

Case Study: Helping students transition from education to employment opportunities with Skills for Prosperity Mexico



Background

In an increasingly competitive and dynamic world of work, young people need the opportunity to build the right skills that will make them work-ready and confident to enter employment.

The Skills for Prosperity Programme, a UK aid-funded programme that supported education and skills development to accelerate inclusive growth and reduce poverty in 9 developing countries, including Mexico, designed a strategy of 5 interventions to achieve a skills ecosystem transformation in the country.

Against that backdrop, People1st International was commissioned by Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), the company appointed to operate the programme in Mexico, to design and implement a strategy for Intervention No. 4, titled “Helping Students Transition from Education-to-Employment Opportunities”, with the goal of building capacity of (TVET) and higher education (HE) institutions to strengthen skills-based internship programmes and other forms of work-based (WBL) learning.

Project Aim

To design and implement a WBL and Job Placement Learning strategy for four leading HE and TVET institutions in Mexico: The Technological University of Chihuahua (UTCH, as abbreviated in Spanish) the National Autonomous University of Chihuahua (UACH, as abbreviated in Spanish), the Technical University of Central Valleys of Oaxaca (UTVCO, as abbreviated in Spanish), and the High Technology Training Centre in Chihuahua.

This was undertaken through the development of tailor-made action plans, toolkits and training interventions aimed at strengthening and improving their existing WBL platforms and employer engagement strategies, expanding their offer of job placement services, and advancing their gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) agendas.

Outcomes

- Tailored research and analysis diagnostic tools to assess the status of existing WBL and job placement services, employer engagement and outreach capabilities at each institution, applied through focus groups, one-to-one meetings, and online surveys.
- Personalized action plans for each institution to further enhance the experiences of students and employers engaging in work placements (with a strong GESI focus), based on a SWOT analysis of the results of the aforementioned research and analysis, including workshops on:
 - Building upon existing WBL practices to enhance the experience for students
 - Developing WBL projects
 - Employer engagement to increase WBL opportunities for students, including WBL projects in the COVID reality, capacity-building for employers and engaging employers in GESI
 - Data processing for WBL, including data collection and analysis and selecting, using and presenting data.
 - GESI for WBL
- Tailored toolkits for both student, employer, and lecturer audiences on how to plan, prepare, carry out and evaluate work placements, providing practical checklists, best practices, and templates to make the result more impactful for all stakeholders involved.
- A guide on GESI best practices to champion gender equality and social inclusion in the workplace, including specialist modules for employers on how to make recruitment and selection process more inclusive for both student placements and prospective employees.
- Customised workshop sessions at each institution to train student and employers on the use of the toolkits.
- Over 30 faculty and outreach staff involved in the process of developing the actions plans.
- Over 400 students engaged in training sessions, focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and pre-employment soft skills training sessions.
- Due to the positive feedback from participants on the toolkit and workshops, the UACH confirmed that the toolkit will officially become a part of their work placement process.

Feedback from partners

"As a partner, People 1st International provided us with scalable solutions based on international best practices that responded to some of the most pressing challenges in the Mexican TVET system. Their team integrated high-skilled professionals with both the technical knowledge and the necessary sensitivity to understand local needs and ensure our interventions were relevant to the different contexts where Skills for Prosperity operated. It was a pleasure collaborating with Brenda, Eddie, Jane, and Jayne to support TVET institutions in their journey to provide students with a better future".

Elisa Lavore, Pillar Lead, Skills for Prosperity Mexico

"Having the guidance and support of People 1st International during each step of the process helped us come together as a team and reflect on our work, particularly on the importance of providing assistance to our student community before and during their work placements, as well as to the employers who host them. Thanks to this guidance and support, we were able to witness the birth of the long-awaited "UTVCO Internship Handbooks", which today are a fundamental piece of guidance for students, academic tutors, and employers, thus strengthening academic and professional performance in a real-life work environment".

Dulce Martínez, Outreach Director, Universidad Tecnológica de los Valles Centrales de Oaxaca (UTVCO)

"By working in collaboration with People 1st International and the Skills for Prosperity Programme, we were able to embed the work-based learning toolkit for placements, and to disseminate it amongst students, department heads and academic advisors. Their help and support were not only tailored to our needs, but also professional and goal oriented. We appreciate Edward's support, attention, and willingness to make the handbooks become a reality and, ultimately, an indispensable tool for students and employers involved in placements".

Lilia Rosa Avila Melendez, Outreach Department Head, Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua

"Working with People 1st International was very rewarding. Their knowledge of the subject and, above all else, their professionalism and attitude were inspiring. Working with Edward, as well as with the rest of the team, motivated me to replicate the contents with the same vocation and was thus able to provide young university students the necessary tools to secure a better position in the workplace. I hope to be able to leave a mark on them, just as People 1st left a mark on me. All my thanks and admiration to everyone."

Tatiana Ponce de Leon Mendoza, Unit Head, University Consulting Center, Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua

Lecturer and Student feedback

A survey was administered to professors after the design of the toolkit was completed and the training sessions had been delivered, in order to assess their level of satisfaction. Out of a total of 38 responses from UACH and UTVCO, 37 lecturers claimed to be "entirely satisfied" or "satisfied" with the results. Similarly, a survey was administered to students that participated in the pilot group to launch the WBL toolkit. Out of 43 responses from UACH and UTVCO, all claimed to be either "entirely satisfied" or "satisfied" with the process.

"It is a very ambitious project of great benefit to the university community"

UACH Professor

"The integration of all the topics in the handbooks allows for greater clarity on the process"

UTVCO Professor

"I really liked that the trainers addressed gender equality, inclusion, violence and bullying"

UTVCO Student

"Trainers gave us a full idea of how to undertake placements and what they consist of"

UACH Student

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