



An innovative initiative of SYNTRA Flanders in the field of VET: Entrepreneurship, Competencies, and Ethical Trading

Context

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Flanders encompasses any educational or training programme that leads directly to the labour market. VET programmes, which typically involve practical training, are primarily designed to equip people with knowledge, skills and competencies that are directly employable in the labour market. VET programmes are provided by educational institutions (schools for secondary education, centres for adult education and university colleges) and two public agencies: SYNTRA Vlaanderen, the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training and VDAB, the Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Service.

Belgium has adopted a formal stance on apprenticeship training, delivered by a network of training centres, which also deliver entrepreneurship training opportunities. Apprenticeship programmes are open to pupils over the age of 15 as part of their compulsory education, young people over 18, and self-employed workers and jobseekers (with no age limitations). As a general rule, 80% of training takes place within companies. The main objective of the apprenticeship programmes is to teach young people a trade or occupation that will lead to a job.

An increasing number of young people in Flanders aged over 18 are continuing education (either part-time or full-time). This is in common with the European trend to remain in education; due in part to pressures from companies and family to gain as many formal qualifications as they can. Young people on Apprenticeship Programmes are paid a fee for the practical work they do and can also attain an educational qualification (the 'Diploma secundair onderwijs') if they attend in total seven years of general knowledge courses (including prior education to the Apprenticeship Programme) as well as the practical work.

The Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme Partners

SYNTRA Flanders works in the policy areas of education, work and social economy; with the mission "to stimulate more and better entrepreneurship". SYNTRA Flanders collaborates with several entrepreneurial education and training providers in Flanders, in particular with the five regional SYNTRA Training Centres; the second Jieha! programme partner.

The SYNTRA Training Centres deliver apprenticeship programmes for young people aged 15 to 25. Apprenticeship trainees gain practical experience in a work environment (four days a week) under the guidance of a tutor-supervisor; and attend classes, including General Knowledge modules, at one of the Training Centres (one day a week) which complement the practical work experience.

“The step from school to working life is often difficult. Through the Apprenticeship Programme we prepare the students as well as possible for life as an employee or entrepreneur. Through spending four days a week with a company or business they gain professional skills and at the same time learn the tricks of the trade. Through this system of learning and working, young people can get a job as well as a diploma”.
SYNTRA Flanders Trainer

Vlajo, the third partner, is a member organisation of the Young Enterprise network JA-YE; who are key players in entrepreneurial training across Europe. Through bridging the gap between education and business, Vlajo works to encourage children and young people to become familiar with and motivated to engage in entrepreneurship.

Further detail is given about each of the three partner organisations at the end of this paper.

The Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme

Jieha! is Vlajo’s Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme; providing the opportunity to plan, develop and deliver a business enterprise. All profits from the enterprise are donated to a charity, chosen by the young people involved. Until recently the Programme has been delivered for ten years to pupils aged 14 to 16 years old in schools over a ten to eighteen week timeframe. Delivery of the Jieha! in fulltime education is supported by Coaches who work for Vlajo (Flemish Young Enterprises). The Coaches help pupils and their teachers to develop and deliver the start-up businesses through providing a start-up loan, and ongoing support. The profits from the young people’s enterprises are donated to a charity of their choice. Through this programme young people have the opportunity to move from theory to practice. They gain knowledge about how to start and run a small business, have fun doing so, and experience the feelings of success and achievement.



SYNTRA Flanders and the SYNTRA Training Centres were looking for new opportunities through which to enable young people on the Apprenticeship Programme to develop their functional skills and competencies. This is in addition to the time they spend working in a SME four days a week.

The Jieha! Programme offered a ready approach, which has been frequently tried and tested with a younger age-group in fulltime education. The approach seemed to fit with the SYNTRA Flanders and SYNTRA Training Centre's mission, and also fitted with Flemish educational legislation and cross-curricular attainments (which are obligatory for the educational qualification of the Ministry of Education).

SYNTRA Flanders and the Training Centres were looking to build competencies in a range of areas within the General Knowledge classroom training. The General Knowledge Programme runs throughout the Apprenticeship Programme and is similar in content to personal development programmes or 'Learning for Life and Work' courses. The eight competencies that are obligatory for young people in Year 7 (AV7) to study in order to achieve the educational qualification are

- critical thinking
- self-organisation and planning
- a sense of initiative
- respect for themselves and others
- creativity
- empathy
- independent living
- learning to work together: team-work and group approaches to projects.

A further aim when delivering programmes highlighting these eight competencies are sustainable development, social relational development and ethical values within young people's development. The Jieha! programme meets those goals more appropriately than the existing didactical material regulated by SYNTRA Flanders which were uniformly used by the SYNTRA Training Centres prior to the Jieha! programme.

SYNTRA Flanders and the SYNTRA Training Centres have a longstanding partnership with Vlajo across the wider entrepreneurial educational landscape (a representative of SYNTRA Flanders sits on the Vlajo Board of Directors). Vlajo were approached and invited to consider adapting

the Jieha! Programme such that it would be relevant to young people aged 17 and over who are attending Apprenticeship Programmes. A further challenge with the delivery of the Jieha! programme within the SYNTRA Training Centres was that rather than working with a group of young people who spend time together in class five days a week, those on the Apprenticeship programme meet much less frequently – and meet in newly composed class groups - and as a consequence many do not necessarily have a similar high ‘sense of belonging’.

For SYNTRA Flanders and the Training Centres the Jieha! Programme appeared to offer a competency based approach that the organisations were looking for; and for Vlajo this opportunity offered the chance to work within a part-time VET environment and a different target group.

This was an innovative approach for SYNTRA Flanders and the Training Centres, with greater emphasis being placed on a number of competencies within the General Knowledge Programme. The Jieha! programme differed from the previous Training Centre enterprise programme (when young people started up a small enterprise from which they could put any profit into shares)- as the new small enterprise product is chosen by the young people working in small groups with guidance from the Training Centre trainers and Vlajo Dream Coaches. Furthermore the over-riding ethos is that all profits go to a charity chosen by the group of young people who have developed and run the enterprise.

“We especially want to encourage our apprentices in creative and entrepreneurial thinking and trigger them to want to start a small businesses. Through the Jieha! programme they are working out an idea and there is also attention given to ethical consciousness”.

SYNTRA Training Centre Trainer

Planning and Adapting the *Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme*

It was decided that the *Ethical Trading Initiative Programme* would be delivered within the General Knowledge classes to young people in Year 7 of the General Knowledge Programme (who are aged 17 years and over). Participation in the Jieha! Programme for this group was compulsory at all five SYNTRA Training Centres.

Initially some of the trainers expressed concerns about the Programme as it has a very new approach, which they felt would demand more of themselves and also of the young people who were already working four days a week in SMEs across Flanders. Trainers were also less confident and more insecure about using the new Jieha! training materials and manual, that differ from the usual resources provided by SYNTRA Flanders.

Some trainers expressed concern about the low level of the financial tasks within Jieha! project for some class group and general concerns about the level of the manual given the experience of some of the young people (bearing in mind that the manual was prepared for a target group aged 14 to 16 years old; and the young people attending the Jieha! programme at the Training Centres were all 17 years or older). In response to trainer's worries about the emphasis on 'soft skills', it was explained that they could adapt the theoretical content to meet the needs of their class.

Prior to the pilot of the Jieha! programme the SYNTRA Training Centre trainers met with the regional Vlajo Dream Coaches. The primary aim of these meetings was to give the trainers the opportunity to go through and comment on the Jieha! training manual, which was provided for the trainers and the young people.

Delivery of the *Ethical Trading Initiative for Young People Programme*

The delivery of the first Jieha! programme in the SYNTRA Flanders Training Centres started in October 2013. In Year 7 the General Knowledge element of the Apprenticeship Programme runs for 152 hours, 52 hours were allocated for the delivery of the Jieha! programme; and an element of flexibility was built in for the Training Centres – with some choosing to deliver the Programme 4 hours a week whilst others delivered it over a longer period with two hours a week sessions. All initial Jieha Programmes were completed by June 2014; involving a total of 541 young people, ranging in age from 17 to 23.

The Vlajo Dream Coaches continued to meet with the trainers and were available for advice on an ongoing basis. They also worked with the young people, for example brainstorming projects and products, and informed them of Vlajo events where they could sell products and meet other young people participating in all of the Vlajo projects, not only JIEHA! In practice the class groups took up this opportunity, primarily because they are not easily able to spend as much time on the enterprise projects as students in fulltime education, as they are already working 4 days a week (and sometimes five days).

Within all classes the young people were expected to work together in small groups and agree on a regional or Fair Trade product to market and sell; and furthermore to agree on the charity to whom they would give the profits from their enterprise.

“As the Programme delivery took place both the trainers began to mention that this approach is much more active and flexible than the previous programme. The young people can choose the content and activity of their enterprise. This leads to greater ownership and forming a group with sense of belonging, between the young people and their trainers. Furthermore, the young people choose to remain in the system (rather than opting to leave before they have attained their qualification when they reach 18 years old, when they can finish compulsory education, because they have a job). We believe that the Jieha! programme has increased retention levels at the Training Centres.

SYNTRA Flanders Representative

A wide range of small enterprise projects were planned and put into practice; the young people were encouraged to source local and regional products; and to support charities that meant something to them. In theory and in practice this meant that the young people felt a greater ownership of the entire process and were highly motivated to make the enterprise successful. Four case studies are presented below.

“The Jieha! programme was a new approach for the trainers. However, despite initial hesitation from some they all felt it was a good programme and complementary to the normal enterprise learning approach. The new ethical approach is valuable. It provides the opportunity for the young people to rethink, and get a smile and thanks rather than making money”.

SYNTRA Flanders Representative

Home-made Pancakes

The young people agreed that they would prepare and sell home-made pancakes. The father of one of the group members is a farmer and the young people wanted to use local food products to prepare the pancakes. Furthermore, pancakes are a Flemish tradition, and the young people were confident before starting the venture that they would make a profit from this enterprise. The young people went to a local market and sold the home-made pancakes.

The group agreed that the money raised through the sale of the pancakes would go to Poverello¹, an organisation that supports people living in poverty. Poverello provides free meals for people on a daily basis and additional support such as clothes and money to go to doctor, the organisation also provides shelter in cold weather. One of the young people had heard a presentation by Poverello when at school, which had a profound effect on him. He argued the case that this should be the charity that the group supported.

“The young people opted to use local produce, and also chose which charity they would give their profits to. During the enterprise task they had to have an eye for all the tasks performed within a company; from coming up with a logo, to the packaging of their products. Everything is covered, so teamwork is very important”.

SYNTRA Training Centre Trainer

Basic Drink: Fair Trade Coffee and Tea



Het Basic-Drink team!

A group in Antwerp province chose to market and sell Puro coffee and tea. This is a Fair Trade brand from South America. Fair Trade coffee and tea is grown by small farmers or plantation workers without artificial fertilisers or chemical agents; employing crop rotation methods and weeding by hand. Money from each bag of Puro coffee and tea sold goes towards buying and protecting areas of rainforest vital for biodiversity in coffee producing countries. The young people made a stand from which to sell the coffee; which they took to local market places.

The seven young people involved in the Basic Drink enterprise agreed that the profits made from selling the coffee would be given to the Collibri Foundation for education in Indonesia².

¹ www.poverello.be

² <http://www.collibrifoundation>

Every 50 euro made provided funding for a child in Indonesia to have a year's education. In total the group made enough profits so that two Indonesian children can have a year's education at school.

"During the brainstorming we decided to sell Fairtrade coffee and tea. We will donate the profits of the drinks we sell to Project Indonesia Dreamland: if we pay 50 euro of our profits to the charity, one Indonesian child can attend a year at school. We thought that was a nice thought. Training is important and should be possible for every child. We know we are not going to change the world, but we want to make our contribution. I'm glad we get that chance now. "

Young Person on a SYNTRA Training Centre Jieha! Programme

Ecological Beef-steaks

The group agreed that they would like to market and sell ecological beef-steak; that is meat that has come from cattle fed on non-chemical food products around Ghent. One of the young people came from an agricultural family background. In addition to some pre-knowledge about the product, which helped with the product packaging, the family links meant that the group could source the product relatively inexpensively. The steaks were sold at a local cultural centre in the Ghent community.

The group decided that the profits from the enterprise would be given to a local organisation, De Totem VZW³, which supports run-away children and provides a safe house for them to stay when they have problems. As in the previous case study, there was a personal experience that provided the argument to support this charity, as one of the group has a sister who was once supported by this organisation.

"In a company a lot has to happen. We have made a structured plan and distribution of tasks Each of us gives 110%".

Young Person on a SYNTRA Training Centre Jieha! Programme

Sponsored Walk on Zandvlietse Heath

³ <http://www.vzwdetotem.be/index.php>

Young people at the SYNTRA Flanders Training Centre in the city of Antwerp decided first and foremost that they wanted the profits from their business venture to support the Make a Wish Foundation⁴. This is an international organisation that allows a seriously-ill child and their family to spend precious time together. This decision was made as one of the young people gave a powerful argument to support Make a Wish as a result of strong personal feelings: her brother had cancer, and had had a wish granted by the Make a Wish charity before he died.

The young people organised a sponsored walk on the Zandvlietse Heath nature reserve in April. The seven young people (one female and six male) were sponsored by family and local businesses. In total they raised 310 euro profit, which was given to Make a Wish at a formal presentation in May, to which the local press were invited.

“The charity that the group decided to support had a very personal meaning for one of the young people. She was very strong and able to argue the case so that the rest of the group supported her proposal. She continued to play a leading role within the project; and it was evident that she learnt and used a ranger of different competencies throughout the process.”

SYNTRA Flanders Representative



The Impact of the Programme for Young People

⁴ <http://www.makeawish.be>

The trainers were asked to give feedback throughout the project (rather than wait until an end of programme evaluation – which they also completed online). One of the challenges was that some trainers and those responsible for the Apprenticeship Programme felt the young people would not be motivated to engage in the Jieha! programme; and were concerned that this would bring too much of a business approach to the General Knowledge Programme when the young people were already working four days a week. Opinion on this was divided, as some trainers felt that this approach could work well for the young people.

Similarly, some of the young people thought the Jieha! programme would take up a lot of energy and time, and unlike students in educational institutions they were already out with companies. In practice in fact the young people became very motivated; the trainers explained the process and rationale at the outset; and as the programme developed the young people could begin to experience entrepreneurial spirit for themselves and see the benefits of empathy.

“The young people on the Apprenticeship programme were keen to participate in the Jieha! experience. They learnt to cooperate, deliberate, and evaluate. Additionally, they gained knowledge about charities and learnt to make choices. They gained practical experience in how to run a small business, marketing knowledge, and how to sell a product. Alongside this they gained a better idea about entrepreneurship and skills to be able to start something up for themselves. I am convinced that they learnt a lot more by doing, rather than just listening to the theory of how marketing or accountancy is done. During this time they were the owners, rather than having a boss and experienced greater development of personal competencies.”

SYNTRA Flanders Representative

There were challenges within such an intensive programme delivered on a part-time basis that when young people miss one or two classes that they had a lot to catch up. However, in practice this provided the opportunity to bring another competency, that of working effectively as a team, into play; as the trainers reported that the group helped out when one of their members needed additional support. The young people also realised in practice that when a member of the team is missing that they have to divide the tasks that need to be done among those who are present in order to keep to the planned schedule.

The trainers reported in the end of programme evaluation that young people had increased their understanding of what it takes and how to start a small business and put into practice

all eight competencies (learning to work together, to be able to organise and plan own activities, critical thinking, creativity, empathy, respect, independent living (determination), and a sense of being able to use their own initiative). This result suggests that all the original targets and outcomes sought from the delivery of a new programme within the General Knowledge curriculum structure were met.

Vlajo carried out an evaluation of the Jieha! programme with the young people. On a scale of one to six (with 6 being fully met) the young people gave all eight competencies (listed in the paragraph above) a rating of four or above. The most significant gains were in determination (in terms of making and stick to choices and going for their goals), the ability to take the initiative, and working in a group.

The young people who participated in the Jieha! programme also reported that they had more knowledge about starting a business and increased confidence to start something in the future. They also gained increased understanding about ethical awareness; and enjoyed being part of a project that allowed them to give something to others in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the ethical focus of the Jieha! programme supports the empathy competency for young people.

Responding to EU VET Priorities

“Forging stronger links between innovation and VET will be among the priorities of the Latvian Presidency in 2015. They will focus on competitive, accessible and prestigious VET through strategic partnerships at national, regional and local level”⁵.

The Jieha! Programme was a didactical innovation for the SYNTRA training Centres. Evaluation of the programme showed that, having delivered Jieha! the trainers liked the pedagogical approach. The young people were motivated and engaged; they had the opportunity to put entrepreneurial theory and competencies into practice and actively. The Jieha! Programme links directly to EU VET generic skills and skills, and encourages entrepreneurial spirit.

EU VET wants to see innovation. The Jieha! Programme brings an ethical dimension into an entrepreneurial environment; which also adds to an understanding of the empathy competency. For the young people, participation in the programme is innovative as they have

⁵ Circular 2014_12 RPA/REF/EWS-SBO/mbe/RB(2014)02427 ReferNet Article: Innovation in VET

to take on the responsibility of being co-owners of an enterprise, which, although they are all working as apprentices in SMEs, is not the position in which they usually find themselves. There was also a need to be innovative in order to be able to promote and sell their product, and identify a niche market.

Having planned and developed the enterprise project, the young people come to terms with the fact that they are entering a competitive market situation. They want to make a profit in order to be able to support their chosen charity; and therefore they need to be competitive in the market place.

The delivery of the Jieha! programme at the SYNTRA Training Centres is accessible to the Year 7 young people who are completing the last year of the General Knowledge Programme. The Jieha! Programme is compulsory; and the young people attend the programme in a known and safe environment. The content is tailored by the Trainers to the level of the class. Throughout the programme the young people are supported and encouraged to take ownership and responsibility; to work together and to reach the targets set within a short timeframe.

The Jieha! Programme was delivered across the regional SYNTRA Training Centres through a strategic partnership between three organisations, who all have high levels of expertise in different perspectives across the field of VET and entrepreneurial education. The organisations have a longstanding strategic partnership across the wider landscape of VET and education. However, until now the strategic approach had not specifically focused on the Apprenticeship Programme. Delivery of the Jieha! has strengthened the strategic partnership, not least because of the operational delivery of the strategy.

Feedback from the evaluation of the Jieha! programme, completed by young people and trainers provided evidence that the young people had gained knowledge about and the confidence to use a range of competencies that can foster entrepreneurial spirit and add to their skills and capability in the workplace.

Young people acquired creative skills through the initial brainstorm at the start of the programme focusing on 'what are we going to do?' and 'which charity will we give the profits to?'. Each group of young people needed to agree on a product that would sell, identify how they could source local, regional or Fair Share resources, and agree a marketing strategy. The enterprise project had to be delivered within a short timeframe, and generate profits that the group would donate to a charity of their choice. This is an analytical creative process.

Prior to the pilot described in the article, the Jieha! programme was delivered to young people aged 14 to 16 years old in fulltime education. The pilot has shown that the Jieha! programme is very relevant to young people aged 18 years and over. There is the potential for Vlajo to adapt the Jieha! programme for an older target group. This article, written with significant input from those involved in the strategy to deliver the programme at the SYNTRA Training Centres, is contributing to the VET 'knowledge triangle'. Through sharing this model, and the impact for young people it offers opportunities for further development of ethical trading through the development of small enterprise projects, linking the theory of entrepreneurship to practical competencies.

Further information about the Jieha! programme partners

SYNTRA Flanders⁶ works in the policy areas of education, work and social economy. SYNTRA Flanders is the agency responsible for the co-ordination and financing of the training towards entrepreneurship in the Flemish Region for adults (short-term programmes) and young (long-term programmes). The SYNTRA Flanders mission (under the supervision of the Ministry of Work and Social Economy and the Ministry of Education) is "to stimulate more and better entrepreneurship". SYNTRA Flanders collaborates with several entrepreneurial education and training providers in Flanders, in particular with the SYNTRA Training Centres.

There are five regional Training Centres⁷, each providing training in four to six locations. The Training Centres are recognised, subsidised and monitored by SYNTRA Flanders. The SYNTRA Training Centres deliver apprenticeship programmes for young people aged 15 to 25. Apprenticeship trainees gain practical experience in a work environment (four days a week) under the guidance of a tutor-supervisor; and attend classes, including General Knowledge modules, at one of the Training Centres (one day a week) which complement the practical work experience. Young people receive a fee from their employer whilst attending the Apprenticeship Programme. The Apprenticeship Programmes lead to a (regulated) profession; and subject to the young people continuing with the classroom based training, a recognised education qualification, which is equivalent to the qualification gained by those in mainstream education (this is monitored by the Ministry of Education, and has come into being following the 2008 Flemish Decree on Learning and Working). The Training Centres also deliver

⁶ www.syntravlaanderen.be

⁷ www.leertijd.be



entrepreneurial training, specialist training for new companies and established entrepreneurs, and tailor-made training programmes for companies.

Vlajo⁸ is a member organisation of the Young Enterprise network JA-YE; who are key players in entrepreneurial training across Europe. JA-YE brings the public and private sectors together to provide young people in primary and secondary schools and early university with experiences that promote the skills, understanding and perspective that they will need to succeed in a global economy. Through bridging the gap between education and business, Vlajo works to encourage children and young people to become familiar with and motivated to engage in entrepreneurship. Through the values of 'dream, do, dare and perseverance' young people discover their own potential and develop their talents. Dream Coaches share their life experience with young people, promoting creativity, and aiming to help them achieve a dream (an idea). Vlajo programmes meet pedagogical and educational demands; and work through the principal of 'Training the Trainer'.

⁸ www.vlajo.org