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MOBILITY RECOGNITION: REVISION OF APPROACHES AND PRACTICES FOR REGIONAL INTEGRATION



Kolejji AAB
CİLƏSİ, LİDERSHIP, SÜKSESİ



Palacký University
Olomouc





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Introduction

THIS VOLUME is a selection of papers presented at the Erasmus+ KA2, CBHE, strand 1 project, “Mobility recognition for integration/MORIN,” project no. 101128376, *Mobility recognition: Revision of approaches and practices for regional integration*, organised by the University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali”, Albania, on 10-11 July 2025, in Vlora, Albania. The conference aimed to bring together contributions that explored innovative pedagogical approaches to academic recognition of student mobility, focusing on learning outcomes. The idea was to ignite discussions that would revolve around the necessity of linking education with work, ensuring curriculum transparency, and improving recognition and study transfer procedures.

The papers herein included bring together diverse perspectives on academic recognition and student mobility in higher education, focusing on aspects such as inclusion, innovation, and regional cooperation within the Western Balkans and beyond. The collection addresses key challenges and opportunities in linking student mobility with employability, curriculum transparency, and policy frameworks that support equitable recognition of learning outcomes. They explore the intersection of inclusion and diversity in mobility recognition, highlighting structural inequalities and approaches towards more just validation systems. Policy frameworks, such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the Bologna Process, and Erasmus+, are examined for their role in fostering learner-centred, transparent, and flexible mobility practices.

Other studies in this collection emphasise the importance of cultural and language awareness, as well as pedagogical innovation, to enhance intercultural competence and student integration in international contexts. Findings and practices from regional projects like MORIN, particularly self-assessment tools that benchmark progress in mobility recognition and promote intra-regional academic exchange, are brought to attention. Case studies from Albania and other countries illustrate the challenges of apprenticeship schemes, curriculum compatibility, and

Internship and apprenticeship: Organisational features of apprenticeship schemes in some European countries and the role of higher education institutions. The case of Albania

Valbona NATHANAILI, Elona ZIREK (QYRA),
LOGOS University College, Albania

Abstract

This paper explores the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in supporting graduate employability through structured internship and apprenticeship models, with a focus on Albania. While internships and apprenticeships are well-developed in several EU countries, Albania lacks a dual system embedded within higher education. The paper examines relevant policy frameworks, legal structures, and comparative European models to highlight pathways for integrating work-based learning in Albanian HEIs. Based on a desk review of national legislation, international reports, and academic sources, the study identifies opportunities and challenges for aligning HEI practices with regional mobility and labour market demands. Recommendations include piloting structured apprenticeship schemes within HEIs, supported by legal reforms and employer partnerships. Key findings suggest the need for co-designed curricula and stronger employer engagement to align with EU models.

Keywords: *internship, apprenticeship, labour market, Albania, Europe, universities*

1. Bridging education and employment

THE TRANSITION from education to employment remains a pressing concern, particularly in countries with high youth unemployment and structural mismatches. Internships and

apprenticeships, as work-based learning mechanisms, are increasingly seen as essential tools for improving graduate employability, fostering mobility, and enhancing the relevance of education systems. Higher education institutions (HEIs) should be key actors in shaping and implementing these mechanisms, especially within the framework of national and European-level mobility and recognition strategies.

1.1. Internships

Internships are recognised for helping students transition from academia to the labour market. Gault et al. (2000) emphasise that internships improve job readiness, reduce job search time, and increase both starting salaries and satisfaction among business graduates. Internships also benefit institutions by enhancing university-employer relationships. Hora et al. (2020, 2021, 2022) introduced the Internship Scorecard to evaluate internship quality and equity. They emphasised that outcomes vary significantly, especially with online and unpaid formats, which can disadvantage lower-income and marginalised students. Hora et al. (2023) reinforced this by showing that unpaid internships often limit access for less affluent students, while paid internships offer better mentorship and outcomes. Saniter and Siedler (2014) and Di Meglio et al. (2022) reported that internships generally improved early career prospects, though long-term benefits could be less pronounced. Online internships—growing since the COVID-19 pandemic—pose new equity challenges (Stewart et al. 2021, 15), particularly for students with limited digital access.

1.2. Apprenticeships: Structured, skill-oriented pathways

The traditional model of apprenticeship has always been premised on the idea of learning a particular trade or craft while performing work to practise what has been learnt and to hone the skills involved (Stewart et al. 2021, 3). Apprenticeships combine formal education with in-company training and are often contract-based, paid, and longer in duration than internships. Lerman (2014, 8) showed that

apprenticeships improve youth employment, skills, and wages more effectively and cost-efficiently than other training models. Germany's dual vocational education and training (VET) system is frequently cited as a best practice (Euler and Wieland 2015; Tremblay and Le Bot 2000). It is praised for its strong integration of academic and practical learning, high employment outcomes, and institutional coherence. The ILO's 2023 *Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation* (ILO 2024) aims to set global standards for apprenticeships, emphasising inclusion and regulation, and to serve as a guide for policymakers.

1.3. Quality and equity concerns

Internships and apprenticeships alike face quality challenges. The *European Quality Charter of Internships and Apprenticeships* (European Youth Forum 2012) highlights widespread failures in mentorship, structure, and compensation, especially in unpaid roles. Poor-quality placements risk reinforcing social inequality by excluding students without financial support. McHugh (2017) found that internship efficacy is strongly influenced by compensation, supervisor support, and supervisor mentoring, while Curiale (2010) warned that unpaid internships—especially in ‘glamorous fields’ such as politics or entertainment—can raise a troubling class divide between entry-level job seekers who can afford the luxury of unpaid experience and those who cannot. In 2017, the European Youth Forum lodged a complaint against Belgium to the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights, citing insufficient protections against intern exploitation¹.

1.4. The Albanian context: Limited but evolving structures

In Albania, the term “apprenticeship” historically correlates with *çirak*, referring to someone working under a more qualified person to gain job-related skills, often for low pay. According to the Albanian

¹ Cf. European Youth Forum. 2017. *Banning unpaid internships in Belgium*. Accessed May 1, 2025. <https://www.youthforum.org/collective-complaint-on-unpaid-internships>.

Dictionary, a *çirak* is a person who accepts to work for a more qualified master for a defined period, aiming to become work ready. In 1920–1921, in Korça, apprenticeship-like practices were observed where parents removed children from school to involve them in family trades (Nathanaili 2016, 57). Regarding the internships, during the 1970s, university graduates were required to perform a year of mandatory work placement, *stazh*, at a state-assigned location. This historical model, although centralised and compulsory, still represents an early form of state-supported employability planning. Similarly, today in Albania, medical graduates must complete a three-year internship before obtaining their license, often intended to delay emigration abroad.

Modern terminology now uses “internship” for most training programmes. According to Decision no. 41 (2018), internships are formal academic activities evaluated through credits or pass/fail grading, designed to apply theoretical knowledge in a professional context and meet ethical, professional, and legal standards.

In Albania, the labour market faces deep structural issues, including high youth unemployment and skills mismatches (Nathanaili 2024). Traineeships are more common than formal apprenticeships. Marku et al. (2024) stressed the urgent need to align higher education with labour market demands in Albania and Kosovo. In this study, we address the following research question: How can HEIs in Albania adopt and adapt structured apprenticeship models aligned with European practices?

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach based on desk research and policy document analysis. It draws mainly on grey literature, that is, Albanian national legislation - DCMs² no. 327/2018, no. 395/2015, and no. 41/2018 - and selected historical records to examine Albania’s approach to internships and apprenticeships. The

² Decision of the Council of Ministers. Accessed May 2, 2025.
<https://fdut.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/57.Vendimi-I-KM-Nr.-395-dat%C3%AB-29042015.pdf>.

analysis focuses on institutional practices and national readiness to support structured apprenticeship pathways in higher education. The analysis involved coding of legal documents and strategic policy reports, including a targeted comparison of apprenticeship structures in Germany, Austria, and the UK. The institutional cases from Albania were examined for legal readiness, structural integration in curricula, and links with employers. Limitations include reliance on secondary data and absence of stakeholder interviews.

2.1. Data and discussions

From our grey literature review, we can report that in Albania, individuals may enter the labour market either directly after completing secondary education or through practical engagement during their university studies. However, the post-secondary employment pathway often remains informal and lacks structured oversight. While post-secondary employment is typically informal and unstructured, employment opportunities during or after higher education tend to be more organised.

For certain study programmes - such as teaching, medicine, architecture, or nursing - students are required to complete professional practice modules. These are academically structured activities, designed and regulated entirely by the university and embedded in the curriculum. For example, in preschool education, it is classified as a Type D supplementary subject, making up 10–15% of the total programme load, as defined in DCM no. 41/2018, amended by DCM no. 185/2021. Nevertheless, these modules are often designed without external employer input, which limits their effectiveness as work-based learning instruments.

Further, professional practice is assessed by university faculty and often carried out in institutions chosen by the students themselves, typically in the private sector. These university-governed professional practices differ significantly from internships and apprenticeships in both structure and purpose. While they are typically supervised by academic staff and follow a curriculum designed solely by the

university, they often lack direct involvement from employers in shaping the learning objectives or in evaluating student performance. Professional practice in Albanian HEIs is academic in design and assessment, lacking the shared governance found in apprenticeships.

Albania has taken steps to support internships as part of broader national priorities. On May 28, 2015, Albania reaffirmed its strong policy commitment to advancing apprenticeships and internships through the National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2014–2020³: apprenticeships are identified as a key policy action to be developed in close collaboration with the private sector and relevant ministries, including the Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, and Entrepreneurship. Furthermore, Decision no. 395 (2015), as amended by Decision no. 327 (2018), requires public institutions to involve interns in activities supporting the EU integration process, coordinated by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. However, implementation gaps remain, especially in terms of private sector engagement and regulatory oversight. Regarding the relation between HEIs and the labour market in terms of internships, internships are more informal and not uniformly integrated across curricula.

In contrast, models such as “Higher Apprenticeships” or “Dual Study Programmes” characterised by structured cooperation between higher education institutions and employers, are currently not available in Albania. Across the European countries like Germany⁴, Austria, the UK,⁵ and Switzerland⁶ (Project Apprenticeship 2015) have

³ MFE. 2019. *National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014 – 2020: Annual Progress Report*. Accessed May 2, 2025.

https://arkiva.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/1310_Annual-Progress-Report-2019.pdf.

⁴ University Network by FU. *Dual apprenticeship*. Accessed May 3, 2025. <https://www.universitynetwork.de/apprenticeship/#https://www.universitynetwork.de/bachelorprograms/>.

⁵ Ulster University. *Degree apprenticeships*. Accessed May 3, 2025. <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/apprenticeships>.

implemented those models that integrate academic learning with structured, paid workplace experience.

“Higher Apprenticeships” represent a more advanced and structured form of vocational training compared to traditional apprenticeships. While traditional apprenticeships typically target school leavers and focus on foundational skills in trades such as construction, hospitality, or mechanics, “Higher Apprenticeships” are designed for individuals seeking to develop technical or professional expertise at a higher level—often equivalent to a foundation degree, bachelor’s, or even master’s level. They blend academic learning, often delivered in partnership with universities or higher education institutions, with work-based training in sectors like engineering, IT, finance, healthcare, or management. These programmes integrate academic study with on-the-job training, allowing students to alternate between university coursework and paid employment in a relevant field, and are often co-designed by HEIs and employers to ensure coherence between theoretical and practical components.

Local training providers, who would be HEIs (Higher VET Programmes), in collaboration with employers, propose programmes to the National Agency for Higher Vocational Education, which then may be funded by the agency for a limited number of programme starts (up to five starts). To establish a new HVET programme, education providers must secure employers’ involvement (Kuczera and Jeon 2019, 21). Apprenticeship governance can be categorised into three models: institution-led (typically by HEIs), employer-led, and shared governance models. The latter, used in countries like Germany and Austria, emphasises co-responsibility between the state, companies, and HEIs. These models provide stronger structure, clearer evaluation criteria, and smoother transitions into employment. Adopting such shared governance models in Albania would require legal clarity and institutional incentives from both the Ministry of Education and Sports and HEIs, and active employer participation. Table 1 summarises the

⁶ University of Zurich. *Apprenticeship in Information and Documentation (I+D) at the UB*. Accessed May 3, 2025. https://www.ub.uzh.ch/en/ueber-die-ub/ub_lehre/ub_berufslehre.html.

key characteristics of professional practice, internships, and apprenticeships.

Feature	Professional Practice	Internship
Organised by	University	Employer (often)
Duration	Depend on the study programme (also, on the year of study)	Short-term (1–6 months)
Initiator	University	University-led or student
Learning type	Passive and Active	Passive/observational
HEI involvement	Strong	Often strong
Curriculum	University led	Employer led
Compensation	unpaid	Low or unpaid
Outcome	Credits (Nathanaili 2024)	Experience/credits
Assessment	Academic staff	Employer
Employment	No	Unsecure

**Table 1. Conceptual comparison:
Professional practice, internship vs. apprenticeship.**

3. Conclusion

Both internships and apprenticeships can support smoother school-to-work transitions. While internships offer flexibility, higher apprenticeships provide more sustained and structured learning experiences. HEIs can play a transformative role by signing structured agreements with employers, integrating practical work into curricula, and supporting students in accessing quality internships and apprenticeships. Equally, there is a need to redefine what constitutes an “apprenticeship” in the Albanian context and ensure it meets minimum standards through shared governance.

For Albania, the challenge lies in bridging theoretical learning with labour market needs, ensuring quality, and scaling up work-based

learning schemes. Although the country has a legal framework for internships, the institutional and financial capacity for HEI-employer co-governance remains underdeveloped. There are no incentive mechanisms for employers to co-design or co-assess student outcomes, which is a critical barrier to implementing dual programmes.

Policy coordination, stronger institutional linkages, and equity-focused strategies will be essential. Key steps include:

- Clarifying the legal framework for apprenticeships in HEIs.
- Developing co-designed curricula between universities and industry.
- Piloting structured apprenticeships in select programmes.
- Including measurable indicators (e.g., student placements, employer feedback).

Additionally, ensuring access to such programmes for disadvantaged groups should be a policy and research priority moving forward.

Some of those recommendations can be found in the objectives of the DUALBA project (Project no. 101179734), a recent initiative funded by the EU, an Erasmus+ KA2, CBHE, strand 3 project whose primary aim is to improve the competencies of higher education graduates in Albania through the development of a generic model of dual education, along with a supportive legal and strategic framework. The project seeks to address the needs and interests of students, companies, and HEIs by offering concrete implementation guidelines. Overall, the initiative aims to align graduate competencies with labour market demands, enhance student motivation and employability, increase access for students from lower-income backgrounds, and improve the national policy environment for the sustainable adoption of dual higher education in Albania.

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