



STEAM

BO.SS



boosting soft skills

Evaluation with Companies

National Report_ITALY | March 2026



Sapere utile



UNIMORE
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI
MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA



Saaremaa
Gümnaasium



EDUGEP



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	3
2.	COMPANY PROFILE	4
3.	SOFT SKILLS AND LABOUR MARKET NEEDS	5
4.	ROLE OF VET-COMPANY SYNERGY IN SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	6
5.	KEY AREAS AND TIMING OF COLLABORATION	8
6.	PERCEIVED IMPACT OF COLLABORATION	9
7.	POTENTIAL FOR FUTURE COLLABORATION	10
8.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	11
9.	APPENDIX	13

1. Introduction

This report aims to systematically analyse companies' perceptions of soft skills and the role of collaboration between the vocational education and training (VET) system and the production system.

In an economic context characterised by rapid changes, driven by technological innovation and the transformation of organisational models, companies today attach increasing importance to the acquisition of soft skills by young people: skills such as flexibility, problem solving, effective communication and proactivity are no longer considered secondary, but fundamental prerequisites for effective integration into the labour market. Understanding how companies interpret these needs and which skills they consider a priority is therefore an essential step in guiding training policies and improving the alignment between educational provision and professional demand.

At the same time, the survey aims to assess the role of collaboration between vocational training and businesses as a strategic lever for the development of soft skills. More and more businesses recognise the value of structured dialogue with the education system, which can integrate theoretical learning and practical activities, offering students concrete opportunities to experience real situations, interact with professionals and develop a problem-solving mindset. Analysing the level of consensus among companies on the importance of such synergies, together with their preferences regarding models of collaboration, makes it possible to outline evolutionary scenarios and identify effective forms of cooperation.

Finally, the report aims to explore the impact and potential of these collaborations on the employability of young people and, more generally, on territorial development. Solid cooperation between vocational training and the labour market can help reduce the gap between the skills required and those available, improve the processes of matching supply and demand, support the growth of businesses and facilitate the construction of more resilient and innovative territorial training ecosystems. Assessing how companies perceive these benefits, in light of their experience and future prospects, is a key element in guiding new intervention strategies.

In this context, the following chapters provide a progressive and integrated analysis of the profiles of the nine companies participating in the survey, their views on skills needs, the importance they attach to collaboration with training institutions, key areas of partnership and the potential for future joint initiatives.

2. Company Profile

The responses collected reveal a picture characterised by a certain variety in terms of the sectors represented. The participating organisations range from technology, information and media to manufacturing, logistics and creative sectors such as design and advertising. This distribution highlights the cross-cutting participation of very different economic entities, united by their interest in dialogue with the world of vocational training.

As regards direct involvement in the STEAM Bo.SS project, most companies were not involved in the specific project: only two companies participated more actively. Despite this, the willingness to collaborate and experiment with innovative forms of interaction between schools and businesses is high overall.

Another element that emerges clearly concerns the level of pre-existing collaboration with training institutions. All the companies involved in the survey boast relationships with VET institutes, some on a regular and consolidated basis, while others report occasional collaborations.

Overall, the picture that emerges is one of a diverse, open business community that is increasingly sensitive to the issue of training. The differences in the nature of the companies, their past collaboration with vocational training and their degree of direct involvement in projects are not an obstacle, but rather a resource: a starting point that confirms the importance of building flexible partnership models capable of adapting to the characteristics and needs of different production realities.

3. Soft skills and Labour Market Needs

The analysis of the data collected shows how much the companies surveyed recognise soft skills as a decisive factor in the employability of young people. When asked about the importance of these skills (question 5 – “*To what extent do you consider soft skills to be decisive for the employability of young people?*”), all participating organisations gave a very high score, concentrated between 3 and, above all, 4. This indicates an almost unanimous consensus: for companies, soft skills are now as strategic as technical skills. This perception confirms a well-known trend in the contemporary labour market, where flexibility, adaptability and problem solving are crucial for dealing with rapidly changing production contexts.

Moving on to the analysis of the skills considered most important, interesting differences emerge, but also a strong convergence on certain fundamental skills. From the data collected, the most frequently selected skill is “Flexibility”, indicated by 7 out of 9 companies. This is followed closely by “Proactivity”, mentioned 5 times, while in third place, with 3 mentions each, are “Problem Solving”, “Decision Making” and “Teamwork” (3 out of 9 companies). These are followed by skills such as “Time Management” (2), “Assertive Communication” (2) and ‘Analytical Thinking’ (2), while skills such as ‘Creativity’, ‘Emotional Intelligence’ and ‘Leadership’ appear less frequently.

This distribution reveals a clear trend: companies are primarily looking for candidates who are able to navigate dynamic environments with ease, work effectively within teams, and make decisions independently and knowledgeably. It is not surprising that “flexibility” tops the list: companies operate in markets subject to rapid technological and organisational change and need employees who are ready to recalibrate their working methods, roles, and responsibilities. Similarly, proactivity is interpreted as the ability to anticipate problems and needs, a key element in contexts where continuous innovation is a necessity rather than a choice.

4. Role of VET-Company synergy in soft skills development

The analysis of the responses reveals a very clear picture of the importance companies attach to collaboration with VET institutions for the development of young people's soft skills. Overall, the data collected show almost unanimous agreement: according to companies, synergy between the world of education and the labour market is not only useful but also essential for effectively preparing future workers.

Starting from the levels of agreement recorded in Question 7 (*"To what extent do you agree that active collaboration between VET schools and companies is essential for the effective development of soft skills in future workers?"*), an extremely positive assessment of the role of active collaboration emerges. Seven out of nine companies gave the maximum score of 4, and the remaining two companies still expressed strong agreement with a score of 3 on a scale of 1 to 4. This data reflects a shared perception among the companies surveyed: collaboration should not be sporadic or formal, but continuous, structured and geared towards the real improvement of young people's skills.

This concept is further confirmed by the results of Question 8, which asks who should be responsible for developing soft skills. In this case, there is complete agreement: all nine companies selected the option *"A balanced combination of school and corporate training"*. None indicated school and professional training as solely responsible, nor the company as the main actor. The development of soft skills must arise from the encounter between theory and practice, between protected spaces and competitive spaces, between formal learning and situated learning.

Question 9 further expands our understanding of the impact that ongoing collaboration between VET institutions and companies can generate (*"To what extent can ongoing collaboration between VET schools and companies contribute to:"*). The very high average scores confirm a widespread perception of effectiveness. For example, 8 out of 9 companies give a score of 4 to the contribution of collaboration in improving the alignment between training and market needs. This suggests that companies recognise cooperation as an essential channel for reducing the mismatch between what students learn and what companies require. Similarly, the development of relevant transferable skills also scores highly (with a prevalence of scores of 3 and 4), indicating that direct contact with the labour market enhances the effectiveness of training programmes.

The perceived impact on youth employability is also interesting: responses are distributed between scores of 3 and 4, with a total of 7 companies attributing a medium-high effect to collaboration. Even more

significant is the result relating to the reduction of the imbalance between talent supply and demand: here, 5 companies give the maximum score of 4, highlighting their belief that synergy also contributes to the quality of the match between companies and young professionals. Finally, the indicator relating to strengthening the competitiveness of companies shows high and consistent values (mainly 3 and 4), confirming that collaboration not only benefits students, but also companies in terms of innovation, the ability to attract talent and the management of growth processes.

Overall, these results outline a strongly shared vision: only through structured and continuous collaboration is it possible to train young workers who are truly prepared for the challenges of the contemporary professional context.

5. Key areas and timing of collaboration

The analysis of the responses to questions 10 and 11 highlights what companies consider to be the most effective forms of collaboration with VET institutions and at what stages of the training process they should take place. The results show a very clear trend: companies recognise that experiences that allow students to engage directly with the labour market have a greater impact.

The data from Question 10 (*“What types of collaboration do you consider to have the greatest real impact?”*) show that the most appreciated type of collaboration is represented by *“internships and work-based learning”*, cited by 8 companies. These are followed, with 5 mentions each, by *“practical projects based on real business challenges”* and the *“participation of professionals in training activities”*. These three categories alone cover most of the preferences expressed and describe a cooperative model centred on experiential learning: activities that bring students into contact with concrete problems, real production processes and experienced professionals. Another important element is the *“co-creation of training content or activities”*, selected by four companies, which indicates the growing interest of companies in actively contributing to the design of educational programmes. More specific activities, such as *“mentoring and coaching of young people”* or *“skills needs analysis”*, appear less frequently but help to complete the picture.

With regard to the timing of collaboration (Question 11 – *“In your opinion, at what stage should schools and companies start working together?”*), seven out of nine companies believe that collaboration should be active throughout the training programme, through a continuous alternation between training and work experience. Only two companies indicate that collaboration should begin in the initial phase of training. None suggest late involvement or involvement limited to the final stages of the programme. This data confirms a shared view: the development of soft skills requires prolonged and constant exposure to the professional context and cannot be relegated to final internships or episodic moments.

6. Perceived impact of collaboration

The responses provided by Atobit Srl and Copiaincolla, the two companies involved in the co-design of the STEAM Bo.SS pilot projects, paint an overall positive picture of the impact of participation in the project.

Both express a very high level of satisfaction with the collaborative experience (4/4), recognising that the project offered a stimulating and well-organised environment for dialogue between the labour market and VET system.

With regard to question 13 (*'Did collaboration in initiatives of this type contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of VET schools on the part of your company?'*), the responses show that the effect on understanding the dynamics of VET institutions varies: Copiaincolla reports a significant improvement (4/4), indicating that the project has clarified the processes and operating methods of training institutions, while Atobit expresses only partial understanding (2/4), suggesting the need for greater clarification of the logic of the system.

The perceived impact of the project on the development of young people's soft skills (question 14) is assessed positively by Copiaincolla, which observes direct benefits derived from practical activities and professional testimonials, while Atobit is unable to express an assessment (*"I don't know"*), probably due to a reduced opportunity to observe the outcomes on students or the absence of structured monitoring tools.

On the other hand, perceptions were more aligned when it came to clarifying fundamental soft skills, with both companies assigning a value of 3/4: the project helped to highlight which soft skills are actually central to their respective sectors, while leaving room for further exploration.

None of the other companies that completed the questionnaire took part in activities related to the STEAM Bo.SS project and, as a result, did not respond to this set of questions.

7. Potential for future collaboration

Analysis of the responses to Question 16 (*'Would your company be willing to collaborate with VET schools in the future?'*) highlights strong potential for further developing collaboration between companies and VET institutions. The vast majority of companies say they are willing to continue or start new joint activities: 7 out of 9 companies answer 'Yes', while the remaining 2 indicate 'Maybe', with no negative responses. This data highlights a climate of widespread openness and recognition of the value generated by the collaboration already experienced, both by the companies most actively involved and those with a more marginal role.

Question 17, concerning preferred formats for future collaboration, clearly outlines which models are considered most effective and a priority by companies. Analysis of the frequencies shows that the most popular format is internships and work-based learning, with 8 occurrences, confirming the value attributed to practical and immersive experiences. This is followed by two types with 4 occurrences each: professional sharing and testimonial sessions and the co-creation of training activities, both models that encourage direct and continuous exchange between professionals and students. There are also 2 occurrences for activities related to participation in real challenges or projects, considered useful for exposing students to concrete and stimulating situations.

Overall, the data indicate not only a strong willingness to collaborate, but also a preference for dynamic, concrete and co-designed approaches. Companies are not looking for casual or purely formal relationships: they want structured pathways that allow young people to experience real work, develop authentic soft skills and gradually approach professional contexts.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Analysis of the responses provided by companies highlights a strong convergence on one fundamental point: soft skills are now an essential element for the employability of young people and the competitiveness of businesses. Companies attach great importance to these skills (question 5), and this view is fully confirmed by the ranking of the soft skills considered most relevant (question 6), among which flexibility, proactivity and a series of key skills such as teamwork, problem solving and decision making stand out in a particularly significant way. These results highlight a clear need on the part of businesses: to recruit young people who are able to adapt, collaborate and act independently in constantly changing work environments.

At the same time, the results show just as clearly that the effective development of these skills requires structured and continuous synergy between the VET system and businesses. Companies place a very high value on active collaboration with VET schools (question 7) and unanimously agree that the development of soft skills must come from an integrated vocational training-business model (question 8). None of the organisations involved consider a unilateral approach to be sufficient: neither training alone nor work experience alone can guarantee the full development of the skills required by the market. The perceived impact of collaboration is confirmed by the high scores in question 9, which highlight concrete benefits in terms of alignment between training and employment needs, development of key skills, increased employability and improved business competitiveness.

Through their open responses to question 18, companies also expressed practical elements they consider essential for building effective partnerships. These include: the need for student-oriented activities to be useful, practical and truly applicable; the importance of constant alignment with everyday work, so that training remains relevant to the real needs of companies; the value of regular contact between companies and training institutions, which is essential for maintaining ongoing dialogue; and, finally, recognition of the practical nature of training courses, which is considered crucial for ensuring that young people receive concrete, professional training. These indications confirm that companies do not just want collaboration, but high-quality collaboration based on constant exchange, co-planning and practicality.

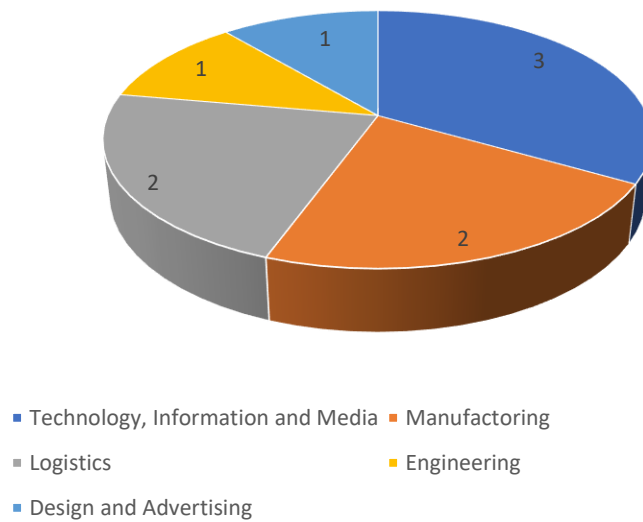
Added to this is the strong willingness to collaborate in the future (question 16), expressed by 7 out of 9 companies, and a clear preference for forms of collaboration that are operational and based on direct experience, such as internships, real projects, professional testimonials and co-designed activities (question 17).

In conclusion, the data confirm that investing in integrated and continuous pathways between vocational training and companies is essential to ensure that young people have skills that are truly marketable and that companies have professional profiles ready to face the complexity of the labour market. It is therefore recommended to expand opportunities for collaboration, intensify dialogue between the various actors and enhance practical experiences that facilitate the transformation of skills into concrete resources for the territory and the production system.

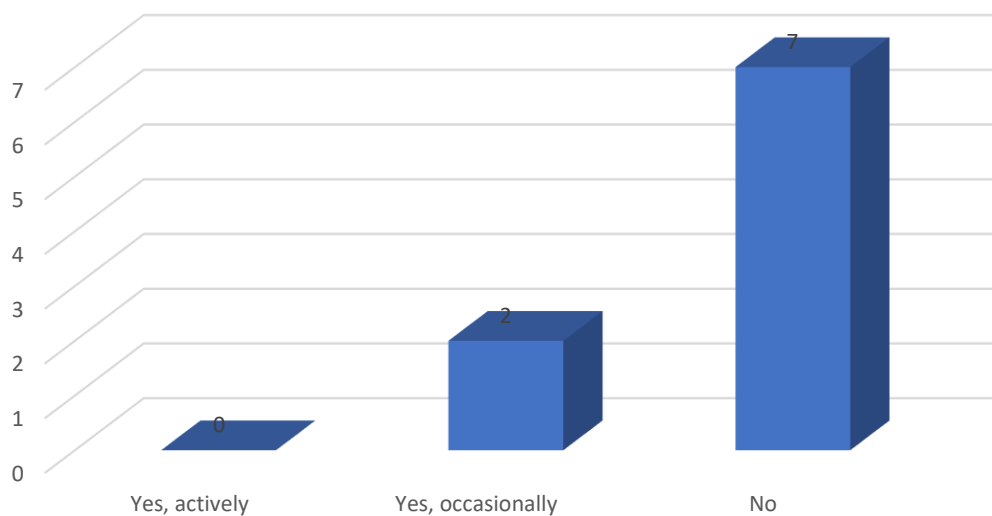
9. Appendix

- Survey questionnaire submitted:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe87V_4jeBnlM8SXmHu2VRZfrC0ihA_XD2JzznzY2-JQAWspw/viewform?usp=dialog
- Detailed tables and charts

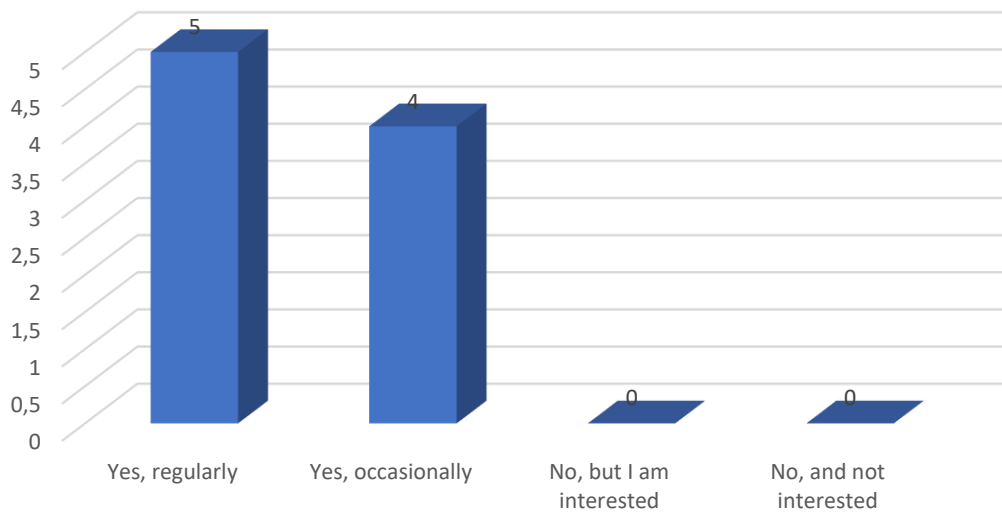
Question 2 - Sectors of the companies involved



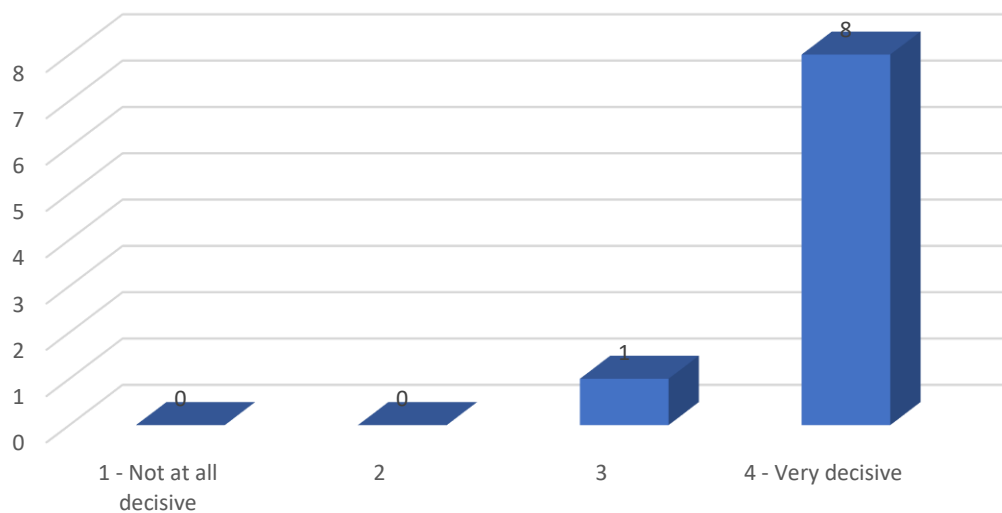
Question 3 - Was your company directly involved in the STEAM Boss project?



Question 4 - Regardless of the project, has your company ever collaborated with schools or VET centres?



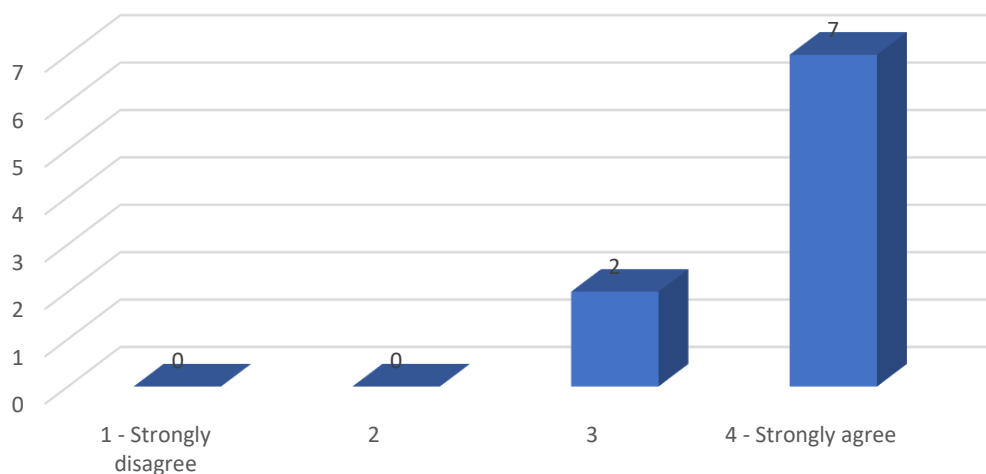
Question 5 - To what extent do you consider soft skills to be decisive for the employability of young people?



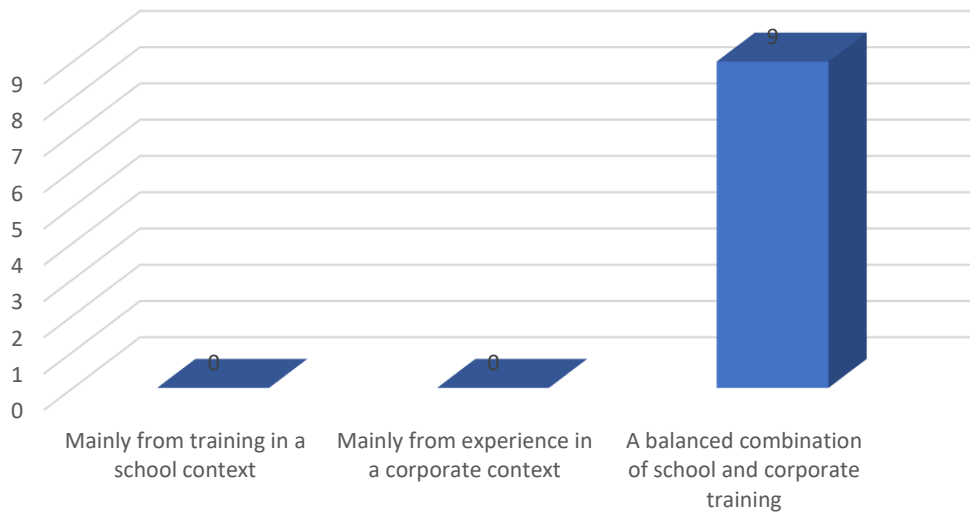
Question 6 - Which of the following soft skills do you consider most critical for professional performance in your company? (max. 3 options)



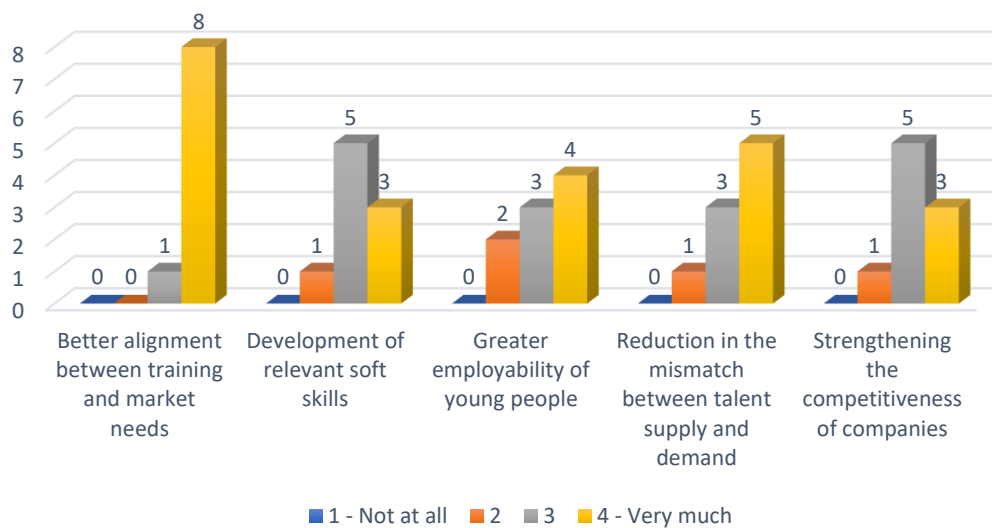
Question 7 - To what extent do you agree that active collaboration between VET schools and companies is essential for the effective development of soft skills in future workers?



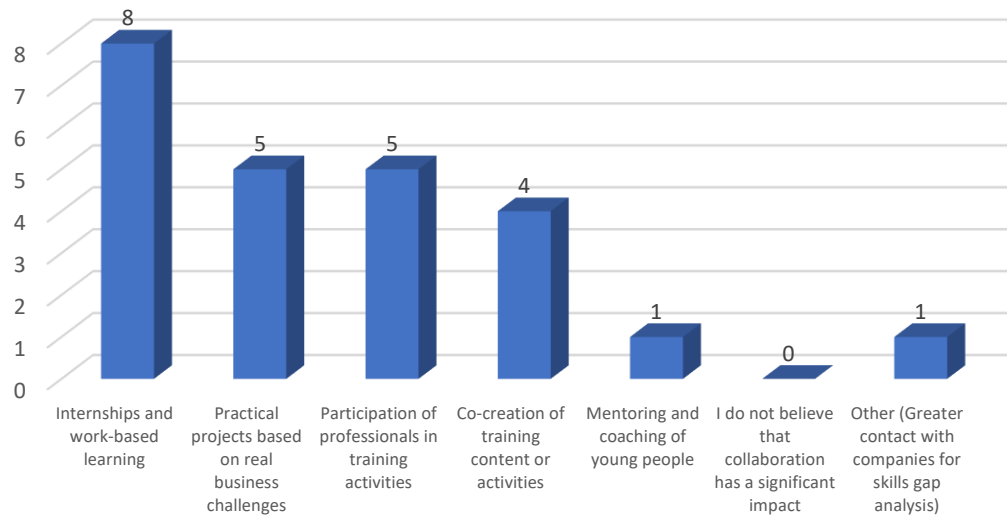
Question 8 - In your opinion, the development of soft skills should result from:



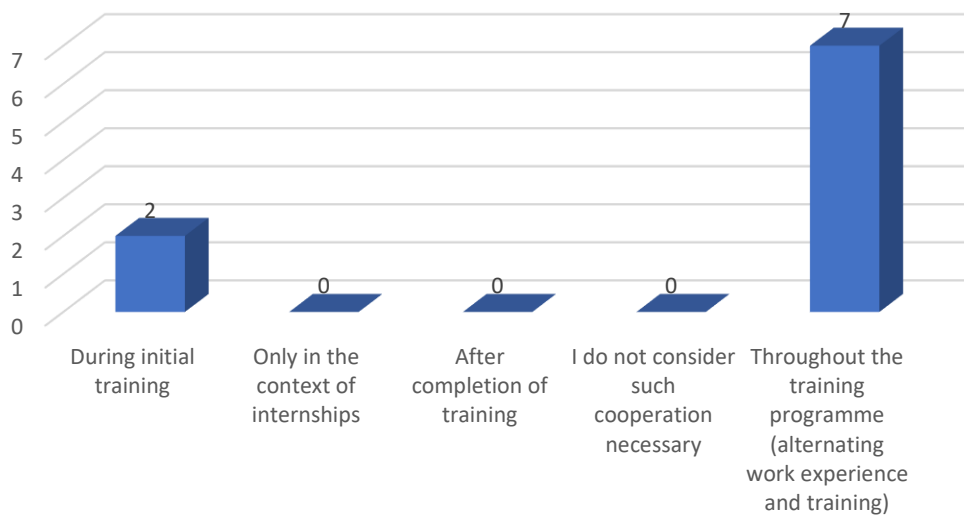
Question 9 - To what extent can ongoing collaboration between VET schools and companies contribute to:



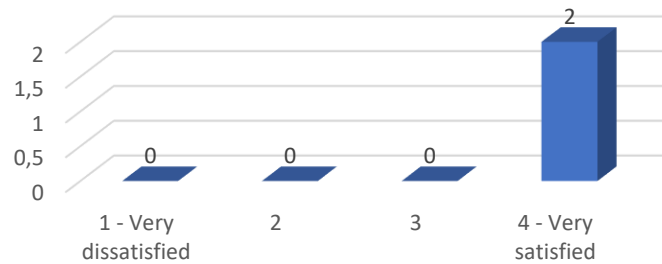
Question 10 - What types of collaboration do you consider to have the greatest real impact?
(maximum 3 options)



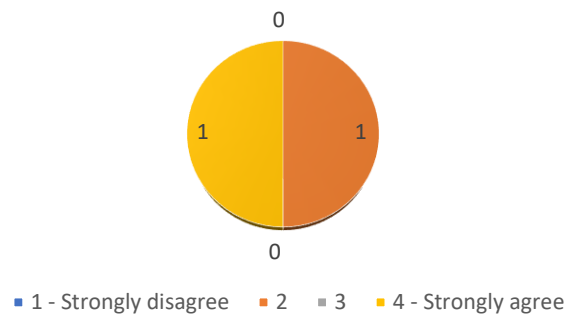
Question 11 - In your opinion, at what stage should schools and companies start working together?



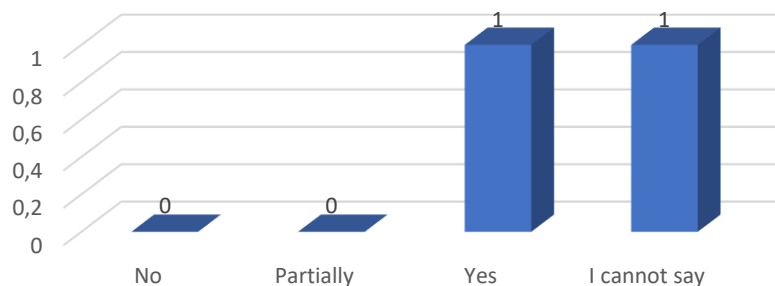
Question 12 - How satisfied is your company with the collaboration experience within the STEAM Bo.SS project?



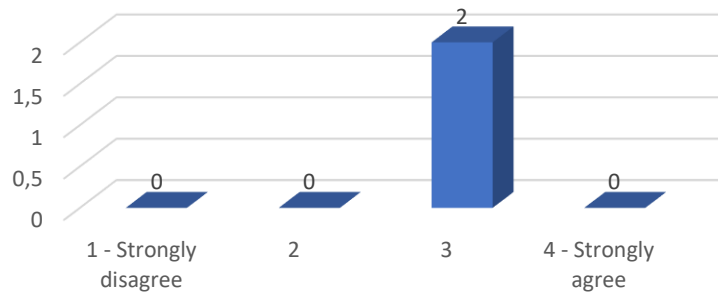
Question 13 - Did collaboration in initiatives of this type contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of VET schools on the part of your company?



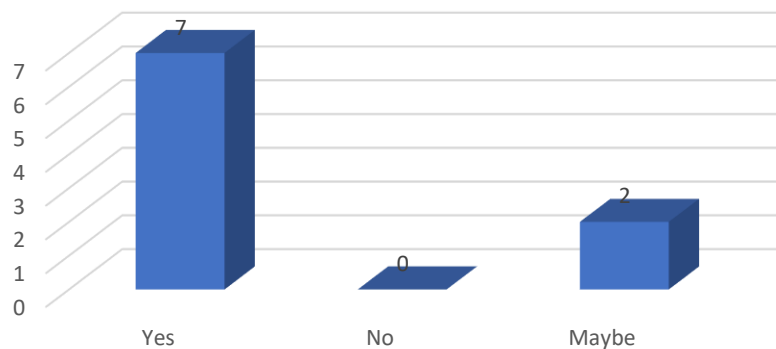
Question 14 - Did your participation in school-company collaboration initiatives contribute to the development of soft skills in the young people involved?



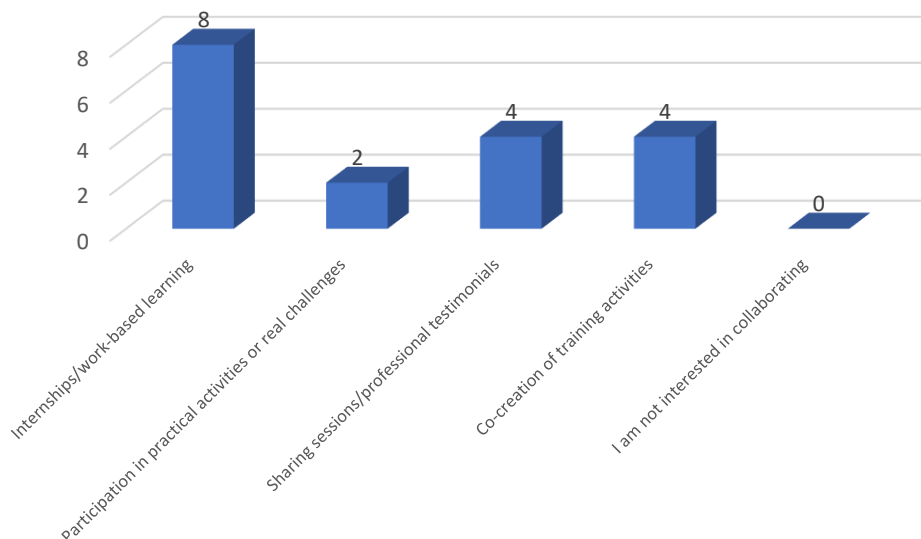
Question 15 - Has collaboration enabled your company to clarify which soft skills are most critical for your industry?



Question 16 - Would your company be willing to collaborate with VET schools in the future?



Question 17 - What type of collaboration do you consider most appropriate for your company?
(you can select more than one)



Question 18 - What factors do you consider essential for effective collaboration between VET schools and companies?

What is required of young people must be useful, practical and applicable.

Constant alignment with the needs of everyday work, so that training remains as closely linked to reality as possible.

regular contact between the company and the VET institution

practical sense of training courses



THE BOOST THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE



Sapere utile



UNIMORE
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI
MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA



Saaremaa
Gümnaasium



EDUGEP



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.