



STEAM BO.SS

boosting soft skills

Evaluation with companies

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UNIMORE
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI
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Introduction

This national report summarises feedback collected through the STEAM Bo.SS company survey. The purpose of this survey was to gather companies' views on collaboration with VET institutions and on the role of soft skills in young people's growth paths - to collect feedback from local companies, evaluating their satisfaction with students trained by VET schools and the usefulness of collaboration with schools for their needs. It primarily investigates how businesses perceive the importance of soft skills, such as problem-solving and teamwork, in determining the employability of young professionals. The questionnaire asks industry members to identify the most effective cooperation models, including internships, professional mentoring, and the joint creation of academic curricula. Furthermore, it seeks to measure the success of the STEAM Boss project by determining if these partnerships have successfully bridged the gap between market demands and educational outcomes. By gathering this feedback, the initiative aims to refine future strategic collaborations that benefit both student development and corporate competitiveness.

1. Respondent Profile Overview

The survey collected responses from five diverse Estonian organizations representing a broad range of sectors:

- Installatsiooni Kompanii: Technology, information, and media.
- Tihemetsa Kala: Food industry.
- Baltic Workboats: Manufacturing.
- Ouman Estonia: Engineering.
- Segel Design OÜ: Design and Advertising.

Regarding their involvement in the STEAM BoSS project, one company was actively involved, while the remaining four participated occasionally. All respondents had prior experience collaborating with Vocational Education and Training (VET) centers, with one company doing so regularly and the others occasionally

2. Soft Skills and Market Needs

Respondents consider soft skills highly decisive for employability, with scores ranging from 3 to 4 on a 4-point scale. When identifying the most critical soft skills for their specific professional environments, the following were highlighted most frequently:

1. Teamwork: Identified by four out of five companies.
2. Problem Solving: Noted by organizations in technology and manufacturing.
3. Time Management: Cited by food and design sectors.
4. Decision Making: Highlighted by technology and engineering sectors.
5. Other mentioned skills include analytical thinking, leadership, creativity, and flexibility

3. Key Areas of Collaboration between companies and the VET system

When identifying types of collaboration with the greatest real impact, the most popular choices were:

1. Mentoring and coaching of young people (4 selections).
2. Practical projects based on real business challenges (2 selections).
3. Internships and work-based learning (2 selections).
4. Participation of professionals in training activities (2 selections).

Regarding the timing of cooperation, three companies believe it should start during initial training, while two prefer it to occur throughout the entire training program.

4. Impact of involvement in the STEAM BoSS Project

For the companies involved in the project, satisfaction levels were very high, with three companies awarding a maximum score of 4 and two awarding a 3.

Specific impacts included:

- Better understanding of VET Dynamics: All respondents strongly agreed (score of 4) that the project improved their understanding of school dynamics.

- **Soft Skills Development:** All five companies confirmed that participation contributed to the soft skills development of the young people involved.
- **Clarification of Critical Skills:** Every company strongly agreed (score of 4) that the collaboration helped clarify which soft skills are most critical for their industry.

5. Potential for Future Collaboration

All surveyed companies expressed a unanimous willingness ("Yes") to collaborate with VET schools in the future.

The most appropriate forms of future collaboration identified were:

- Participation in practical activities or real challenges (All 5 companies).
- Co-creation of training activities (2 companies).
- Internships and work-based learning (1 company).

Essential factors for effective collaboration cited by respondents include the integration of real industry challenges into learning, providing practical engagement opportunities, and the ability to adjust cooperation models to meet changing industry needs. One respondent noted that effective collaboration ensures companies gain access to future talent while schools ensure the relevance and employability of their students.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, gathered data indicates strong perceived relevance of soft skills and broad agreement that structured cooperation between VET providers and companies is beneficial.

- Prioritize collaboration formats that embed real business challenges into training (projects, mentoring, practitioner involvement, and work-based learning).
- Start cooperation early and maintain continuity across the training pathway, rather than limiting contact to end-stage internships only.
- Define clear roles, communication channels, and expectations upfront (school, company, and student responsibilities; timelines; deliverables).

- Keep administrative procedures lightweight to reduce barriers for companies.
- Use collaboration activities to explicitly practice and assess the most valued soft skills (teamwork, problem solving, communication, flexibility), not only technical outputs.

To better align with company needs, schools should focus on deep, practical integration with the corporate world rather than isolated academic training. According to the sources, the following strategies are most effective:

- **Integrate Real Industry Challenges:** One of the most essential factors for alignment is the integration of real industry challenges into learning activities. This ensures that the projects students work on are grounded in current market realities.
- **Adopt Collaborative Training Models:** Companies suggest that soft skills and professional readiness should result from a balanced combination of school and corporate training. This includes implementing internships, work-based learning, and project-based collaboration.
- **Involve Professionals in the Curriculum:** Schools can bridge the gap by inviting industry professionals to participate in training activities and deliver guest lectures. Furthermore, the co-creation of training content or activities between VET centers and companies ensures the curriculum remains relevant.
- **Early and Continuous Engagement:** Alignment is most effective when collaboration starts during initial training or continues throughout the entire training program, alternating between work experience and school.
- **Focus on Mentoring:** Providing mentoring and coaching for young people is identified as a high-impact type of collaboration that helps students transition successfully into the workforce.
- **Maintain Flexibility:** Schools must have the ability to adjust cooperation models to meet changing industry or educational needs quickly.

By fostering these active partnerships, schools can ensure the relevance and employability of their students while providing companies with access to future talent that possesses the specific soft skills—such as teamwork, problem solving, and leadership—required by the market.



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