events, helps stakeholders develop professionally while contributing to the project's quality and reach.

In turn, young NEETs benefit from a comprehensive support system that improves their employability through work experience, mentorship, and access to relevant training.

2.4.2 BUILDING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Building effective relationships with stakeholders requires an active approach, both when establishing new partnerships and when maintaining contact throughout the project. Different groups may require different approaches, depending on their role and level of involvement.

For companies, personal contact is often an effective approach. This can take place through introductions from existing partners, local business events, or direct outreach by the project team. It is helpful to clearly explain what the project offers them, such as access to motivated young candidates, opportunities for visibility, and contributions to corporate social responsibility.

Local authorities are generally approached through formal written communication, followed by an invitation to participate in roundtables or other project events. This helps to establish alignment with local policy goals and shows the relevance of the project to their priorities.

NGOs and youth organisations can often be approached through existing networks and recommendations from current partners. Invitations to capacity-building activities or informal conversations provide opportunities to build trust and explore areas for collaboration.

Youth workers are usually engaged through their employing organisations, such as youth organisations or NGOs, and through existing project contacts. Involving them in project activities from the beginning encourages a sense of ownership and supports ongoing engagement.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach—adaptation depends on local and cultural realities. Once relationships are established, it is helpful to maintain regular contact with stakeholders. Invitations to roundtables, participation in project events, training sessions, and regular updates by email all contribute to keeping stakeholders connected to the project. For partners such as companies and local authorities, one-to-one follow-up can also support ongoing collaboration. A project calendar and a simple record of when and how stakeholders have been contacted, along with any planned follow-up, help to ensure continuity and effective collaboration throughout the project (e.g.: CRM solutions).

If a stakeholder's level of involvement decreases, a personal follow-up by phone or meeting is usually more effective than general updates. Revisiting their interests and priorities and identifying upcoming project activities that may encourage renewed involvement can help to strengthen the relationship. Approaching stakeholder contact as an ongoing relationship, rather than a single task, helps to build partnerships that remain active throughout the project.

2.5. BRINGING EVERYONE TOGETHER: ORGANIZING A NETWORKING EVENT

Networking events are one of the most effective ways to build strong, productive relationships between stakeholders. They provide a platform for companies, local authorities, NGOs, youth organisations, and youth workers to connect, share insights, and explore potential collaboration. For young NEETs, these events offer an opportunity to meet employers and professionals in an informal setting, helping to reduce anxiety, build trust, and develop confidence when engaging with the labour market. Importantly, these events also act as a first step for young people to explore different sectors, job roles, and work environments, helping them gain a clearer understanding of what kind of professional path they might want to pursue.

To ensure that these events lead to meaningful outcomes for both NEETs and stakeholders, it is important to define clear objectives and structure the event accordingly.

2.5.1 SET CLEAR OBJECTIVES: WHAT IS THE EVENT FOR?

The objectives of the event should guide its structure and ensure it meets the needs of all participants. Depending on the local context and project priorities, these objectives might include:

- Building trust between young NEETs and potential employers, helping to create a supportive environment for future collaboration.
- Providing NEET participants with first-hand exposure to various job sectors roles, and professional environments through direct engagement with professionals. This helps them better understand the labour market, reflect on their interests, and begin identifying the types of work they would like to explore further.
- Supporting young people in discovering which skills are valued in different sectors and how they might acquire them.
- Strengthening networking connections between NEETs, companies, youth organisations, and public institutions to increase employment opportunities.
- Encouraging companies and organisations to adopt inclusive recruitment strategies and create opportunities that cater to the skills and needs of NEETs.
- Facilitating knowledge exchange and shared learning between stakeholders to improve cooperation and strengthen future partnerships.

Ensuring that the objectives align with the interests of all stakeholders helps to make the event relevant and engaging for everyone involved.

2.5.2 EVENT DURATION, VENUE SELECTION, AND SETUP

Duration

The event should last long enough to keep participants engaged, allowing for structured activities and informal networking, without overwhelming them. A duration of up to 4 hours is ideal to maintain focus and energy levels.

Venue

Choose a venue that is easily accessible to all, with convenient transport links, parking, and necessary accommodations for any special needs.

The space should encourage movement and interaction, rather than a classroom-style setup with fixed tables and chairs, and that there is room for participants to stand, move around, and change spots easily.

Facilitation

A skilled facilitator should be appointed to guide the event. The facilitator should be able to keep discussions on track, encourage active participation, and manage group dynamics. They should ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and that the focus remains on the event's objectives. They also play a crucial role in building an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable engaging.

The event should start with structured activities, such as short presentations or panel discussions, and follow up with informal networking time. This balance allows participants to learn, interact, and make valuable connections in a comfortable, relaxed environment.

2.5.3 ENSURING MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

A successful networking event depends on offering participants opportunities for meaningful interaction. Simple icebreaker activities at the beginning of the event can help to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage young NEETs to engage with others.

During breakout sessions, activities such as career simulations, information stalls, and panel discussions provide direct contact with professionals and help NEETs explore different career paths. A structured matchmaking session can further support networking by helping participants identify shared interests and opportunities for collaboration.

For detailed examples of icebreakers and engagement activities, see [Annex 3](#).

2.5.4 FEEDBACK AND REFLECTION

After the event, it's important to gather feedback to identify what went well and areas for improvement. This can be done through surveys or informal feedback. A summary email should be sent to participants, thanking them, highlighting the main outcomes, and outlining follow-up actions to maintain engagement and momentum.

2.6. STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE THROUGH ROUNDTABLES

Roundtables are an effective way to bring together stakeholders to share insights, address challenges, and collaboratively develop strategies to support the upskilling of young NEETs. However, to ensure that these discussions lead to meaningful outcomes, careful planning and facilitation are essential.

Each type of stakeholder attending a roundtable will bring a different perspective: local authorities bring an understanding of policy frameworks and existing structures, companies have insight into practical skills gaps and labour market needs, youth organisations possess direct experience with the barriers and support needs of young NEETs. By sharing these varied insights openly, the group builds a more complete understanding of the problem than any single organisation could alone.

2.6.1 SETTING CLEAR OBJECTIVES

Before organising the roundtable, it is important to define the session's goals clearly. For a roundtable focused on upskilling young NEETs, typical objectives might include:

- Discussing current challenges and barriers to skills development.
- Sharing successful initiatives and best practices from different sectors.
- Brainstorming new strategies to improve access to high-quality upskilling opportunities.
- Identifying available resources, partnerships, and support mechanisms.
- Developing a clear, actionable plan with assigned responsibilities.

2.6.2 PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Begin by carefully identifying and inviting stakeholders who bring relevant expertise, practical experience, and, where possible, decision-making authority. A balanced mix of participants, such as representatives from local authorities, businesses and labour market experts, youth organisations, and youth workers, will help create a rich and well-rounded discussion.

The agenda and objectives should be shared in advance to allow participants time to reflect on the topics, gather relevant information, and consider potential contributions or examples to bring to the table. To help establish a common understanding, provide background materials such as recent reports, data on local youth employment trends, and summaries of current challenges or successful initiatives.

A neutral and comfortable venue is recommended, allowing enough time for in-depth discussion, and open and equal participation. The more thoughtfully the session is prepared, the greater the likelihood of developing concrete outcomes and building strong stakeholder relationships.

To ensure productive and inclusive discussions, it's important to have a skilled facilitator and a clear plan for documentation. The facilitator helps keep the group focused on solutions, encourages balanced participation, and ensures that everyone feels heard. Visual tools like flipcharts or digital whiteboards can be used to summarise main ideas and keep the conversation on track.

To capture the outcomes of the session, audio or video recording or using live transcription could be useful. Participants must be informed in advance, and explicit consent should be obtained, either verbally or through a written form. They should be reassured that all contributions will be treated confidentially, the recordings used only for documentation and follow-up, and that opting out of being recorded will not affect their involvement. If recording or transcription is not used, or even as a complement to them, it helps to have someone assigned to take notes during the session.

Collecting honest feedback on the roundtable itself is a learning opportunity. Participants often have useful suggestions about how to improve the format, the preparation, or the facilitation. Sending out a short feedback form soon after the event will provide insights that can make future sessions more engaging and more productive.

After the roundtable, the actions agreed during the session need to be put into practice. To support this, it is useful to schedule regular check-ins and a follow-up meeting. Setting these dates while everyone is still in the room ensures commitment. These sessions help keep everyone accountable and provide a space to discuss challenges.

2.6.3 ACTION PLAN: DEFINING CONCRETE STEPS AND ROLES

By the end of the session, the group should have agreed on a clear and practical plan to set out the concrete steps to support NEETs' integration, with specific tasks assigned to individual stakeholders or organisations. Timelines or milestones should also be agreed upon, so that progress can be tracked and next steps remain on schedule. A well-prepared action plan gives all partners a shared reference point. It helps to maintain momentum after the roundtable and ensures that everyone understands their role in delivering the agreed-upon outcomes.

A good action plan should be clear, detailed, and practical.

- **Specific and clear objectives:** It should state the objectives of the plan and what the group is aiming to achieve. These objectives should be specific, measurable, and realistic, so everyone understands the exact outcomes expected.
- **Define steps:** Break down each objective into concrete activities or tasks. Each step should be detailed enough to know what exactly needs to be done to progress toward the goal.
- **Assign responsibilities:** Each task or activity must be assigned to a specific stakeholder or organisation. Clear responsibility ensures accountability and helps avoid confusion about who is doing what.
- **Realistic timeline:** The plan should include deadlines or milestones for each activity to help track progress and keep the work on schedule.
- **Resources and support:** Identify the resources needed, financial, human, technical, or material, and specify how and where these resources will be obtained or allocated.
- **Indicators of Success:** Establish clear criteria or indicators to measure progress and success. This helps stakeholders evaluate whether the actions are effective and meet the objectives

A template for preparing an action plan is provided in [Annex 4](#) to support this process.

2.7. SETTING UP AGREEMENTS AND CONTRACTS

When several organisations work together to support the upskilling of young NEETs, it is helpful to make their partnership clear from the start. In practice, this means putting agreements in writing to clearly define who does what. The type of agreement you choose depends on how formal the partnership needs to be and how far the project is already developed.

2.7.1 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can be a good first step. It is not legally binding, but it helps clarify the intentions of the partners and sets out shared goals. An MoU is useful when the collaboration is still evolving, or when partners are working together for the first time and want to build trust.

2.7.2 TASK SHARING AGREEMENT

When roles and tasks are already clear, a more detailed Task Sharing Agreement can help. This type of document outlines which organisation is responsible for which activities. It helps to avoid overlap or gaps in delivery and gives everyone a clearer picture of how the project will run in practice.

2.7.3 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

If the partnership involves funding, shared resources, or legal responsibilities, a formal Partnership Agreement is usually needed. This type of contract clearly defines obligations, contributions, and timelines. It also includes clauses about confidentiality and data protection, especially if partners are working with sensitive information about young people.

Regardless of the format, a good partnership agreement should cover the following points:

- Roles and Responsibilities: Who will do what, including leadership and coordination tasks.
- Resources: What each partner will contribute (staff time, funding, materials, space, etc.).
- Timelines and Milestones: Key dates, deliverables, and review points.
- Confidentiality: How sensitive information will be protected.

2.8. CHECKLIST

- ☐ Key local stakeholders (youth services, NGOs, host organisations) have been mapped.
- ☐ Gaps in support that need to be filled have been identified.
- ☐ A plan to keep stakeholders informed through regular updates or brief check-ins has been established.
- ☐ A process for feedback from NEETs and host organisations has been implemented.
- ☐ Adjustments for participant needs or local conditions have been planned.



Chapter 3

MENTORING PROGRAMME



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CHAPTER 3

Mentoring Programme

This chapter outlines the structured approach of the YouthPioneer Mentoring Programme (YPM) in supporting NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training) through their Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience. It presents a comprehensive guidance framework that spans the entire mentoring journey: before, during, and after the placement.

Mentoring provides a structured yet personalized support mechanism to help young people navigate their learning and work journeys. Through regular engagement, role modelling, and emotional support, mentors can support the development of self-esteem, motivation, and goal-setting capacities in participants: crucial ingredients for successful integration into the world of work.

To maximize its impact, the YPM promotes a dual-mentor model, involving both a youth worker and a company mentor. The youth worker offers emotional and educational support, helping the NEET prepare for and reflect on the WBL experience. The company mentor, meanwhile, acts as a guide and role model in the workplace, helping the young person integrate into professional routines, build job-related skills, and gain confidence in a real-life employment setting. By combining these two mentoring perspectives, social/personal and professional, the YPM ensures that NEETs are supported holistically throughout their journey.

This chapter first presents the structure of the mentoring process and the rationale behind the mentoring roles. It then details the session formats and strategies employed before, during, and after the WBL placement to ensure a high-quality, youth-centered experience that builds long-term employability and personal development.

3.1 STRUCTURING THE WBL EXPERIENCE

To provide a coherent and impactful experience for NEETs in Work-Based Learning programs, mentoring should follow a structured and supportive model. There are several strategies that can be borne in mind.

3.1.1 THREE-STEP ONBOARDING PROCESS

Initial Meeting (Youth Worker + NEET)

At the start of the mentoring relationship, it is essential to hold a preparatory meeting between the youth worker and the NEET. This meeting sets expectations, explores the young person's goals and needs, and explains the structure of the mentoring and WBL experience. The importance of building trust, outlining responsibilities, and clarifying boundaries should be approached in this initial meeting and mentee induction phase.

Coordination Meeting (Youth Worker + Company Mentor)

Before the WBL placement begins, a coordination session should be held with the youth worker and the workplace mentor. This meeting ensures that the mentor understands the mentee's background,

the goals of the placement, and the mentor's responsibilities. It provides space to align on support strategies and address any concerns proactively.

Joint Kick-Off (NEET + Youth Worker + Company Mentor)

A joint meeting involving the NEET, the youth worker, and the company mentor should formally launch the mentoring and Work-Based Learning (WBL) process. This kick-off session establishes a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities, confirms the learning and development goals, sets a clear timeline for mentoring sessions and progress reviews, and ensures that the mentee feels supported by both the educational and workplace components of the programme. It lays the foundation for open communication and coordinated guidance throughout the WBL experience.

3.1.2 REGULAR MENTORING SESSIONS

Mentors should hold regular check-ins, adjusted to each mentee's schedule, to track progress and sustain engagement. These sessions should include goal reviews, problem-solving, and emotional check-ins, guided by agreed objectives. More information to support these meetings can be found within the **YouthPioneer Mentoring Programme**⁴, on the [YouthPioneer website](#).

These can be followed by joint sessions with the youth worker, where everyone reflects on what's going well, what's challenging, and what the next steps should be. The [YouthPioneer Mentoring Programme](#) provides some guidelines to help both mentor and mentee assess development during the WBL period.

Additionally, it is best for mentors to be prepared to provide youngsters emotional support which centres on providing empathy, understanding, and a safe space for expressing their emotions and concerns. Psychosocial mentoring relationships offer active listening, validation, and guidance on managing stress, coping with challenges, and building healthy relationships (Sánchez et al., 2017). This style is particularly relevant for youngsters who may be facing emotional difficulties or may be struggling with personal issues.

3.1.3 ROLES OF PEOPLE INVOLVED: YOUTH WORKER MENTOR, MENTEE, COMPANY MENTOR, ANY OTHER PERSON (TUTOR, E.G.)

Mentee (NEET youngster)

The mentee is the young person taking part in the Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience. His/her role is to engage actively in the mentoring process by setting personal development and learning goals, participating in regular sessions, and communicating openly with their mentor. Mentees are encouraged to reflect on their aspirations, take responsibility for their own growth, and apply what they learn in both personal and workplace contexts.

⁴ For further resources and downloadable tools developed within the YouthPioneer project, visit: <https://www.youthpioneer.eu>

Company mentor

The company mentor is typically a staff member from the WBL host organization. His/her main responsibilities include supporting the mentees as they adapt to the workplace, guiding the development of practical skills, and providing feedback on performance and progress. They work closely with the youth worker to ensure that learning goals align with workplace tasks. Company mentors often participate in joint planning and evaluation meetings to monitor the overall learning experience.

Youth worker or programme coordinator

The youth worker plays a central role in coordination and supervision of the WBL. They prepare both mentors and mentees for the WBL experience, organize initial and ongoing meetings, and facilitate communication among all parties. Their duties include matching mentor–mentee pairs, overseeing progress, troubleshooting issues, and ensuring emotional and educational support structures are in place. They may also liaise with external stakeholders such as parents or social workers when necessary.

Tutors, teachers, or other support persons (if applicable)

In some cases, additional support figures such as teachers, tutors, or counsellors may be involved in the process. Their involvement can strengthen the overall learning environment and help maintain motivation and structure for the mentee.

3.1.4 BUILDING AN INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE NEET

Development of individual learning and development plans for each mentee should be done at the initial phase of the WBL to relate each participant's personal skills and competences to the placement objectives and expected learning outcomes in terms of skills and competences. An individual development plan template is available in [Annex 5](#).

The development of mentees' plans needs to be done with the help of the mentor with the involvement of mentees themselves, in order to motivate and give them a sense of ownership of their personal and learning goals. The learning outcomes to be achieved should also be determined, including how broader competence development might be incorporated into work experience and work tasks. The individual plans can be used as a benchmark for measuring the progress of participants during and at the end of placements.

3.2. BEFORE THE WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.2.1 SELECTING AND PREPARING NEETS FOR WBL

A clear and engaging call for participant selection should be developed for selecting NEETs for WBL. Organizing a networking event beforehand will offer valuable insights for building this call.

This call should outline all key aspects, in a youth-friendly and accessible format:

- activities before and after the Work-Based Learning experience,
- placement details,
- duration,
- roles and responsibilities,
- covered costs, logistics,
- and learning goals.

To ensure wide reach, the call should remain open for at least a month (or however long the implementation team considers necessary) and be promoted through various channels: the organization's website and social media, local media outlets (e.g., newspapers, websites), and a tailored, youth-oriented visibility campaign. Key local stakeholders working with youth groups (such as youth associations, employment agencies, coaching centres, and institutions offering internships or jobs) should be actively engaged to support promotion and future collaboration. Informal communication channels popular among the target NEET audience should also be utilized.

Once applications for WBL are received, organizations can begin the preselection phase using basic eligibility criteria (age, local residence, NEET status, etc.). Individual interviews should be conducted, and a shortlist created, ideally larger than the number of available WBL placements (for back-up in case of withdrawals, better matching, etc.).

Selection should prioritize candidates' motivation, interest, and potential for social and labour market integration over formal education or work experience. Preselected candidates will then have an informal interview with both the youth worker and a representative of the hosting company/organisation. Final participants will be chosen jointly, based on the number of placements available. Creating a reserve list is also recommended.

3.2.2 INITIAL MEETING: SETTING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Individual meetings with the assigned mentor from the company/organisation and each of the preselected candidates prior the start of the WBL experience will be arranged to discuss their expectations and possibilities ensuring that participants have a realistic vision of the next project phases.

This initial step also involves identifying participants' backgrounds, barriers, and readiness levels. Understanding their needs helps tailor the preparation phase and determine appropriate WBL placements and support structures.

The next step introduces youngsters to structured, goal-oriented project work, helping them develop workplace skills like task ownership, deadlines, collaboration, and problem-solving in a supportive setting. By applying their learning to a concrete project idea, participants build confidence and better understand their upcoming WBL placement. The training includes basic project planning, deliverables, time management, and soft skills, tailored to each participant's background.

The Project Design Training should be delivered as a short, interactive workshop series using a non-formal education approach. Conducted in small groups, it can combine practical exercises, group discussions, and role-plays to introduce NEETs to project-based thinking in a low-pressure, supportive environment. By the end, each participant or group should develop a simple project idea linked to their upcoming WBL placement, helping them build confidence and workplace readiness.

3.2.3 SELECTING AND PREPARING MENTORS

When contacting hosting companies/organisations interested in providing short-term WBL for NEETs, first assess their capacity to support disadvantaged youth, including skills in mentoring, social and psycho-pedagogical support, intercultural communication, and understanding of ethnic and gender issues. Check if they have previously worked with similar target groups, which can strengthen their role in this project.

Collaboration should be formalized (see [Setting Up Agreements and Contracts in Chapter 2](#)). Additionally, coordinating organizations are encouraged to involve other stakeholders as associated partners to share knowledge and benefit from the project's insights.

MENTOR PROFILES

Youth worker's profile

Youth workers selection for NEETs should involve a semi-structured interview with the candidates designed to assess the candidate's experience, motivations, and suitability for supporting young people who may face social exclusion or come from challenging backgrounds.

The interview should explore the youth worker's background in youth work, especially with vulnerable or at-risk populations, as well as their understanding of the youth worker's responsibilities, including building trust, supporting integration into the community or workplace, and encouraging personal development. Candidates are asked to reflect on their motivations, attitudes towards rehabilitation and change, and their ability to maintain professional boundaries and manage confidentiality, especially in situations involving potential risk or harm.

Company/business mentor's profile

The role of the company mentor during the work-based learning placement is to support NEET participants' personal development, wellbeing, and successful integration into a professional environment. It combines practical guidance, emotional support, and encouragement for reflective learning to help young people build confidence and skills for long-term employment.

The mentor serves as the participant's main point of contact during the placement, helping manage day-to-day challenges that may arise. These can include issues such as adjusting to a work routine, low self-confidence, or difficulties interacting with colleagues. The mentor will also guide the participant through a process of self-reflection, helping them identify and articulate the skills and knowledge they are developing throughout the placement. This reflection may take the form of regular written reports or discussions, and supports the participant in recognising their progress, building self-esteem, and preparing for future job opportunities.

In addition, the mentor will provide support in case of any personal or professional issues that may disrupt the learning process. Regular one-to-one meetings between the mentor and participant will be scheduled, offering a consistent space for communication and guidance.

The ideal mentor will have a background in youth work, education, social services, or business mentoring, with experience supporting young people facing disadvantage or exclusion. They should be empathetic, reliable, and able to build trusting relationships. Strong communication skills, cultural

sensitivity, and a practical understanding of workplace dynamics are also essential to effectively guide NEET participants in their transition into employment.

Mentor–mentee matching process

Carefully matching mentors with mentees is key to building meaningful, trusting relationships that boost engagement and personal and professional growth. The process can start with group activities like workshops or team-building exercises, allowing natural interaction and observation to identify good pairings. Matches should consider shared interests, career goals, communication styles, and personal backgrounds, especially for mentees facing social or educational barriers.

An important factor to assess during this phase is the mentee’s “relational readiness”. That is, their emotional and cognitive preparedness to engage in a supportive and trust-based relationship. Not all NEETs are immediately ready to connect with a mentor, particularly if they have experienced trauma, unstable relationships, or institutional mistrust in the past. Relational readiness can be gauged through preparatory interviews and informal interactions, with the youth worker playing a key role in helping the young person understand the nature of mentoring and what it requires.

Once a match is identified, the relationship should begin with a structured first meeting involving the mentor, mentee, and the youth worker or programme coordinator. During this session, the mentor and mentee should co-develop a simple “working agreement” that outlines shared expectations, communication preferences, goals, and boundaries. This collaborative agreement may include:

- Frequency and format of meetings (in person, phone, video, etc.)
- Confidentiality and respect for privacy
- Mutual responsibilities and commitments
- Preferred ways of giving and receiving feedback
- How to handle any concerns or challenges

Clarifying expectations and boundaries from the outset is crucial for preventing misunderstandings and promoting mutual respect. The working agreement can serve as a living document, revisited during the mentoring process to adjust or reaffirm commitments as the relationship evolves.

Practical factors like availability, location, and commitment length are also important, particularly for short-term placements. A trial period helps both parties assess compatibility, with staff support and flexibility to revisit matches if needed. Once matched, regular check-ins and documentation ensure progress and allow adjustments.

Safety measures

Safety of the NEET must be prioritized and integrated into every aspect of the WBL planning. Clear procedures for incident reporting and escalation must be established and communicated. Both mentors and mentees should receive comprehensive briefings on safety expectations, participate in relevant drills or training, and be prepared to respond to emergencies effectively.

Additionally, all WBL activities must adhere strictly to the YouthPioneer Child Protection Policy. This policy outlines the responsibilities of staff and mentors in maintaining a safe, respectful, and abuse-free environment for all participants, particularly minors. It includes clear guidelines for identifying and reporting concerns, mandatory safeguarding practices, and instructions on maintaining

appropriate professional boundaries. All personnel involved in the mentoring programme must familiarize themselves with this policy and rigorously follow its principles.

3.3. DURING THE WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.3.1 MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE MENTEES

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of any effective mentoring programme to ensure that mentees are making measurable progress toward personal, social, and professional development objectives. This process should begin with the establishment of clear, achievable goals between the mentor and mentee at the outset of the relationship (see the Individual development plan). These goals serve as reference points that can be reviewed regularly to track development and maintain focus throughout the programme.

The [NEET Skills Assessment Tool](#)⁵, part of the YouthPioneer resources, should be administered both before and after the WBL placement to evaluate a range of soft skills. This tool allows for a structured comparison of baseline and post-placement skills, offering valuable insights into the mentee's development journey. It focuses specifically on practical and transferable skills relevant to employability, and by supporting mentors and programme coordinators in tailoring follow-up activities to individual growth areas.

Beyond standardized assessment tools, mentors should maintain consistent, supportive contact with mentees. Frequent check-ins and reflection sessions are vital, particularly for NEETs who may be experiencing instability or disengagement. These sessions allow mentors to identify challenges early, celebrate achievements, and adjust support strategies as needed. Mentors should also maintain logs or simple monitoring sheets (see [Annex 6](#)) to record session frequency, mentee participation, and notable developments. These records contribute to an overall understanding of the mentoring process and can inform decisions around future support or potential re-matching. The log not only tracks engagement but also helps ensure that each mentee receives consistent, goal-oriented support during their placement. Topics may include the development of life and employability skills, communication strategies, building positive workplace relationships, and addressing any personal or situational challenges. It also allows mentors to reflect on their approach, align with programme goals, and implement strategies related to crisis navigation and NEET motivation.

Mentors may be asked to maintain this log throughout the WBL period and submit it at the end of the placement. The completed logs support programme evaluation, provide insight into mentee progress, and help ensure quality and consistency across the mentoring experience.

Evaluation should also capture qualitative indicators such as mentee satisfaction, academic or skill-related progress, and behavioural changes. Feedback from both mentors and mentees helps determine the overall quality of the mentoring relationship and the relevance of the activities involved (see evaluation forms in [Annex 7](#) & [Annex 8](#)).

Finally, the mentoring programme should ensure that a structured support system is in place. Programme coordinators should facilitate regular communication with mentors, families, and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach allows for a broader understanding of each mentee's progress and strengthens the support network around them. Including evaluation and monitoring as

⁵ For further resources and downloadable tools developed within the YouthPioneer project, visit: <https://www.youthpioneer.eu>

integral parts of the mentoring process enhances accountability, promotes growth, and helps ensure that the programme is responsive to the diverse needs of NEETs.

3.3.2 BUILDING AND UPDATING THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Each participant should have an individual development plan tailored specifically to their skills, competencies, and placement objectives. Individual plans must recognize and address each mentee's unique needs and strengths, ensuring alignment with the available placements and the desired learning outcomes. The development plan sets a foundation meaningful growth and successful engagement in the programme.

The individual plans need to be done with the involvement of participants themselves in order to motivate and give them a sense of ownership of their personal and learning goals. The learning outcomes to be achieved should also be determined, including how broader competence development might be incorporated into work experience and work tasks. The Mentee individual plans can be used as a benchmark for measuring the progress of participants during and at the end of placements. The resulting self-awareness has a high potential to be a strongly motivating factor and provides orientation for the further course of the personal development of participants.

3.3.3 ENSURING THE NEET FEELS SUPPORTED

Supporting young people from the NEETs group requires a focused approach to developing essential life and employability skills. Mentors should focus on supporting the development of core life skills, such as time management, self-motivation, and job retention strategies, while also helping the mentee develop critical thinking, communication skills, and the ability to form positive, respectful relationships. To ensure consistency and responsiveness, coordination is key. Proactive crisis navigation plans should be in place to address emotional or behavioural challenges early and constructively.

For example, If a participant is considering leaving, mentors and youth workers should initiate a supportive dialogue to understand the root causes, whether they are emotional, logistical, relational, or related to the workplace environment. A temporary pause, a re-evaluation of expectations, or even a change in placement may be considered as alternatives. It is crucial to validate the young person's feelings, remind them of their goals, and collaboratively explore possible adjustments that could help them re-engage with the programme. Having a predefined exit and re-engagement protocol in place helps maintain structure and reduces the likelihood of permanent disengagement.

3.4. AFTER THE WORK-BASED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

3.4.1 FINAL EVALUATION OF THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEET

Upon completion of the WBL placement, a final evaluation should be conducted to measure participants' overall growth and achievement of their objectives. This evaluation integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods, combining data from pre- and post-placement NEET Skills Assessments to identify measurable progress in core competencies.

Additionally, mentees should complete a final Satisfaction Questionnaire to capture their experiences, satisfaction, and suggestions for improvement. Mentor logs and qualitative feedback further enrich the evaluation, providing insights into participants' behavioural changes, increased confidence, and overall readiness for employment.

A series of follow-up activities could be organised for measuring participants' learning progress and their potential to integrate into education, vocational training and/or employment. The following activities may be organised:

Individual evaluation meeting(s) with the youth worker - Sessions will serve participants to undertake self-assessment in order to provide self-reflection on both their social skills and their professional skills and abilities acquired in comparison to their initial baseline from the preparation phase.

At this point an update of the Individual development plan of each participant can be done. Individual sessions should include practical help and information on how to further assess their skills and interests, how to choose a course of study or employment options that align with your career goals, and build techniques for finding and maintaining employment.

Group evaluation meetings - One group evaluation meeting of the whole group of mentees can be organised in order to provide participants with the possibility to share their impressions and lessons learned from the WBL experience as well as with the opportunity to interact and thus learn from each other. They will have an opportunity to participate in joint activities with others whose learning experiences may be different than their own. It could be a well-structured work process with the application of non-formal methods to engage participants in discussions, provoke and encourage participants to share, question, comment and thus raise their interest level and motivation to participate in the subsequent follow-up activities.

A group evaluation meeting might also be a good platform for participants to discuss their entrepreneurial project ideas to be further developed. The activities in the group evaluation meetings will be chosen so that they simulate participants' engagement in tasks they might do in 'real world' situations.

3.4.2 CLOSURE OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

In order to carefully close the mentoring relationship, it is essential for the youth worker to encourage reviewing milestones reached and growth experienced to provide a sense of accomplishment to the mentee.

An essential component of the closure phase is the formal review and updating of the mentee's Individual development plan. This collaborative process allows the youth worker and mentee to assess the initial goals set at the beginning of the WBL experience and evaluate progress against these objectives. Together, they can identify new strengths, remaining challenges, and emerging interests or aspirations.

Based on this review, the IDP should be updated to reflect the mentee's current situation and future plans. This updated plan acts as a practical roadmap for the mentee's continued personal, educational, and professional development beyond the programme. It may include recommendations for further training, potential career paths, or skills to focus on developing.

The process may also include discussing strategies to help NEETs maintain momentum, such as linking them to other support networks or resources and providing emotional support to participants, including acknowledging feelings of loss or anxiety that can come with closure and suggesting ways to manage them. The youth worker should guide the mentee through a reflective process that highlights the milestones reached and personal growth experienced throughout the programme. This reflection not only provides a strong sense of accomplishment but also reinforces the mentee's self-confidence and motivation as they prepare for their next steps.

Finally, we recommend for coordinating organisations to actively communicate with employment agencies, job centres, and potential employers. This ongoing dialogue helps familiarise these key stakeholders with participants' specific needs and strengths, demonstrating their potential as employees and motivating stakeholders to actively support their labour market integration.

Youth workers mentors should assist participants in mapping potential next steps, providing information and referrals to relevant local services, vocational training providers, career counselling centres, and employers. They should also help mentees prepare or revise CVs, practice interview skills, and learn how to present their experiences from the WBL in ways that appeal to future employers or training institutions.

Where possible, and depending on the youth mentors' availability, follow-up coaching sessions may be offered to support implementation of these career pathways.

3.5. CHECKLIST

Before the WBL

- ☐ A clear, inclusive call for NEET participants has been published and promoted.
- ☐ Initial screening and motivational interviews have been conducted.
- ☐ The youth worker has conducted a preparatory meeting with the mentee to establish trust and expectations.
- ☐ A coordination meeting between the youth worker and the company mentor has been held.
- ☐ A joint kick-off meeting has taken place with the mentee, company mentor, and youth worker.
- ☐ An Individual Development Plan (IDP) has been created collaboratively with the mentee.
- ☐ Mentors are trained in safeguarding and mentoring approaches.

During the WBL

- ☐ Regular mentoring sessions (e.g., weekly or biweekly) are scheduled and documented.
- ☐ Mentors maintain meeting logs and track progress.
- ☐ The NEET Skills Assessment Tool and development plan are used to monitor growth.
- ☐ Mid-term evaluations or check-ins are conducted with all parties.

After the WBL

- ☐ A structured closing meeting has taken place to review progress and update the IDP.
- ☐ Individual and group evaluation sessions have been held.
- ☐ Mentees receive tailored career guidance and referrals to training, jobs, or education.

Programme-level best practices

- ☐ A company mentor has been identified and selected.
- ☐ Structured learning tools (e.g., project design training, mentoring logbooks) have been integrated.
- ☐ Sessions have been kept inclusive, flexible, and psychologically safe.
- ☐ Close collaboration with employers, youth agencies, and support networks has been maintained.

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Chapter 4

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH PROJECT DESIGN AND
ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTION



Co-funded by
the European Union

CHAPTER 4

Experiential Learning Through Project Design and Entrepreneurial Action

4.1. WHY PROJECT DESIGN - EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Project design is a key part of the YouthPioneer Learning Model, as it becomes a way for young people to take initiative, build confidence, and learn how to solve real problems. It promotes entrepreneurial thinking as a mindset: spotting opportunities, taking initiative, and learning from setbacks.

The three-month WBL experience (250 hours as initially designed for the YouthPioneer programme) is structured into two different phases:

- **The first 1.5 months:** NEET participants take part in everyday tasks within the host organisation. This helps them get used to the workplace environment, understand routines, and build working relationships.
- **The second 1.5 months:** Participants are supported in designing a small project that addresses a real need or opportunity in the organisation: this could be a new idea, a service, a simple campaign, or an internal improvement.

This phase is hands-on and context-specific. Participants propose solutions that respond to real needs, developing practical and entrepreneurial skills in the process. Mentorship, as offered both by youth workers and company mentors, ensures that the project remains grounded and achievable, while supporting the learner's development regardless of prior educational experience.

This approach is firmly rooted in **Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle**, which involves:

- **Concrete experience:** engagement in real-life work and project tasks;
- **Reflective observation:** guided reflection on workplace situations and personal reactions;
- **Abstract conceptualisation:** connecting those reflections to broader ideas and project planning;
- **Active experimentation:** testing ideas and refining a project through real-world feedback.

The key outcomes expected from this model include:



This methodology builds on the successful practices of the [REBUILD](#) and [StartUp2](#) projects, which demonstrated that NEETs benefit from challenge-based learning anchored in real-life social and professional environments.

4.2. FROM EXPLORATION TO ACTION

In the second half of the WBL placement, NEET participants follow a hands-on process to design and present a small project that meets a real need in their host organisation. This process is guided by the [Project Design Training Programme \(PDP\)](#)⁶, an integral component of the YouthPioneer model. The programme is structured around four key modules.

1. **Situation analysis**, where participants learn how to observe their surroundings and spot real needs in the organisation. They use simple tools like the problem tree or SWOT to map challenges clearly;
2. **Problem solving**, which helps them come up with realistic, creative project ideas that matter to them and make sense in the workplace;
3. **Planning and leadership**, where youngsters turn their ideas into concrete plans, setting clear goals, outlining steps, and listing what they'll need to make it happen;
4. **Mentor hints**, which offers practical tips for youth workers and company mentors to guide NEETs through the process in a flexible, supportive way.

4.3. DELIVERY OF LEARNING SESSIONS

The learning sessions implemented in YouthPioneer are inspired by proven methods of the REBUILD project, focused on making learning accessible, inclusive, and practical. These sessions are designed to activate curiosity and promote collaboration.

Each session follows a participatory structure:

clear learning objectives

- explained at the start

interactive methods

- group brainstorming, role play, visual tools, quadrant mapping, and simplified templates

opportunities for reflection and debrief

- where participants share insights and connect experiences to real-life goals;

guided mentoring

- offered by both youth workers and company supervisors to support learning and motivation

To reflect the varied backgrounds of NEET participants, including different levels of education, literacy, and migration experience, sessions are designed to be flexible in both content and format. In addition, mentors are encouraged to use visual aids (e.g. icons, diagrams, flipcharts), facilitate small-group work to lower pressure in sharing, replace technical language with everyday words, or encourage peer learning through role rotation and shared tasks.

⁶ For further resources and downloadable tools developed within the YouthPioneer project, visit: <https://www.youthpioneer.eu>

Learning sessions also include the use of practical tools, which can be used from **REBUILD** or the [YouthPioneer Project Design Programme](#):

- Gantt chart templates for basic time planning;
- Budget templates to guide resource allocation;
- Pitch script examples to model persuasive communication.

The goal is to make abstract concepts tangible and actionable, so that by the time NEETs enter the WBL project design phase, they are equipped not only with ideas but with the confidence and structure needed to turn them into real outcomes.

4.4. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Rather than treating NEETs as passive recipients of training, the YouthPioneer model positions them as active participants and co-creators in their learning journey. This commitment to engagement starts from the very first session and continues throughout the Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience and the final pitch.

From the outset, facilitators use activities that invite self-expression, connection, and goal-setting. Drawing from the REBUILD Toolbox, methods such as *The Superpower Circle* and *The Hot-Air Balloon of Expectations* help participants reflect on their strengths, identify personal motivations, and share fears or hesitations. These early exercises create a safe, non-judgmental environment where each participant's voice is valued.

Engagement is maintained as a continuous process. During the WBL phase, NEETs are supported to take initiative, contribute ideas to their host organisation, and collaborate with mentors on real tasks. As the project design process unfolds, they are not only learning new skills but also shaping the direction of their work based on their observations, insights, and aspirations.

To ensure inclusivity, facilitators should adapt their approach to each NEET's individual background, interests, and capacity. Some may benefit from visual aids, group collaboration, or storytelling; others might need extra time to build confidence or prefer hands-on tasks. Participants with more advanced skills or experience can be encouraged to take initiative or lead parts of the process, depending on their readiness.

Youth engagement is further reinforced during the pitch preparation phase, where each participant is supported to develop and express their project idea in a format that feels authentic and accessible to them. This may involve visual storytelling, co-presenting with peers, or using digital tools, depending on their comfort level and communication style. Regular reflection checkpoints are recommended, to sustain engagement and motivation.

4.5. PROJECT DESIGN BASICS – CYCLE OF A PROJECT

Understanding the structure of a project is a foundational step in building entrepreneurial thinking among youngsters. This stage introduces them to the project cycle, a step-by-step approach to planning and implementing ideas in response to real-world challenges. Rather than presenting the project cycle as a theoretical framework, YouthPioneer draws on the **REBUILD** methodology to make it concrete, relatable, and directly connected to participants' Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience.

The focus here is on the early stages of a project: from identifying a need to formulating a coherent plan. This aligns with Module 1 of the [YouthPioneer Project Design Programme \(PDP\)](#): Situation Analysis, which teaches youngsters how to observe, assess, and define problems using tools like the problem tree, SWOT matrix, and goal analysis.

Participants explore the core stages of the project cycle:

1. Context analysis – understanding the environment in which the project will take place (e.g. the host organisation's needs);
2. Problem identification – defining what needs to change;

3. Setting objectives – formulating SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound);
4. Defining activities and resources – outlining the practical steps and tools required;
5. Expected results – visualising what success looks like and how it will be measured.

To make these abstract steps accessible, facilitators use visual aids like flow diagrams and simple project templates. Sample project stories from past REBUILD participants are also shared, to show how small ideas can grow into real-world outcomes.

The company mentor plays a key role in this phase by helping the NEET understand internal organisational needs and realistic constraints. Meanwhile, the youth worker mentor ensures that the participant doesn't feel overwhelmed by technical language or planning tools. Together, they create a support system that enables each NEET to apply structured thinking, even if they have never planned a project before.

Importantly, this phase will allow the development of:

- Planning and organisational skills, essential for both entrepreneurship and employment;
- Strategic thinking, including the ability to set goals and map logical steps;
- A shift from passive task-following to active problem-solving and initiative.

By the end of this stage, participants begin to understand that project design is not only about creativity, but also about clarity, coherence, and feasibility. These insights become the backbone of their later project development during the WBL placement.

4.5.1 ANALYSING NEEDS IN THE MARKET OR IN THE COMPANY HOSTING THE WBL

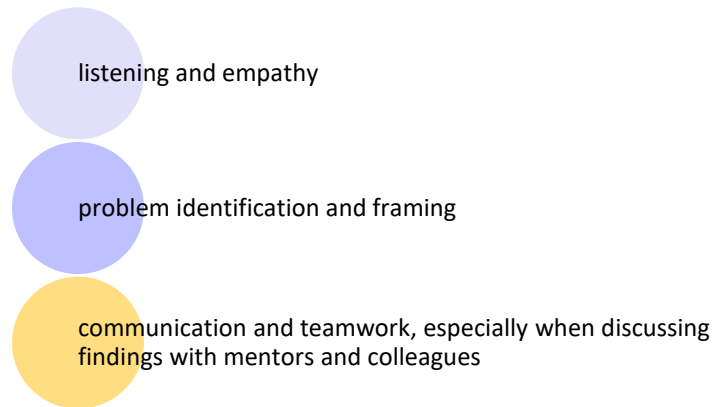
Identifying needs is a critical step in the YouthPioneer project development process. It allows young NEETs to move from general observation to focused inquiry, encouraging them to become active researchers within their hosting organisations. This phase typically takes place in the first few weeks of the WBL experience and lays the foundation for meaningful project ideas.

The “Situation Analysis” phase equips youngsters with simple yet powerful tools to understand their environment. These include:

- The Problem Tree, which helps visualise root causes and consequences;
- SWOT Analysis, to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the organisation;
- Empathy Mapping or Stakeholder Mapping, to understand the needs and perspectives of those affected by the problem.

The aim is not to perform a full business analysis, but to train youngsters to observe patterns, ask questions, and connect what they see to areas where they can make a contribution. By learning to look for gaps, inefficiencies, or unmet needs, they begin to think critically about how change happens within organisations and communities.

This phase also supports the development of the following soft skills:



YouthPioneer recognises that not all young NEETs, or workplaces, are the same. In a micro-enterprise or family business, participants might explore how to improve visibility through social media or streamline an internal logistical process. In an NGO, they may identify a communication gap with beneficiaries or learn how to improve volunteer engagement. In a larger company, their focus might be on internal communication, sustainability practices, or workplace wellbeing.

Approaches are equally adaptable to individual working styles and learning preferences. Some participants may benefit from guided observation and reflective tools like photos, sketches, or conversations. Others may enjoy diving into more structured tasks, including offering input on small-scale improvements. What matters is matching each person's starting point with meaningful opportunities for growth.

The dual mentorship system supports this flexibility:

- The youth worker ensures that each NEET is equipped to reflect meaningfully on their experience;
- The company mentor helps bridge the gap between learner observations and organisational realities, offering insights into feasibility, priorities, and internal dynamics.

By the end of this phase, youngsters should not only gain insights into their host organisation but also begin to see themselves as capable of generating relevant, value-driven ideas. This process builds their confidence and prepares them for the next step: turning observations into concrete project proposals.

4.5.2 IDENTIFICATION OF THE IDEA

Once youngsters have analysed their environment and explored the needs of their host organisation, the next step is to identify a project idea that responds meaningfully to those insights. This is where observation becomes innovation, transforming “problems” into opportunities for creative and constructive action.

This stage is part of the **Problem Solving Module** in the [Project Design Programme \(PDP\)](#), and it invites participants to engage in structured idea generation activities that match their skills, interests, and the real-world context of their workplace.

Facilitators typically use participatory tools such as:

- Group brainstorming: to generate a large pool of ideas without judgment;
- Dot voting or idea ranking: to prioritise based on feasibility and impact;

- The “5Ws” method: asking Who, What, Why, Where, and When to clarify ideas.

Participants are encouraged to ask:

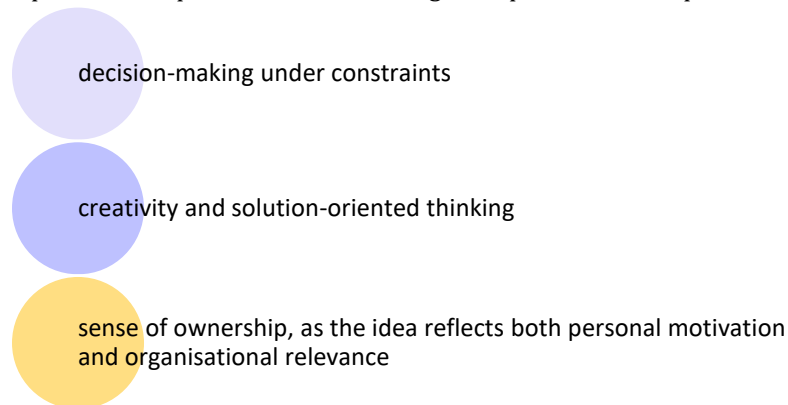
- What issue am I passionate about solving?
- Is this idea realistic within the 1.5-month timeframe?
- Will this solution benefit the organisation, its users, or the wider community?

At this point, the role of the mentors becomes especially important:

- The company mentor helps validate the idea’s relevance and feasibility within the organisational context.
- The youth mentor ensures the participant remains confident, aligned with their personal goals, and supported in expressing their vision.

In cases where a participant struggles to settle on one idea, the team may help break it into smaller, actionable components. For example, a broad idea like “improving mental health awareness” may become a short video campaign or a proposal for a staff wellbeing week.

The identification process also promotes the following entrepreneurial and personal skills:



Learners should understand that the goal is meaningful progress, and not perfection: the idea does not need to change the world, but it should make a difference in a specific, measurable way within the placement environment.

By the end of this phase, youngsters should be stepping into a new role as creators of change, ready to begin shaping their project proposal.

4.5.3 FORMULATION OF THE IDEA

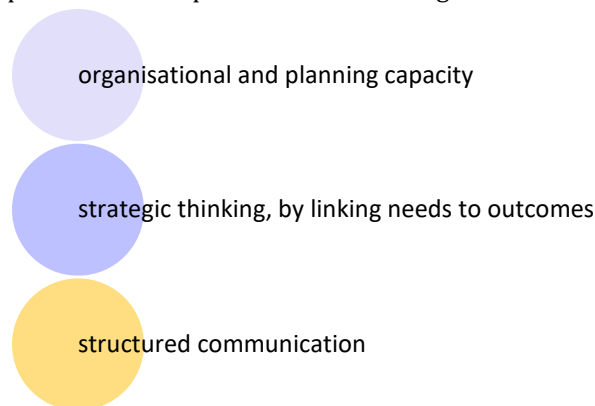
After selecting a viable and meaningful idea, youngsters move into the idea formulation phase, where they begin shaping their concept into a structured project. This is where creativity meets clarity: young people learn how to translate inspiration into action, by defining objectives, activities, expected outcomes, and necessary resources.

This stage aligns with the Planning and Leadership module of the **Project Design Programme (PDP)**⁷ and introduces participants to the basics of project logic and structure. Facilitators help break the process down into simple, accessible steps, often using templates or worksheets.

Key components of the formulation process include:

- Title and objective: What is the project aiming to achieve?
- Target group: Who will benefit?
- Planned activities: What actions will take place to reach the objective?
- Resources: What tools, materials, or support are needed?
- Expected results: What will be different if the project succeeds?

The process supports the development of the following transferable skills:



The company mentor should ensure that the project idea is realistic within the hosting organisation's constraints and can provide access to needed resources or feedback from staff, while the youth mentor helps the NEET stay focused, positive, and connected to their own voice, ensuring that the process doesn't become overly technical or intimidating.

youngsters are also encouraged to test their draft formulation by explaining it to peers, simulating questions they might receive during the pitch. This reinforces clarity, coherence, and confidence.

4.5.4 TIMELINE AND BUDGET

Creating a simple timeline helps NEETs break their project into clear steps and manage their time realistically. **YouthPioneer resources, together with the REBUILD Toolbox, include tools such as Gantt charts** that help participants lay out tasks week by week, showing what needs to happen, when, and who is accountable. This structure reduces stress and makes steady progress visible, while also making it easier for mentors to check in and offer timely support.

Budgeting should be introduced in a light, practical way. NEETs learn to think through the basic resources they will need, such as materials, printing, or transport, and estimate rough costs. A simple budget template is part of the **YouthPioneer Project Design Programme**⁸ and reflected also in the

⁷ For further resources and downloadable tools developed within the YouthPioneer project, visit: <https://www.youthpioneer.eu>

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REBUILD Toolbox. The goal is not financial accuracy, but awareness and planning. Group work is highly encouraged at this step, as it strengthens peer exchange.

Facilitator prompts:

- “What are the main steps of your project? What comes first?”
- “Which tasks will take more time, and how will you fit them into the schedule?”
- “What materials or support will you need?”
- “If you had €50 to spend, what would you prioritise and why?”

These prompts help NEETs think critically about time and resources, while staying flexible and grounded in their own capacity.

4.5.5 PROJECT COMMUNICATION

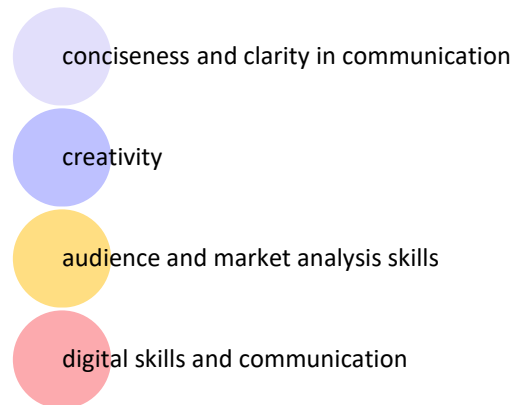
In YouthPioneer, project communication is not limited to formal presentations. Participants are also encouraged to share their ideas through social media micro-campaigns, gaining valuable experience in digital communication, audience targeting, and creative self-expression. This activity builds on the daily digital habits of young people while preparing them to engage in more professional and purpose-driven online communication.

During the WBL, youngsters can work individually or in small teams to design a short campaign that introduces their project to a wider audience, whether their peers, the host organisation, or the local community. Facilitators guide them through the basics of message design, helping them reflect on questions such as:

- What is the key message of my project?
- Who is the audience I want to reach?
- Which platform is best suited for this message?
- How can I capture attention visually?

These questions can be introduced using tools from the REBUILD Toolbox and the YouthPioneer training material. Participants explore the structure of a campaign, including posts, visuals, hashtags, and calls to action. They may create a series of Instagram or Facebook posts, a TikTok video showcasing the challenge they address, a digital flyer or story to share within their hosting organisation.

Beyond technical skills, this process cultivates:



The company mentor can offer feedback on appropriateness, tone, or relevance to the host organisation's audience.

Importantly, this stage allows youngsters to experience a shift from informal use of social media to strategic, values-driven outreach, while also enabling them to build a digital portfolio that can support future job-seeking or project promotion.

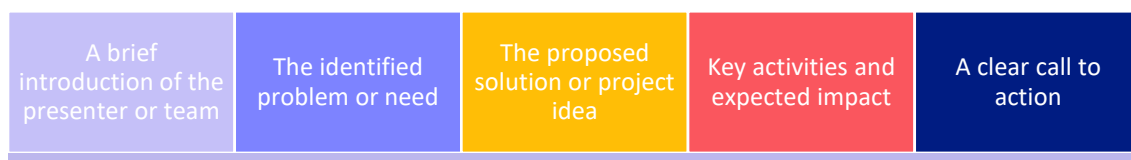
By the end of this phase, participants have not only developed a tangible output to accompany their project but also gained insight into how ideas gain traction and visibility online and offline.

4.5.6 PITCH CREATION

As the project nears completion, youngsters are guided to develop a clear and compelling entrepreneurial pitch. This process helps them reflect on their learning journey, refine their communication, and prepare to present their project in a concise, confident, and impactful way. It is not only the culmination of the project design process but also a key opportunity to strengthen self-expression, public speaking, and professional presentation skills.

The pitch creation process is structured around the *YouthPioneer Handbook on Entrepreneurial Pitch* developed in WP3. This resource offers accessible guidance to help young people organise their thoughts, practice delivery, and anticipate audience questions. It draws inspiration from real-world formats (such as startup pitch decks) while keeping language and structure simple enough for participants of all backgrounds.

Each pitch typically includes:



Rather than memorising a script, participants are encouraged to internalise the logic of their project and speak in their own voice. Facilitators use role-play, peer feedback, and small-group rehearsals to build comfort and confidence. Special attention is given to tone, body language, and storytelling, which are just as important as the content itself.

The pitch creation stage develops a wide range of transferable skills, including



The goal is not to create a flawless performance, but to help each NEET express their project with authenticity, structure, and purpose.

Mentors continue to provide targeted support, the youth mentor should help the NEET reflect on personal progress and overcome nervousness, while the company mentor should provide a workplace perspective, helping them frame their pitch in ways that resonate with real-life stakeholders.

4.5.7 FINAL PRESENTATION AND CONTEST OF PITCHES

The project development journey concludes with the final presentation or contest of pitches, a celebratory and empowering moment within the YouthPioneer program. This event marks the culmination of the youngsters' experiential learning process, offering each participant the chance to present their project idea to an audience that may include peers, mentors, host organisations, and community stakeholders.

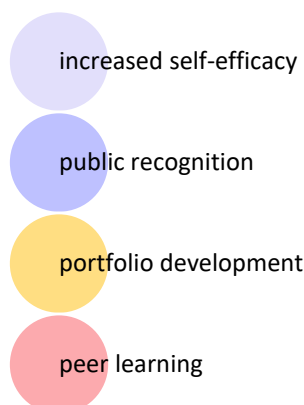
More than a simple presentation, this final step acts as a rite of passage, a space where young people are publicly acknowledged for their effort, creativity, and growth. Each participant or team presents their pitch using the format they have practiced, whether as a spoken presentation, visual slideshow, prototype demonstration, or storytelling session. The format is flexible, youth may co-present with a peer, or use pre-recorded content, or find other creative ways to match their public speaking skills and creative vision.

The final event also includes structured feedback and reflection. A small panel, comprising project staff, company mentors, and external guests, is invited to provide constructive comments focused on:

- Clarity of the problem and solution;
- Relevance to the hosting organisation or community;
- Feasibility and creativity of the plan;
- Communication and presentation skills.

Symbolic recognition should be provided to all participants, such as certificates, digital badges, or small prizes. In some cases, hosting organisations may offer to pilot or implement selected project ideas, further validating the young person's contribution (making sure they give credit to the owner).

The final presentation phase generates multiple positive outcomes:

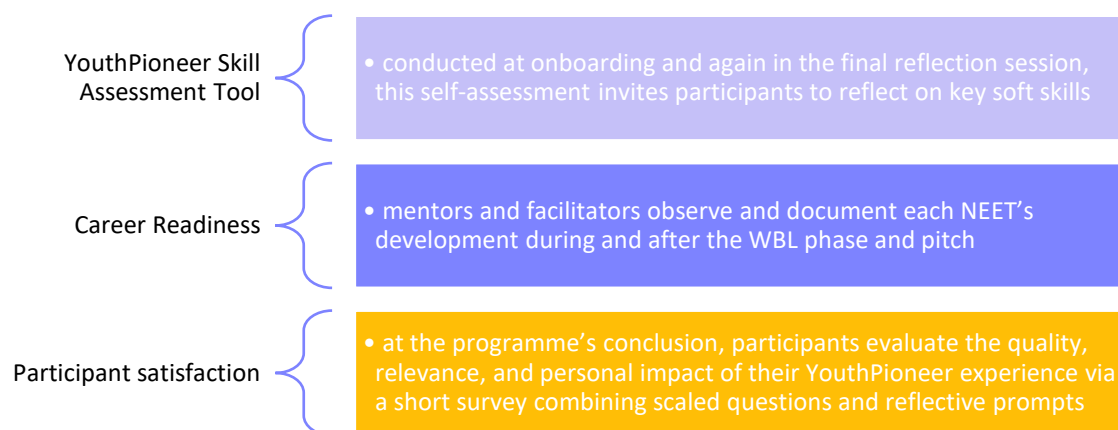


Facilitators and mentors help ensure that the event remains supportive, inclusive, and confidence-building, especially for youngsters who may be presenting in public for the first time. Regardless of the outcome, each young person should finish the programme with the experience of having developed, planned, and presented a real project, demonstrating not only technical learning, but personal transformation.

4.5.8 MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

To ensure that the YouthPioneer learning process is effective and aligned with its objectives, a concise and practical Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework should be used. The framework incorporates the [YouthPioneer Skill Assessment Tool](#), which provides structured criteria for tracking growth in transversal and entrepreneurial skills throughout the WBL experience.

It is composed of three interlinked tools:



YouthPioneer provides a set of dedicated tools within the **Project Design Programme**⁹ on the [project website](#). Together, these resources ensure that the project's impact is measured consistently and can be used to support both individual learning and programme-level improvements.

4.6. CHECKLIST

⁹ For further resources and downloadable tools developed within the YouthPioneer project, visit: <https://www.youthpioneer.eu>

- ☐ Each participant has been supported to identify at least one workplace need or opportunity based on their observations.
- ☐ Tools (e.g., problem tree, SWOT) have been used in session, and outputs have been documented (photos, worksheets).
- ☐ Participants have brainstormed and selected a single project idea with input from both the mentor and youth worker.
- ☐ A project plan (goals, activities, resources) has been completed by each youngster.
- ☐ Youth worker and company mentor have agreed on their roles in supporting the project (e.g., who checks timelines, who provides technical feedback).
- ☐ Regular progress check-ins have been scheduled and logged.
- ☐ Adjustments to plans have been made in response to participant feedback or workplace changes.
- ☐ Participants have rehearsed their project pitch at least once with facilitator feedback.
- ☐ Feedback from mentors, peers, and youth workers has been gathered and shared constructively after the pitch.



Chapter 5

ADAPTATION AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY



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CHAPTER 5

ADAPTATION AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

This chapter aims to provide guidance and inspiration for YouthPioneer partners and key stakeholders on how to adapt the Learning Model to diverse national and local realities, ensure its relevance to different categories of NEETs, and secure its sustainability in the long term.

The overarching approach that informs the following sections is that the conclusion of the project's activities should be seen as the starting point of a broader and sustained effort to reinforce and expand the original concept.

As also reflected in the YouthPioneer approach, young NEETs constitute a segment of the population whose potential has not yet been fully harnessed. They can contribute meaningfully to the European economy's response to skills shortages, particularly through targeted reskilling and upskilling initiatives. This is especially relevant for social groups facing structural barriers to labour market participation. ([European Year of Skills 2023](#)).

Achieving such an endeavour requires a strong collaboration between the private and public sectors, as well as active community involvement.

The following section outlines key recommendations that are critical to supporting this direction.

5.1 ADAPTING THE MODEL TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

The Learning Model has been designed to be adaptable, allowing each participating country and region to align it with their specific policy environments, labour market conditions, educational infrastructures and civil society activation. When considering implementation at national or local level, stakeholders should take into account:

5.1.1 The existing frameworks for Work-Based Learning and public-private partnerships

In some countries and regions, the culture of Work-Based Learning (WBL) may be particularly well developed, while in others, additional efforts may be required to inform and raise awareness among businesses and relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, certain sectors and professional fields typically integrate WBL as an essential component of their services, for example, university departments often collaborate with companies to provide internships for their students. This practice may, however, limit the opportunities available to NEET youth for similar services and experiences.

It is also important not to overlook the existing culture of cooperation, or lack thereof, between the public and private sectors. A superficial understanding of this local dynamic may lead us to overlook real opportunities that could benefit our target groups. Instead of relying on assumptions, we should explore realistic possibilities and actively seek the most appropriate partners.

5.1.2 The availability of supportive services for youth:

These services can be sought across the public and private sectors as well as within the third sector. They may include employment promotion services offered by public institutions and universities, private educational providers, career counselling offices, or municipal community and youth centres.

At the same time, they may involve profit or non-profit organisations working with youth on broader issues, for instance, prevention centres and services for psychosocial well-being, youth organisations promoting active citizenship, participation in cultural and sports activities, or formal and informal third sector groups engaged in areas such as environmental sustainability, accessibility, or democratic engagement.

The choice of which entities to collaborate with should consider their perceived relevance and attractiveness to the target group, young NEETs. Trust and cultural proximity play a key role in whether these structures are accessible and approachable to young people. It should not be surprising, for example, that in some contexts an informal street art collective may reach more NEET youth than a municipal youth centre. Similarly, a mental health promotion centre may have greater access to young individuals who need to enter the labour market or re-engage with lifelong learning due to psychosocial factors.

5.1.3 The capacity of local enterprises to host and mentor NEETs

When the local economy is predominantly composed of very small and small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Work-Based Learning and mentoring can often take on a more direct and personalised character. However, such environments may not always allow for a high degree of specialisation, as the typical working model in small businesses often follows a "one person for all tasks" approach.

On the other hand, in areas where large industries and enterprises are present, it may be more feasible to provide specialised training and potentially create employment opportunities beyond the internship period. Nonetheless, developing the personal relationships that are essential for effective Work-Based Learning and mentoring tends to be more challenging in such contexts.

In today's reality, special attention should also be given to businesses that can provide Work-Based Learning and Mentoring opportunities for NEETs through remote work tools and methodologies.

5.1.4 Legal and administrative regulations that may impact training delivery and Work-Based Learning agreements

Depending on the legal and regulatory framework of each country or region, Work-Based Learning (WBL) can range from being practically unfeasible to being strongly promoted and even publicly subsidised. The fact that certain forms of WBL are supported by official employment strategies should not be misinterpreted as meaning that all forms of implementation are automatically permissible. Conversely, existing restrictions should not be taken to mean that Work-Based Learning in businesses is strictly prohibited.

Before becoming either overly enthusiastic or prematurely discouraged, it is important to gather accurate information and understand who is being protected under the relevant legal and administrative regulations. Young NEETs undertaking placements in businesses for educational purposes must be safeguarded against the risk of being perceived as cheap, short-term, or seasonal labour. Companies should not use WBL placements to cover ongoing operational needs that would normally require formal employment contracts.

At the same time, businesses are investing resources into the training of young NEETs. It would be unfair for the benefits of this investment to be captured solely by the trainee or by another enterprise that has not contributed to the training effort. Therefore, it is equally important to establish mechanisms that offer protection and incentives to companies that engage in WBL activities in good faith.

*

The purpose of the above recommendations is to strengthen collaboration and mutuality among the many and diverse stakeholders involved in the Learning Model. Misjudging the role or capacity of key actors may jeopardise the desired culture of cooperation and potentially lead to competition or even conflict.

It is never a bad idea for potential stakeholders to gather around a common table, similar to the roundtables implemented within the YouthPioneer project, where, through a coordinated and transparent process, they can engage in equal dialogue about the strengths and weaknesses of a given strategy, as well as its accompanying opportunities and threats. A SWOT matrix informed by such discussions could serve as a highly effective tool for analysis and for the development of a sustainable action plan tailored to local specificities and conditions.

Such meetings should be held regularly to ensure that the analysis and its outcomes remain current and relevant in light of ongoing transformations in society, the economy, education, the environment, politics, digitalisation, entrepreneurship, and production systems.

5.2 ADAPTING TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEETS

NEETs are a highly diverse group. Given the diversity among NEET sub-groups, this model is not intended as a one-size-fits-all solution but rather as a flexible framework that can be adapted to address specific needs and circumstances.

To ensure inclusiveness and responsiveness, the Learning Model should integrate tailored interventions:

5.2.1 Flexible learning schedules for carers and those with health conditions

Flexible learning schedules are essential for NEETs with caring responsibilities or health conditions, as these individuals often face unpredictable or demanding daily routines that limit their ability to participate in traditional training formats. Offering adaptable timetables, asynchronous learning options, or modular delivery allows them to engage with the programme at their own pace and according to their availability. Moreover, businesses that provide online work opportunities can be effectively leveraged to support remote Work-Based Learning, further enhancing accessibility for these groups. This flexibility not only increases participation but also promotes equity and inclusion, ensuring that no one is excluded from upskilling opportunities due to personal circumstances beyond their control.

5.2.2 Motivational mentoring for discouraged youth

Motivational mentoring plays a crucial role in re-engaging discouraged youth who may feel disconnected from education, employment, or training opportunities. Personalised mentoring relationships provide emotional support, build confidence, and help mentees navigate challenges that hinder their progress. Mentors can inspire young people to set realistic goals, recognise their strengths, and persist through setbacks. Additionally, integrating mutual aid groups, peer-support networks where participants share experiences and encouragement, can enhance motivation and resilience. This collective approach builds a sense of community and mutual empowerment, transforming discouragement into motivation and improving participation and outcomes within the Learning Model.

5.2.3 Onboarding sessions for re-entrants and those with weak attachment to the labour market

These sessions help participants understand the programme's goals, available resources, and expectations, reducing anxiety and uncertainty and setting expectations in terms of engagement and commitment from the start. Additionally, tailored support during onboarding can address specific barriers these groups face, such as gaps in skills or confidence, and connect them with appropriate mentoring and Work-Based Learning opportunities, thereby improving their chances for successful reintegration into the labour market. It is also crucial to ensure a collaborative co-creation space during onboarding, where participants and stakeholders can jointly identify and address potential challenges early on, creating a more responsive and effective learning environment.

5.2.4 Inclusive approaches and accessibility tools for youth with disabilities

Providing appropriate assistive technologies, such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, adjustable user interfaces, and alternative input devices, helps remove barriers to learning and communication. Additionally, the selection of partner businesses and training venues must guarantee accessibility for individuals with mobility impairments (such as wheelchair users), sensory disabilities, and neurodiverse individuals (e.g., those sensitive to light, noise, or crowded environments). Designing materials and activities following universal design principles ensures that content is accessible to all participants, regardless of their abilities.

5.2.5 Provision for groups with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds

Special attention should be given to individuals with a refugee background, who may face not only language barriers but also emotional challenges such as shyness or trauma-related hesitation. Moreover, cultural differences, especially regarding gender interactions and social norms, must be carefully respected and accommodated. Creating a safe, culturally sensitive, and supportive environment, potentially including access to interpreters, culturally aware mentors, and tailored communication approaches, helps build trust and encourages active engagement.

The above recommendations should be taken into account at least during the design phase of the actions. Whether or not they are implemented is part of a conscious and comprehensive decision-making process and/or the need to involve additional or more targeted stakeholders. It is advised to apply these considerations wherever possible and where the necessary resources exist. This approach ensures that our efforts do not focus solely on the most privileged representatives of young NEETs, but also contribute to promoting inclusion and an economy without exclusion.

5.3 CONNECTING WITH LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

To maximise impact and alignment with ongoing initiatives, the Learning Model should be connected with relevant EU and national programmes, such as:

5.3.1 Youth Guarantee initiatives, especially for WBL placements

Aligning Work-Based Learning (WBL) activities with Youth Guarantee frameworks enables programmes to benefit from existing public-private partnerships and funding structures that offer timely pathways to employment. [Youth Guarantee](#) ensures that young people receive an offer of employment, further education, apprenticeship, or traineeship shortly after leaving education or becoming unemployed. Embedding training and mentoring elements of the Learning Model within this system strengthens the support around NEETs and increases retention in placements. It also expands the network of engaged employers, contributing to long-term sustainability.

5.3.2 Erasmus+ for mobility of learners and staff

Erasmus+ supports the international mobility of learners and staff, enriching their professional and personal development. NEETs benefit by gaining exposure to new working cultures and practices, enhancing their employability and adaptability. Staff mobilities promote knowledge exchange, methodology improvement, and stronger partnerships across countries. Integrating Erasmus+ into the Learning Model boosts innovation and ensures the programme remains responsive to labour market changes across Europe.

5.3.3 Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE) for entrepreneurial mentoring

The EYE programme connects aspiring young entrepreneurs with experienced business owners across Europe, enabling the transfer of practical knowledge and entrepreneurial insight. This mentoring builds confidence, encourages innovation, and strengthens professional networks. Including EYE in the Learning Model equips NEETs with entrepreneurial tools and experience, encouraging self-employment and local economic development.

5.3.4 European Social Fund+ (ESF+) programmes focused on youth employability

ESF+ provides targeted funding to improve youth employability through training, skills development, and Work-Based Learning. Stakeholders are encouraged to integrate ESF+ resources into their Learning Model strategies to support scalability and long-term impact. These programmes promote inclusive labour market access for disadvantaged youth, while also encouraging cross-sector cooperation and investment in sustainable pathways to employment.

5.3.5 Other local, regional and national programmes for Youth employment and entrepreneurship

In addition to EU-wide instruments, local, regional, and national programmes offer critical support for youth employment and entrepreneurship. Stakeholders should explore these options to diversify resources, strengthen community partnerships, and tailor interventions to local needs. Leveraging such programmes enhances the overall impact and sustainability of the Learning Model, creating a more integrated ecosystem for NEET inclusion and empowerment.

Partnerships with local employment services, chambers of commerce, and municipal youth councils are essential for grounding the Learning Model in the specific needs and dynamics of each community. These collaborations can improve outreach to NEETs, identify suitable host organisations for placements, and unlock local funding opportunities. Moreover, establishing local consortia encourages shared ownership, coordinated action, and long-term commitment among key stakeholders, increasing both the relevance and sustainability of the interventions.

5.4. CREATING ALUMNI NETWORKS FOR ONGOING SUPPORT

Establishing an alumni network is a simple but powerful strategy to ensure continuity and peer-led impact. Such a network can:

5.4.1 Encourage former participants of the programme to act as mentors or ambassadors

Engaging alumni as mentors or ambassadors leverages their lived experience to inspire and support new participants. Having successfully navigated similar challenges, former NEETs can offer relatable guidance, boost motivation, and build trust among peers. Their involvement also reinforces a sense of community and continuity within the Learning Model, while promoting peer-led learning and advocacy. This approach empowers alumni and strengthens the programme's long-term social impact.

5.4.2 Provide a platform for former NEETs to share success stories

Creating opportunities for alumni to share their personal journeys, through events, videos, blogs, or social media, can be a powerful motivational tool for current participants. Success stories help normalise setbacks, highlight diverse pathways, and demonstrate the tangible outcomes of training, mentoring, and Work-Based Learning. Public storytelling also enhances the visibility of the programme, builds credibility with stakeholders, and builds a culture of aspiration and mutual encouragement within the NEET community.

5.4.3 Organise annual gatherings, webinars, and networking events

Regular events such as alumni meetups, online webinars, or networking sessions help maintain long-term engagement with former participants and creates a sense of belonging to a wider community. These gatherings offer opportunities for peer learning, knowledge exchange, and collaboration on new initiatives. They also strengthen the feedback loop, allowing programme designers to gather insights for improvement while celebrating progress and reinforcing the collective impact of the Learning Model.

5.4.4 Foster a community of practice among trainers-mentors and local stakeholders

It could encourage continuous professional development and collaboration among those involved in delivering the Learning Model. By bringing together trainers, mentors, youth workers, representatives by the business sector, the local authorities and the third sector, this network can share effective methodologies, address common challenges, and co-develop innovative solutions

tailored to the needs of NEETs. Such a structure also helps build trust and alignment among partners, ensuring that support remains consistent, informed, and responsive to evolving local realities.

To sustain long-term engagement and facilitate ongoing collaboration, digital platforms such as LinkedIn Groups, Discord servers, or dedicated alumni portals can serve as essential tools. These spaces enable alumni, mentors, and stakeholders to stay connected, exchange opportunities, and share updates in real time, regardless of geography. Integrating such platforms into the Learning Model enhances continuity, peer support, and the overall resilience of the community.

5.6. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND CSR INVOLVEMENT

To ensure that future initiatives inspired by the Learning Model remain sustainable, it is essential to secure ongoing funding and institutional backing that build on the project's legacy and results.

Key recommendations include:

5.6.1 Leveraging EU funding schemes such as Erasmus+, EYE, and ESF+

They can significantly enhance the sustainability and scalability of youth-focused initiatives. As outlined in Section 3, aligning these programmes with local employment and youth engagement strategies helps build stronger partnerships, access diverse resources, and ensure the long-term impact of the Learning Model.

5.6.2 Engaging local authorities to embed the model in public policy

Engaging local authorities is key to embedding the Learning Model into long-term public policy and ensuring structural support. When municipalities and regional governments recognise the value of such initiatives, they can allocate resources, integrate them into local development plans, and promote them through public-private partnerships.

5.6.3 Approaching companies through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) frameworks to support training, mentoring, or placement activities

Large companies with active CSR policies and [ESG reporting obligations](#) present significant opportunities for collaboration. By aligning training, mentoring, or placement activities with their social impact objectives, particularly those related to inclusion, youth employment, and community engagement, organisations can attract private-sector support and resources. Framing such involvement as a meaningful contribution to their sustainability strategy enhances their brand reputation while reinforcing the Learning Model's reach and long-term viability.

5.6.4 Setting up regional multi-stakeholder platforms to co-finance activities

Establishing regional multi-stakeholder platforms can build a spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility in supporting youth employability. By bringing together public authorities, private sector actors, and third sector organisations, these platforms can enable collective financing mechanisms that pool resources and align efforts. Such collaborative structures not only reduce individual financial burden but also ensure that the Learning Model reflects local priorities and enjoys broader ownership, laying the groundwork for long-term impact and systemic change.

To ensure the long-term viability of initiatives based on the Learning Model, a diversified funding strategy is essential. Leveraging EU programmes, engaging local authorities, activating CSR frameworks, especially within large enterprises, and creating regional co-financing platforms can all contribute to a more sustainable ecosystem. In addition, exploring alternative sources such as crowdfunding or sponsorship campaigns can offer targeted support for specific actions or recognition schemes. A growing trend in this area is [civic crowdfunding](#) campaigns, which mobilise citizens and local stakeholders around projects aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), enhancing transparency, community ownership, and impact.

5.7 A ROADMAP FOR SCALABILITY AND REPLICABILITY

The long-term ambition is to scale the Learning Model across different regions and socio-economic contexts, ensuring adaptability to various work-related, administrative, and youth engagement environments. Just as the YouthPioneer initiative emerged from the combined experience of previous EU-funded projects (REBUILD, StartUp2, YOPEVA), future efforts for adaptation, scalability, and replicability should treat the YouthPioneer Learning Model not as an isolated tool but as a valuable component within broader, integrated strategies. It should serve as a catalyst for systemic innovation rather than a standalone intervention.

At its core, the model promotes a culture of cross-sector collaboration and social innovation among diverse stakeholders, forming a coherent ecosystem that supports NEETs' transition to employment and entrepreneurship. The benefits extend beyond the direct target group, contributing to local economic resilience, addressing skills shortages for businesses, and enhancing social cohesion. To enhance effectiveness and support continuous improvement, it is recommended to develop a roadmap including readiness assessment tools, clear scale-up guidelines, monitoring mechanisms, and transferable toolkits. Findings from pilot activities and stakeholder roundtables will offer valuable input to support mainstreaming and long-term policy integration.

5.8 CHECKLIST

- ☐ A plan for post-programme follow-up (alumni contact, referrals, tracking outcomes) has been established.
- ☐ Data on participant progress and employment/education outcomes has been collected for reporting and advocacy.
- ☐ Opportunities for scaling or replicating the model in other regions have been explored.
- ☐ Funding options (public, private, EU-level) have been mapped and pursued to support future cycles.
- ☐ Local labour market trends and youth needs have been reviewed before each programme cycle.
- ☐ Cultural and language differences have been considered when planning sessions and materials.

CONCLUSION

The YouthPioneer Model represents a practical response to Europe's persistent NEET challenge, combining work-based learning, structured mentoring, and project-based entrepreneurial education into a cohesive framework. Rather than treating youth disengagement as an individual deficit, this approach recognizes it as a systemic issue requiring coordinated action across multiple stakeholders.

The model's true potential lies in its scalability and adaptability: as more regions develop their capacity for multi-stakeholder collaboration, the approach can evolve from isolated projects to standard practice within national youth strategies. The evidence from earlier pilot implementations suggests the model works when implemented with sufficient commitment: young participants develop practical skills, professional confidence, and expanded social networks, completion rates improve when mentoring relationships are properly structured and maintained, employment outcomes increase when work-based learning placements connect to genuine career pathways rather than temporary positions.

This represents systemic change: moving from fragmented youth services toward integrated support systems that recognize the interconnected nature of economic development and social inclusion. Each successful implementation creates ripple effects, demonstrating to other regions that coordinated action can overcome persistent challenges.

Looking ahead, three developments could determine the model's lasting impact.

- First, integration with existing frameworks will provide institutional stability and expanded reach necessary for moving beyond project-based interventions.
- Second, corporate engagement has the potential to mature from traditional CSR initiatives into strategic workforce development partnerships, where businesses recognize youth integration as essential to their long-term competitiveness.
- Third, alumni networks could evolve into self-sustaining professional communities where former participants become mentors and advocates, supporting new cohorts while demonstrating ongoing value to employers and policymakers.

We hope that readers have found sufficient support in the YouthPioneer Model to feel confident in starting up their own initiative, or in continuing a process of integration and improvement within existing youth services, employment programmes, or educational structures.



Annex

TEMPLATES AND TOOLS



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ANNEX

ANNEX 1: TEMPLATE FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION STRATEGY

Objective: Define how public and private actors will collaborate to support NEETs in accessing WBL opportunities through YouthPioneer.

SECTION	DESCRIPTION
Shared Goals	<i>What are the shared goals of the public and private partners in the project? (E.g., increase NEET employability, create more WBL opportunities, ensure inclusive access)</i>
Public Partner Contributions	<i>What will public actors (local authorities, employment services) contribute? (E.g., funding, data, access to target groups, political support)</i>
Private Partner Contributions	<i>What will private actors (companies, employers, business networks) contribute? (E.g., WBL placements, mentoring, expertise on labour market needs)</i>
Joint Activities	<i>What concrete joint activities are planned? (roundtables, capacity building, project ideas contest, Job and Innovation Forum)</i>
Communication and Coordination	<i>How will the partners communicate and coordinate? (regular meetings, contact persons, progress updates)</i>
Sustainability	<i>How can the collaboration be sustained beyond the project? (integration into local employment strategies, long-term cooperation agreements)</i>

ANNEX 2: TEMPLATE FOR STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Stakeholder	Type of Actor	Current Involvement	Interest/Expectations	Potential Contribution	Level of Involvement ¹⁰	Contact Person	Notes
<i>e.g. Local Employment Service</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Social inclusion of NEETs, reducing unemployment</i>	<i>Funding, participant identification, policy alignment</i>	<i>Core</i>	<i>[Name]</i>	<i>Already engaged in pilot phase</i>
<i>e.g. Chamber of Commerce</i>	<i>Private / Business Network</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Skilled workforce development</i>	<i>Employer mobilisation, advocacy, placement offers</i>	<i>Influencer</i>	<i>[Name]</i>	<i>Needs further engagement</i>
<i>e.g. NGO working with disadvantaged youth</i>	<i>NGO / Third sector</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Youth empowerment, inclusion</i>	<i>Outreach to NEETs, mentoring support</i>	<i>Delivery</i>	<i>[Name]</i>	<i>Potential new partner</i>

¹⁰ Core / Delivery / Support / Influencer

ANNEX 3: TOOLS AND ACTIVITIES FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

The success of any networking event lies in providing participants with plenty of opportunities to interact with one another. If interactions are not well-facilitated, the event can quickly lose momentum.

A. BREAK THE ICE WITH CONVERSATION STARTERS

Start with simple icebreakers that encourage people to interact early on. This could include short introductions, fun activities, or quick conversations about topics of interest.

ICEBREAKER: QUICK QUESTIONS

A simple way to encourage early interaction is to begin with light conversation starter questions. These questions go beyond typical small talk and give participants an opportunity to share something personal or fun in a relaxed way. This helps break the ice, creates a friendly group atmosphere, and makes it easier for NEETs to engage with others during the rest of the session.:

- **If you were invisible for a day, what would you do?** *A light-hearted question that often brings laughter, helping participants feel at ease.*
- **What's the strangest thing you've ever done at work?** *This question sparks relatable and humorous stories, encouraging participants to share their experiences.*
- **What's the most unusual thing you've ever eaten?** *This can lead to amusing anecdotes and keeps the atmosphere light and engaging.*
- **What's the funniest mistake you've made at work?** *A question that invites participants to bond over shared human errors, helping break down barriers.*
- **What's your dream job?** *This allows participants to express their aspirations and offers insight into their career interests.*
- **What's in your bag?** *A playful and unexpected question that often reveals fun facts about participants' everyday lives.*
- **What's your superpower?** *Encourages participants to reflect on their strengths and unique qualities, helping them to build confidence.*

ICEBREAKER: COMMON GROUND

Another ice breaker is to play "Common Ground": Pair participants with someone they don't know. Ask them to find three things they have in common (e.g., hobbies, favourite foods, common struggles). Afterwards, each pair shares their findings with the larger group.

This activity helps NEETs find shared experiences, creating a sense of connection within the group. It encourages active listening and highlights participants' similarities rather than differences, encouraging a sense of unity. It can also serve as a natural conversation starter for further interaction.

ICEBREAKER: ONE TRUTH, TWO LIES

Another effective icebreaker, "One Truth, Two Lies": Participants share one truth and two lies about themselves. Instead of simply responding with yes or no, they can use predetermined hand gestures or body postures to signal which is the truth and which are the lies, making the activity more interactive and engaging.

B. "WHAT'S MY ROLE?" CAREER SIMULATION ACTIVITY

Active participation can also be encouraged during the breakout discussion or group activities. It gives them direct access to professionals and allows them to explore different industries in an informal yet structured way. These sessions should encourage engagement, learning, and clarifying career paths, helping NEETs discover fields they might be interested in while gaining insight into the skills and opportunities in those sectors.

In the career simulation activity, the NEETs get to experience a role or task that might be typical in a certain sector, providing them with practical insight into what the job involves. Professionals set up a mock task or challenge related to their sector. For example, a graphic designer could show how to create a basic logo design, or a healthcare worker could demonstrate basic first-aid techniques. NEETs participate in the task, either individually or in small groups, with guidance from professionals. After the task, the professional provides feedback, shares how it ties into the day-to-day work of the job, and explains the skills needed for that particular role. This helps the NEETs get a hands-on feel for the work involved in a sector, making it less abstract and more tangible. They can ask more informed questions about whether they would want to pursue this line of work, and in turn, professionals can assess whether NEETs show interest or aptitude for the sector.

C. CAREER PATHWAYS INFORMATION STALLS

If the types of sectors represented at the networking event don't allow for an active simulation, a more traditional approach to increasing engagement during the breakout discussion or group activity session is to set up dedicated stands or stations. Here, professionals can provide detailed information about different career pathways in their sector. These stands can have brochures, career maps, and interactive tools to help NEETs understand career progression.

Each stand focuses on a particular industry, offering both general information and specific career pathways (for example, from entry-level positions to senior roles). Industry professionals are available to answer questions about required qualifications, career growth opportunities, and practical steps for entering the sector. This helps NEETs interact in a low-pressure environment, gather resources, and ask specific questions about entry into the field.

D. JOB ROLE EXPLORATION PANEL

A straightforward format for the breakout discussion or group activity session is to organise a panel discussion where professionals from various sectors share their career journeys and experiences. NEETs can ask questions to the panel at the end of the discussion. While this approach is less interactive than simulation activities or information stalls, it is easier to organise and can still provide valuable insights for NEETs. Professionals from various industries (such as healthcare, technology, engineering, and business) are invited to speak about their roles, how they entered their field, and what career paths are available. The panel offers NEETs the chance to hear first-hand experiences and gain a realistic understanding of different sectors.

At the end of the panel, a Q&A session allows NEETs to ask questions about qualifications, ways to gain experience, and what day-to-day work in the sector looks like. This format is particularly useful when time, space, or staffing for more interactive activities is limited, and it still gives participants exposure to a range of industries and potential career pathways.

E. "FIND YOUR MATCH": MAKE MATCHMAKING EASIER FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

An informal networking or matchmaking session works best when it has some structure. This gives participants a clear starting point for conversation and can make it easier for them to engage, especially for young NEETs who may feel shy or unsure in such settings. The matchmaking session

uses a simple profile and colour-coding system to help NEETs and professionals quickly identify shared interests, skills, and opportunities, making networking more structured, intuitive, and confidence-building for all participants.

3. NEET PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

Each NEET fills out a questionnaire to provide information about their skills, interests, and career aspirations:

- **Skills:** Examples include technical skills and transversal skills like leadership, communication or creativity.
- **Interests:** This could cover sectors such as healthcare, IT, retail, creative arts, engineering, etc.
- **Career Aspirations:** Short- or long-term career goals, e.g., aspiring to work in management, a creative field, or customer service.
- **Current Experience:** Information on whether they have any previous work experience, internships, or projects.

4. PROFESSIONAL PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

Each professional fills out a separate questionnaire to share information about the sector they represent and the skills they are seeking:

- **Sector/Industry:** E.g., technology, retail, healthcare, education, etc.
- **Skills they are looking for:** Specific technical skills, customer service, teamwork, or problem-solving. This should also include transversal skills that apply across industries.
- **Entry-Level Roles or Opportunities Available:** Descriptions of the positions or opportunities available in their companies.
- **Career Growth Trajectories:** How individuals can grow within the sector or company, and what development opportunities exist.

5. DESIGNING THE PROFILE CARDS

Each NEET and professional will have a profile card with colour-coded categories, which makes it easier to identify potential matches quickly.

Colour for Industry Interests

- Blue: Technology
- Green: Healthcare
- Red: Retail and Hospitality
- Yellow: Creative Industries (Design, Media, Arts)
- Orange: Finance/Business

Colour for Experience Level

- Light Blue: Communication
- Light Green: Technical Skills (e.g., coding, data analysis)
- Purple: Leadership
- Pink: Problem-solving
- Yellow: Teamwork

Colour for Career Aspirations

- Light Blue: No experience
- Medium Blue: Volunteer or Informal Experience
- Dark Blue: Work Experience

Each profile card will have a brief description of the individual's experience, skills, sector, and the roles or skills they are looking for.

The colour coding makes it easier for NEETs to identify professionals they want to engage with and vice versa. This session is semi-structured, and participants can interact for as long as they wish, allowing for natural conversation and the chance to search for other potential matches.

The colour-coding system helps both NEETs and professionals identify matches quickly. It also ensures that the interactions are more focused on mutual interests and skills, which makes conversations feel more relevant and purposeful. This approach not only builds confidence but also helps NEETs feel more empowered as they engage with professionals. Furthermore, by considering transversal skills alongside industry-specific needs, the system ensures a well-rounded match based on both skills and potential. The whole process is designed to be intuitive, ensuring that everyone involved can easily navigate the matchmaking session and create valuable connections.

ANNEX 4: TEMPLATE ACTION PLAN

No.	Responsible Stakeholder(s)	Role or Commitment	Action Description	Frequency / Timeline	Expected Outcome	Method of Monitoring
1	Youth worker	Identify key local services, NGOs, and host organisation	Contact available partners and document potential roles in the programme	During programme setup; updated monthly	Clear overview of support network for referrals and partnerships	Stakeholder map approved by programme coordinator

ANNEX 5: INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

The Individual Development Plan is used to prepare the WBL experience of the NEETs and the individual roadmap. It consists of Background + 5 Sections.

Background	
Age	
Background <i>(short description, respecting participants' privacy, gender, educational or professional background, socio-economic background)</i>	
Mentor	

I. Personal interests and preferences	
<i>Write a summary here , in bullet points. Use questions below to guide the conversation and go in-depth.</i>	
What makes you feel “in your element”? Think of a moment you felt confident, useful, or proud - what were you doing?	
Do you have any hobbies that you enjoy particularly? If yes, tell me more about them. If not, let's talk about what activities make you feel good or give you energy, what would it be?	
What kinds of people or environments do you enjoy being around? (e.g. noisy, calm, helping others, hands-on work?)	
Was there a tough time you got through that taught you something about yourself?	
What do you wish you had the chance to try or learn more about?	
If you had the financial means to start a mini project or idea, what would you do?	
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	

II. Goals and aspirations	
Write a summary here, in bullet points. Use questions below to guide the conversation and go in-depth.	
Life and career aspirations What would you like to do in life? What kind of work or daily life would feel meaningful or satisfying to you in a few years? Who is someone you admire, and what is it about them that stands out to you? <i>Mentor tip: Listen for values, interests, or ambitions. Gently guide the young person to identify patterns, without rushing. Personal skills and knowledge may not match their interests.</i>	
Exploration areas (TOP 3) Are there any jobs, tasks, or skills you're curious about or would like to try? What kinds of work have caught your attention, even briefly? In which sector/field would you like to use your skills? <i>Mentor tip: Suggest ways to explore those ideas during the WBL (e.g., shadowing someone, trying a task, visiting an office). Focus on discovery rather than decisions.</i>	

III. Overview of current general skills	Confident / Unsure / Needs support
Independent life <i>(e.g., how independent they are, how much they know about daily responsibilities, etc.)</i>	
Workplace	

<i>(e.g., CV writing, workplace language)</i>	
Soft and communication <i>(e.g., teamwork, reliability, arriving on time, following instructions, etc.)</i>	
Digital <i>(e.g., can use a computer/phone, other gadgets, what kind of software they are familiar with, etc.)</i>	
Language <i>(language mastery, if they know multiple languages)</i>	
Others	

IV. Overview of sector-specific skills Sector of choice (from the TOP 3 or other): _____ <i>(if the youngster finds it hard to choose, multiple sectors can be explored using the same template)</i>	Confident / Unsure / Needs support
Attitudes and values related to the workplace <i>What values or attitudes do you share with this sector?</i>	
Knowledge about expectations <i>Do you know what is usually expected of someone when they start working in general and in this sector?</i> <i>Can you name any typical tasks or roles in this sector?</i>	
Abilities and qualifications needed <i>Do you know if this kind of work needs a diploma, license, or training?</i>	

Awareness of sector opportunities <i>Do you know what kinds of jobs are available in this field?</i>	
Previous experience in the sector <i>Have you ever tried something related: volunteering, helping, or learning about it?</i>	
Confidence and motivation <i>Would you be curious to explore this field during WBL or in future?</i> <i>Would you feel ready to apply for a job or internship in this field?</i>	

V. Skill development strategy				
Sector of choice (from the TOP 3 or other): _____ <i>(e.g. hospitality)</i>				
No.	Skill to work on	Steps in the short-term (1-3 months)	Steps in the long-term (4 - 9 months)	Support & resources needed
1	<i>e.g. communication with customers</i>	<i>roleplay with friends, watch short videos or movies, observe in commercial/open or hospitality environments</i>	<i>practice during work-based learning, make phone calls to ask questions</i>	<i>feedback, access to hospitality environments</i>
2	<i>e.g. waking up on time and punctuality</i>	<i>set a regular bedtime and morning routine, use phone alarm, track wake-up times, always plan to arrive early</i>	<i>wake up every day at the same hour, regardless of schedule, etc.</i>	<i>mentor check-in, alarm clock</i>
3	...	...	...	...

Plan prepared by:

Name and signature (Youngster):

Name and signature (Mentor):

Date: Click or tap to enter a date.

ANNEX 6: MENTORING LOG

Directions: Keep track of any formal meetings between the mentor/mentee using the mentor log. This mentor log will be collected at the end of the work-based learning period. Make as many copies as needed to reflect the mentor meetings. The log can be completed in written or typed form.

Mentor: _____ **Mentee:** _____

Date	Type of meeting (check-in, problem-solving, joint reflection, etc.)	Duration (min)	Key topics discussed	Next steps or follow-up actions
Date of next meeting:				
Date of next meeting:				

ANNEX 7: MENTEE EVALUATION FORM

Please provide information and insights regarding the WBL experience by indicating a rating value for the following questions related to the past week's activities and the nature of the mentoring process.

Mentor: _____

Mentee: _____

Company/organisation: _____

Questions	Strongly disagree-1	Disagree-2	Neutral-3	Agree-4	Strongly agree-5
The mentee was accessible and available					
The mentee communicated regularly with me					
The mentee contacted me regularly is there was a need to improve his/her WBL performance					
The mentee demonstrated a reasonable interest/concern towards me in my quest to offer assistance					
My mentee's behaviour and attitude were generally professional and courteous					
My mentee learned at least one important lesson about the job placement and the work environment					
I recommend my mentee for future mentoring programmes					
Overall, my mentee participated in most mentoring activities					
I anticipate an extended future relationship with my mentee					

ANNEX 8: MENTEE SATISFACTION FORM

Instructions:

Please rate the following statements based on your experience during the programme.

Section 1

Please indicate for each of the 8 statements which is closest to how you have been feeling during the WBL experience

	Strongly disagree-1	Disagree-2	Neutral-3	Agree-4	Strongly agree-5
... I have felt cheerful and in good spirits					
... I have felt calm and relaxed					
... I have felt active and vigorous					
.. I woke up feeling fresh and rested					
... my daily life has been filled with things that interest me					
...I have felt a sense of purpose					
...I have felt more confident about my future					
...I have felt more motivated to pursue my goals					

Section 2

Scale:

① = Strongly Disagree ② = Disagree ③ = Neutral ④ = Agree ⑤ = Strongly Agree

#	Statement	Circle One
1	The programme helped me develop important soft skills.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2	I feel more confident about my future career or education path.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3	The sessions were engaging and clearly delivered.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4	I had enough support from facilitators and/or mentors.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
5	The Work-Based Learning (WBL) experience was valuable.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
6	I understood the structure and purpose of the project activities.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
7	I felt part of a team or community during the programme.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
8	I had the opportunity to express my ideas and take initiative.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
9	I learned useful digital and communication tools.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
10	I feel more aware of employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
11	I discovered or accessed new networking or collaboration opportunities.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
12	I would recommend this programme to others.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Section 3

Please answer the following questions in your own words.

1. What is one important skill or insight you gained from the programme?

2. Which part of the programme was most meaningful or impactful for you, and why?

3. What new opportunities (e.g. job, training, collaboration) do you feel more prepared to pursue after this programme?

4. Did you make any useful connections or feel part of a new network during the programme?

5. What could we improve in future versions of the programme?

6. Do you feel more prepared to work, study, or start your own project after this experience? Why or why not?

Thank you for sharing your feedback!

Your reflections are important to us and will help shape the future of the YouthPioneer programme.



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