

Building and Sustaining
Successful Alumni Relations
Programs in VET Schools
How-To-Guide



TRACKTION



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PROJECT INFORMATION

The EU-funded project “Advancing Graduate Tracking and Alumni Relations in VET Schools – TRACKTION” focuses on **strengthening graduate tracking capacity and fostering alumni relations in VET institutions**. TRACKTION is a collective endeavour comprising six organisations from five countries.

Country	Organization	Profile
Estonia	PKHK	VET providers
Italy	Cometa Formazione	
Netherlands	Alfa-college	
Spain	Valnalón (Coord.) Tknika	Intermediary organization
United Kingdom	Education & Employers	Research

The project general objective is to improve VET schools’ understanding of “VET-to-work transition systems” (e.g. impact of learning on VET graduates’ careers, labour market relevance) and it is based on three specific goals:

- a.** To establish a more coordinated and appropriate set of VET Graduate Tracking measures at VET-provider level.
- b.** To increase institutional capacity to act on and use results for a variety of purposes, such as enhancing study programmes and alumni services.
- c.** To strengthen Alumni Culture in VET Schools.

The project foresees two main tangible Intellectual Outputs:

1. A Tracking Protocol that simplifies data collection from Alumni (O1).
2. A How-To-Guide “Building and Sustaining Successful Alumni Relations Programs in VET Schools” (O2).



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This intellectual product is timely as it addresses a highly relevant issue of growing importance for both VET institutions and national VET systems. The guide showcases a range of different approaches considering the different ramifications of the school-to-work transitions and needs from different types of alumni: from school leavers to graduates entering employment or seeking to continue their education.

Through the examples of good practice and the guidelines it provides, this How-To-Guide is expected to inspire and support practitioners, institutions and policymakers across Europe in developing or further strengthening alumni culture in VET Schools.

Yet, the added value of the How-To-Guide resides in the inclusion of useful processes/ protocols for VET institutions willing to build and sustain successful alumni relations based in real examples of practice gathered from VET schools in 5 European countries (Estonia, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the UK) and recommendations from other institutions elsewhere in the world. Last but not least, the guide includes a list of policy recommendations for follow-up at school-level.

Each section describes the background context and includes some basic tasks with a view to prompt some discussion and (collective) action.

1

CHAPTER

WHY ENGAGE WITH VET ALUMNI?

Why engage with VET Alumni?

1. WHY ENGAGE WITH VET ALUMNI?

Alumni culture is a well-established and longstanding tradition in Higher Education. Initially it seems the motivations and incentives to engage are not so evident in TVET sector but we believe this needs to change because of the many benefits it provides.

A mutually and enduring beneficial relationship

Much of the literature and initiatives on alumni engagement are based in the experiences of American Universities and Community Colleges. Yet the trends, strategies and techniques observed there are not readily applicable in the VET context in Europe. For instance, charitable giving is the domain of alumni involvement receiving most attention in the States (Weerts, Cabrera & Sanford, 2010) but VET Schools in Europe are normally state (or regional) supported so they rarely turn to philanthropic donations from alumni and friends.

Understanding alumni engagement in the European VET context requires broadening the scope and moving the focus away from donations and more on the non-monetary support roles played by VET alumni. So when modelling an effective alumni relations program in the VET sector, efforts should be geared towards raising friends rather than funds (Gallo, 2018).

This change of focus represents a golden opportunity to reframe alumni-VET relationships as an intentional and mutually beneficial partnership with student and graduate success as the overarching, shared goal (Vanderlelie, 2019).

Alumni engagement impacts positively on all sides involved: the institution, the alumni and current students. We discuss the institutional, professional and personal advantages for each group in the next section.

What's in it for VET Schools

Alumni are key stakeholders for your institution and their contribution to the achievement of your TVET School strategic goals can be substantial.

A myriad of reasons could be advanced to make the case for alumni engagement but these are the three main ones:

- **Reputation.** Alumni attest to the quality and value of the training delivered in the school. Visualising the career outcomes of alumni is a good way to raise the profile of the institution and attract new students.
- **Employability.** Career guidance services are substantially improved with the input of former students. Mentoring programmes, networking events, work placements and employment opportunities provided by alumni are great assets to maximise the capability and employability of graduates.
- **Quality of education.** Alumni could support the process of enhancing the quality of education and the capability and employability of graduates (Irani, 2012 in Vanderlelie, 2019). Former students are increasingly seen as valuable allies and key sources of information to define school-level strategies and enhance study programmes.

By building strong connections with alumni, VET schools have the power to enrich curriculum in a manner that is not only informed by industry experience but takes it further to facilitate the co-creation of programs and activities through the continued investment of alumni in the teaching and learning community as evidenced in the following two examples:

Alfa-college (The Netherlands)

"From Alfa-college's perspective, being in contact with the business community is of great importance to keep abreast of the latest developments and therefore respond quickly to newly requested competences and skills. To stay in contact with employers, Alfa-college uses both a formal approach (via business organizations) and an informal one (via former students). As far as technology education is concerned, alumni are highly valuable, since they are involved in workshops, guest talks and company visits. Practically speaking, they also assist in developing new training material or give feedback on the curriculum that the school implements. [...] Through the involvement of former students, the school remains informed and connected with companies in an informal way. From an alumni perspective, the involvement in the curriculum development represents the start of life-long learning. Alfa-college starts building alumni relations with the students in the last year of the program by involving them, for instance, in business-to-business meetings."

Pärnumaa Kutsehariduskeskus (Estonia)

“Curricula design and development takes place according to the labour market and employers’ needs. Curricula are designed and developed taking into account feedback from alumni, students (module/ subject feedback, online roundtables) and company’s practice supervisors (mentors). For example: the extension of the hairdressing curriculum by half a year came from the employers and alumni who are now working in the salons, so that the students could gain more practical experience and theoretical knowledge.”¿Qué aporta a los alumni?.

What’s in it for Alumni.

“Ask not what your school can do for you – ask what you can do for your school.”

We could not resist the temptation of paraphrasing J.F. Kennedy, but it would be unfair to put the onus on alumni alone. So before asking anything of them, it’s very important for schools to have an adequate answer prepared to respond to this question: What can the school do for alumni? Again benefits are manifold but three aspects stand out:

- **Job opportunities.** No doubt this is the first and most obvious alumni service that comes to mind. This is the main but not the only role played by career or job placement offices or staff. Local employers will often rely on the tutors and/or Career or Job Placement Offices of TVET schools to identify potential candidates for new job openings.
- **Professional development.** Make sure alumni understand the school continues caring about their career development even after they graduate. School should be seen as a partner in the lifelong professional development of alumni providing training opportunities that support upgrading of skills and knowledge
- **Networking.** Access to social and professional networks may be another appealing prospect for alumni to stay in touch with the school. Face to face events, interactions in social media with former peers, receiving newsletters, are just some of the actions a TVET school could facilitate. Alumni support for employability could also cater for the needs of graduates willing to take the self-employment route.

Urratsbat: Start-up support for alumni (Spain)

URRATSBAT is a regional business start-up support programme promoted by the Deputy Ministry of Vocational Education and Training of the Basque Country and coordinated by TKNKA. The goal is to encourage and support VET students and alumni to create their own company. Urratsbat aims to convert VET schools into incubation units. If the business projects require it, alumni are able to use further facilities such as school workshops to design the prototypes of the product at study stage. The in-house incubation unit is run by specifically trained staff, normally a VET teacher, whose role is to raise awareness about self-employment as a real way of getting access to the labour market and guide and support users in the business planning phase. The service is available for final year VET students, alumni and any person related to the school through non-formal training system or distance training. The teacher in charge of the program implementation, contacts via phone the alumni between September and December to know if the company is still active. Then, each Urratsbat responsible of each centre uploads the information to Ekingune Platform, whose responsible is TKNKA. ¿Qué aporta a los estudiantes?.

What's in it for students

For students, alumni could be role models not only career-wise. They may also show and inspire current students to maintain a fruitful relationship with their school after graduation. It is important for VET Schools to create opportunities so that students, and even future students, can interact regularly with alumni through various activities, thereby achieving:

- **Motivation.** Contact with alumni is useful to better link studies with future career pathways and thus increase motivation to study.
- **Employability.** The professional experiences and career pathways of graduates can have a very positive impact on the expectations and employability of current students.
- **Identity.** Fostering interpersonal relationships between the educational community, including students and alumni, improves the feeling of belonging and identification with an educational institution.

CISLAN VET School : Pigmalion Mentoring project (Spain)

The project is an extra-academic support resource for personal motivation and professional orientation of students. Its objective is to reduce the dropout rate and improve academic results. Mainly students with low academic achievement and / or high level of absenteeism participate. And also students from other regions to help them integrate into the VET School and the town. For this, an alumni mentor is assigned to each student with whom they have biweekly meetings and contact by email.

2

CHAPTER

WHO ARE OUR ALUMNI?

Who are our alumni?

2. WHO ARE OUR ALUMNI?

One of the first and foremost tasks for a VET institution is to consider which type(s) of alumni are currently engaged or should be engaged.

Time since graduation

From the perspective of student/graduate/alumni lifecycle alumni typically fall into one of these three categories:

- Recent graduates (< 5 years ago)
- Mid-career professionals
- Established career

As time since graduation elapses the connection may be lost and alumni may become more difficult to reach. So most recent graduate cohorts may be easier to reach but the expertise and experience of mid-career and established career professionals may put them in a better position to engage as volunteers (mentors, networking, job placement, job recruitment).

Criteria to define alumni

Graduation is certainly a narrow criteria to define alumni. As soon as you start considering other types of academic relationships your alumni base will be considerably expanded. This is the approach proposed by CASE's Alumni Engagement Metrics Framework:

"Alumni are former students of the institution. This population includes current students who previously received a credential but are currently engaged in further studies- for example, an individual who received an undergraduate degree and who is currently working on a graduate degree." (CASE).

To put it simply, any former student is a potential actor for your alumni engagement strategy. We have cherry-picked CASE’s most relevant profiles for a TVET school setting.

- **Graduates:** Individuals who received an official certificate
- **Certificate or Award:** Individuals who received an award or credential other than official certificates. Included in this category are those who receive professional certifications.
- **Non-Graduates:** Individuals who completed at least one term or one semester or at least one degree-credit course with passing grades, but who left before completing studies.
- **Other:** this can include visiting students—such as mobility students—, former employees and any other individual with some academic relationship with your institution and that’s not already counted in any of the previous categories

► **TASK: IDENTIFY THE TYPE(S) OF ALUMNI YOU ARE TRYING TO ENGAGE WITH**

	Category	Alumni
1	Graduates	
2	Non-Graduates	
3	Apprentices	
4	Visiting students	
5	Fomer employees [add rows as needed]	
6	Add rows as needed	

Add rows as needed

3

CHAPTER

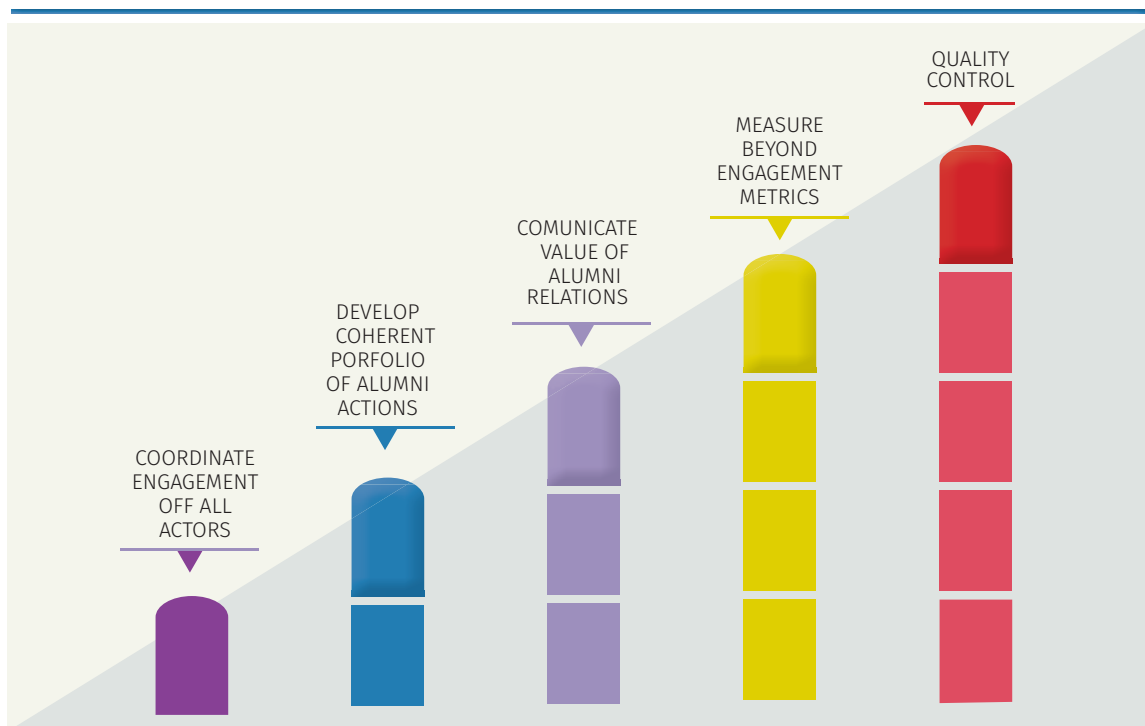
KEY STRATEGIC GOALS

Key strategic goals

3. KEY STRATEGIC GOALS

Attempts by TVET Schools to engage alumni are unlikely to be successful if they represent a ‘bolt-on’ to mainstream activities. Alumni engagement, therefore, should be contemplated as a strategic endeavour that requires a whole-school approach.

The figure below summarises the building blocks of a sound strategy for alumni engagement. Each goal highlights key improvement areas previously identified by TRACKTION partners.



Each theme will be discussed individually in separate sections leading to a final chapter aptly titled “Connecting the dots” with suggestions to embed alumni engagement in school strategic documents.

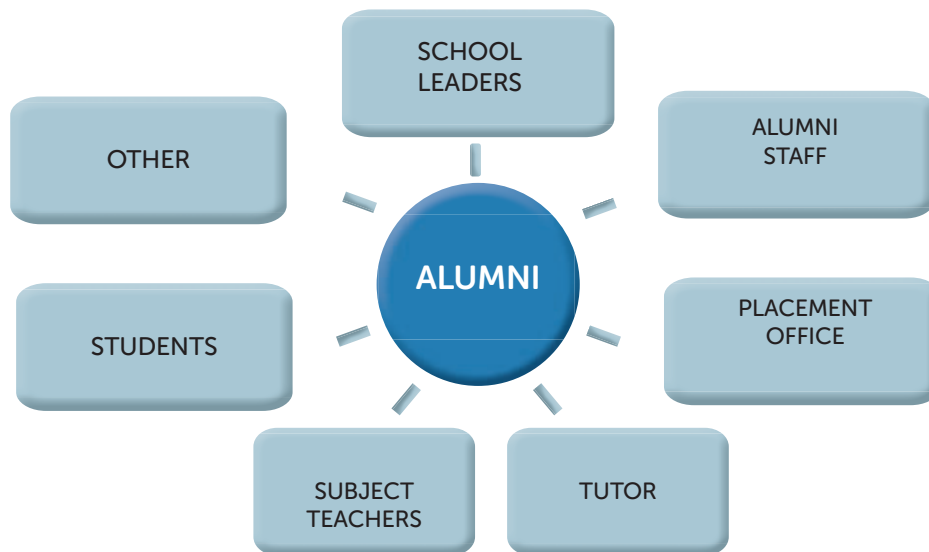
#1 COORDINATE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL ACTORS

In this section we will:

- Identify the key actors
- Discuss the importance of alumni loyalty
- Suggest ideas to create a strong relationship between all actors.

Who should have a say?

Alumni are a central piece in a system populated by a broader range of actors so it is essential to create a strong partnership between teaching staff, alumni offices and other actors to leverage alumni relationships. A vital first step requires identifying not only who is who in this constellation of actors, but their motivations and how they are connected. Once we have all relevant actors mapped, we are in a position to identify weak connections, spot gaps or bottlenecks and bring out ideas for improvement.



Loyalty as a precursor of engagement

Student loyalty in general refers to the extent to which students feel connected to the educational institution in which they are enrolled, expressed by their attitudinal and/or behavioural actions (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2001). To put it other way, alumni loyalty is evidenced both in what they say (e.g. positive word of mouth) and what they do after their graduation (e.g. becoming part of an educational advisory board) (Snijders et al., 2019)

But loyalty does not pop out of thin air after graduation. On the contrary, it evolves through time, all the way from enrolment to graduation and beyond (Koenig-Lewis et al. 2016, p. 59). Why should we pay attention to this concept? Well, because loyalty is connected to engagement. Snijders et al. (2019) found alumni report higher (retrospective) engagement when they perceive their past educational experiences positively in terms of the relationship they had with former educational faculty and staff.

Alumni loyalty is not evenly distributed among all actors. Loyalty comes in layers. Teaching staff is a key piece in the loyalty puzzle. Students develop stronger connections with (some) former teachers and tutors whereas the attachment to the Alumni Office may be understandably weaker. The quality of relationships with academic staff has been found to be a good predictor of future alumni loyalty (Koenig-Lewis et al. 2016).

Bearing this in mind, it is hard to fathom how this crucial relationship is often lost by TVET Schools. After interviewing faculty staff in a number of Australian Higher Education Institutions, Vanderlelie (2019) identified two major issues that resonate with our experience in a TVET context. The first was the lack of coordination between teaching staff and Alumni Offices or staff in charge of alumni relations. And, as if this wasn't bad enough, the majority of respondents kept their own secret list of alumni, more often than not separate to those maintained by the Alumni Office.

In personal communication, Vanderlelie (2020) highlighted the importance of recognizing the ownership of the relation. TVET School Management Team needs to reassure staff that sharing alumni lists won't mean the relationship would be snatched away from them by Careers/Alumni staff. Alumni lists should include a column identifying staff with the strongest connection (e.g. tutor). So that whenever the school/Careers/Alumni Office is approaching an alumnus for a request, the member of staff "owning" that relationship is informed and brought into the loop of that conversation.

Pärnumaa Kutsehariduskeskus (Estonia)

Students usually establish a link with class teachers who usually invite them to participate in different school activities when they graduate. The alumni network relies on the initiative of individual teachers to maintain informal contact with former students. Only a few restricted attempts at network creation have been registered, such as "MTÜ Tihemetsa Vilistlane" alumni association from Pärnumaa VET school, which was initiated by forestry and gardening alumni and is currently managed by teachers.

► **TASK: MAP KEY ACTORS IN ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL**

STAKEHOLDER	What's in it for them?	What may put them off?
Tutors		
Other teachers		
Alumni Relations Staff/Office		
School Administrators		
[Add rows as needed]		

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

SCHOOL LEADERS	TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS
Work with Heads of Department to identify academic champions to lead alumni engagement across the institution (if applicable, liaise with the Alumni Office). Make the Alumni Office responsible to spot all the relevant actors and come up with the plan to improve weak connections, spot gaps or bottlenecks. Make the processes for engagement with the Alumni Office clear to all staff. Ensure ownership of relation is recognized. Inform your staff about different types of alumni relations in order not to miss or ignore any.	Share your lists of alumni with the Alumni Office/ relations staff (if applicable). Collaborate with your colleagues (teaching staff, Alumni Offices, staff in charge of alumni relations) to be more effective. Share with colleagues and Alumni Office your alumni initiatives and results. Make sure to sustain, ensure and explicitly highlight the value of alumni relationships to your students.

#2 DEVELOP A COHERENT PORTFOLIO OF ALUMNI ACTIONS

In this section we will:

- Take stock of existing alumni engagement initiatives.
- Propose a framework for alumni engagement actions.
- Improve existing initiatives with content based on student/alumni needs through different life stages.

Take stock of existing alumni engagement initiatives

Start with what you have. A basic first step is collecting all the actions that your colleagues and you already do. Think of all activities currently undertaken at your TVET school where alumni are involved to some extent. Tick all that apply.

	Guest lectures		Career Talks		Open Days
	Training opportunities		Job Postings/ offers		Networking events
	Student internships		Mentoring		Advisory role
	Alumni profiles		Alumni awards		Other

Normally, the result of compiling this portfolio of actions is more impressive than expected. Yet, the resulting picture may lack structure.

Find a framework for your alumni engagement actions

Having a coherent frame of reference is a good way to move from a set of patchy and disconnected alumni engagement actions towards a more robust strategy. A framework is a useful scaffold to ensure the continuity and consistency of all the alumni actions and events already taking place at your school. What's the thread underpinning your alumni engagement narrative?.

Inspiring Practice: Alumni Engagement and Employability Model at Griffith University (Australia)

The Alumni Engagement and Employability Model at Griffith University (Vanderlelie, 2019) uses Employability as the underpinning thread. The Model scaffolds all alumni engagement opportunities under the frame of employability¹.

Thus, alumni are provided with diverse opportunities to engage and connect with students of all year levels and navigate the troubled waters of transition from school to work. The model goes at great lengths to encourage students to consider their employability from enrolment to graduation with four key goals in mind:

- *Build personal and professional awareness.*
- *Enhance the capacity to identify and articulate key skills.*
- *Raise awareness of the supports available through their TVET schooling experiences.*
- *Enrich the understanding of professional pathways and the realities of job search.*

¹ Bridgestock (2009) expands the definition of graduate employability to not only accommodate the acquisition of generic skills but more broadly the ability of students and graduates to self-manage their career development.

Improve existing initiatives

More importantly, the framework does also acknowledge the needs and motivations to stay connected to their former school evolve through different stages in the student/graduate lifecycle as summarised in the table below:

	Stage & questions	Alumni engagement actions
BEFORE	AWARENESS • Is TVET for me? • Which TVET track should I choose? • What can I do with this qualification?	• Sharing alumni stories with students at feeder schools² • Alumni stories in promotional materials • Alumni presence at “Open Days”
DURING	BELONGING (1ST Year) • Am I in the right track? • Do I belong here • How do I succeed?	• Build professions awareness with alumni examples • Demonstrate diversity of pathways to “success”. • Invite alumni to classroom • Connect first year students with alumni mentors
	COMPETENCE (all throughout) • What skills will I need to develop? • How do I make a network?	• Make skills for the profession explicit • Invite alumni to present their educational pathway during career guidance sessions • Provide industry relevant examples for teaching
	INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE (final year) • What do employers look for? • How do I get experience? • Do I need further study?	• Connect final year students with alumni mentors (e.g. in final year projects) • Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities. • CV writing and job-search strategies
AFTER	ALUMNI SUPPORT (after graduation) • Where do I begin to find a job? • I’m ready for a career change but what can I do? • How can I help/support students?	• Professional development and lifelong learning • Contribute to curriculum renewal • Alumni-alumni mentoring & networking • Employ other graduates

² A school or college whose graduates continue their education at another specific school or college, or enter a specific profession. A school from which many or most students progress to a particular higher-level educational institution. eg. “A VET School takes pupils from a number of feeder secondary schools.”

► **TASK: LOCATE EXISTING ALUMNI ACTIONS IN A FRAMEWORK**

The template below helps you/your school to start programming alumni actions around major milestones in the student lifecycle. Map existing actions/initiatives, spot the gaps and consider new opportunities where alumni can engage with students.

Stage & questions	Actions already undertaken	What else can be done?
AWARENESS • Sharing alumni stories with students at feeder schools. • Alumni stories in promotional materials. • Alumni presence at “Open Days.		
BELONGING • Build professions awareness with alumni examples. • Demonstrate diversity of pathways to “success”. • Invite alumni to classroom. • Connect first year students with alumni mentors.		
COMPETENCE • Make skills for the profession explicit. • Invite alumni to present at career guidance sessions. • Provide industry relevant examples for teaching.		
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE • Connect final year students with alumni mentor (e.g. mentor in final year projects; capstones). • Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities. • CV writing and job-search strategies.		
ALUMNI SUPPORT • Professional development and lifelong learning. • Contribute to curriculum renewal. • Alumni-alumni mentoring & networking. • Employ other graduates.		

In the two examples below show how two schools have put the tool to good use.

COMETA (Italy)

Stage & questions	Actions already undertaken at COMETA	What else can be done?
AWARENESS • Sharing alumni stories with students at feeder schools. • Alumni stories in promotional materials. • Alumni presence at “Open Days”.	• Alumni stories in promotional materials, sharing stories: on Facebook. Realization of videos about courses and publishing on youtube. • Alumni presence at “Open Days”	• Define a process to create awareness (staff involved + actions). • Create a page on our website with alumni section for stories.
BELONGING • Build professions awareness with alumni examples. • Demonstrate diversity of pathways to “success”. • Invite alumni to classroom. • Connect first year students with alumni mentors.	• Build awareness about the profession with the involvement of alumni. • Invite alumni to classrooms to share their work experience.	• Define a process to create belonging (staff involved + actions).
COMPETENCE • Make skills for the profession explicit. • Invite alumni to present at career guidance sessions. • Provide industry relevant examples for teaching.		• Define a process to create competence (staff involved + actions).
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE • Connect final year students with alumni mentor (e.g. mentor in final year projects; capstones). • Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities. • CV writing and job-search strategies.	• Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities: an alumnus creates the opportunity to visit the company where he/she is working in.	• Define a process to create Industry experience (staff involved + actions).
ALUMNI SUPPORT • Professional development and lifelong learning. • Contribute to curriculum renewal • Alumni-alumni mentoring & networking. • Employ other graduates.	• Professional development and lifelong learning: extra courses for adults for specialization. • Our Job & Placement office contributes to curriculum renewal. Frequent meetings to update CV. • Employ other graduates. • Informal personal support by tutors and teachers.	• create a website/ page on our website with job offers . • Annual meeting to share experiences and develop collaborations. • Formalize individual support given by tutors and teachers.

PKHK (Estonia)

Stage & activity ideas	Actions already undertaken at School/Department	What else can be done?
AWARENESS • Sharing alumni stories with students at feeder schools. • Alumni stories in promotional materials. • Alumni presence at "Open Days."	• Alumni go to their alma mater (The school where they studied) to talk about their professional experience. • Alumni success stories have been shared in the media. • We have had "open days/doors" in recent years together with vocational competitions and we have involved alumni who talk about their choices in the workshops. • Some teachers are themselves alumni and speak in the open doors events .	• In the advertisement materials we have not used our alumni and their professional success stories.
BELONGING • Build professions awareness with alumni examples. • Demonstrate diversity of pathways to "success". • Invite alumni to classroom. • Connect first year students with alumni mentors.	• Every year we organise career talks for the first year students (alumni attend the introductory classes to talk about their time and experiences in school). • Sometimes alumni come to help our 1st year students with their first practical work. (hairdressers, cooks etc). • Alumni are involved in the teaching process – they give lessons, assess the vocational exams etc	• Mentoring could probably only be introduced in the internship module initially.
COMPETENCE • Make skills for the profession explicit. • Invite alumni to present at career guidance sessions. • Provide industry relevant examples for teaching.	• Industry relevant examples: some of the teachers are also our school's alumni and are currently practitioners in the field that they teach.	• Use alumni in career guidance modules. • Use alumni in the career counselling of our current students (for instance a buddy system).
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE • Connect final year students with alumni mentor (e.g. mentor in final year projects; capstones). • Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities. • CV writing and job-search strategies.	• Our internship programme has enlisted companies, some of which are managed by our alumni. Students often go on study trips to these companies. • They go on internships to these companies, where they are supervised by our alumni.	

Stage & activity ideas	Actions already undertaken at School/Department	What else can be done?
ALUMNI SUPPORT • Professional development and lifelong learning. • Contribute to curriculum renewal. • Alumni-alumni mentoring & networking. • Employ other graduates.	• We often share curriculum updates with alumni from relevant companies and ask their opinion and recommendations for further improvement. • Many alumni are actively involved in the vocational training provided at school, eg. through meetings with the students, conducting lessons, curriculum development, study visits, internships, etc. • Alumni have continued to work as vocational teachers at the school, which makes it particularly clear that they are ready and keen to contribute to the development of the school. • Many of the alumni who are salon owners often hire other graduates from their school. (hairdressers) • The anniversary celebrations for each speciality course have active involvement of the alumni ,representatives of the companies and the current students.	• In the advertisement materials we have not used our alumni and their professional success stories.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

SCHOOL LEADERS	TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS
Leverage employability as a 'foot in the door' to connect teachers and alumni in efforts to enrich the curriculum. Identify the alumni activities already carried out in your school and then work on improving their quality and add new activities. Define a framework in your institution to include all alumni initiatives. Define a precise process and strategy for alumni activities. Use alumni stories in promotional materials as an advertisement and career opportunities for your institution.	Provide a supportive student experience that offers diverse opportunities to connect with alumni already throughout their studies. Provide tailored support for alumni in their transition to the world of work. Share opportunities and needs with who is in charge of the alumni network. Collect all the alumni initiatives developed and analyze them with the rest of the team.

#3. COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF ALUMNI RELATIONS

In this section we will

- Make alumni visible by creating and sharing alumni stories.
- Raise awareness of the multi-faceted nature of alumni relations.
- Do not wait too long, get consent and stay in touch.

Make alumni visible

Alumni stories are powerful ways to highlight the experiences and accomplishments of alumni. Whether in a short-text or interview format, alumni stories may help in inspiring current students. Kailanto et al. (2012) examined the impact of alumni stories to motivate and commit students to their studies in a Higher Education Institution in Finland. Alumni stories, coupled with more detailed information and face-to-face meetings, have proved helpful for students and educators to better link students' studies with career pathways and increase their motivation to study.

► TASK: CREATE YOUR FIRST ALUMNI STORY

Here are some sample questions or topics but feel free to add your own.

- Briefly describe what you're doing now (status, job role).
- How did you get there since graduation?.
- Looking back, what's the most valuable aspect of your TVET School experience?.
- Do you (or would you like to) stay in touch with your former TVET School? How? Why?.
- What would be the next step in your professional career?.

And some additional tips:

- Compile real-life experiences and accounts. It is a conversation, not a survey.
- Do not only focus on highly successful individuals and take diversity into consideration. Pay attention to balance in terms of gender, vocational track, career trajectories and pathways (e.g. employees, self-employed, further studies) and career stage (early graduates, mid-career, established professional).
- Quality should be given priority over quantity. Yet, it is recommended to agree on some quantitative target with your team/colleagues. For example, by the end of the school year, we will have five interviews/stories or each department will carry out at least an interview before the end of the school year/term.
- Organize a personal interview and make the graduate feel comfortable to share more information about his professional career. Avoid being judgmental.
- Do not forget to collect the interviewee's authorization to record the conversation and publish the interview and a photo.
- Alternatively you can ask your students to interview an alumnus. This is a good opportunity for them to start creating professional networks.

All the aforementioned aspects have informed the development of the alumni section in TRACKTION website.

Take your time to read some of the interviews for inspiration before you start. Just click on the following links:

Estonia <https://tracktionerasmus.eu/alumni-stories-ee/>

Italy: <https://tracktionerasmus.eu/alumni-stories-it/>

Spain: <https://tracktionerasmus.eu/alumni-stories-es/>

Netherlands: <https://tracktionerasmus.eu/alumni-stories-nl/>

► TASK: CREATE ALUMNI SECTION ON YOUR SCHOOL WEBSITE

Consider including an alumni section on the school website to showcase your alumni stories and other relevant content. Do you need some inspiration? Let's have a look at two examples from Australia.

Inspiring practice: TAFE alumni section (Queensland, Australia)

Click on the link: <https://tafeqld.edu.au/information-for/alumni/index.html?>

Discuss in a group the following topics:

- What's the main purpose of TAFE alumni section?
- What's in it for alumni?
- Any prompts to action? Which ones?
- Things that you liked? Why?

Inspiring practice: The Australian VET Alumni Program

"The Australian VET Alumni Program is a national community of Vocational Education & Training (VET) graduates, registered training organisations (RTOs), VET practitioners and businesses dedicated to sharing their VET journey with Australians to encourage greater participation in VET." <https://www.myskills.gov.au/the-australian-vet-alumni-program/>



Raise awareness of the multi-faceted nature of alumni relations

Conversations around alumni engagement tend to consider students/alumni as passive recipients of services provided by the school. Broadening what counts as alumni engagement is the first step towards the creation of an alumni culture with strong and sustainable foundations. For this to happen, it is crucial to make sure students leave the school with a clear idea on the multiple roles they could play as alumni.

Updated information on job openings and further training opportunities will undoubtedly continue having a central role in alumni relations programmes but that should not be the only reason to stay in touch with their former school. As we have seen, their active contribution will be largely valuable in other areas such as programme/curricular design and career guidance.

Conversations help but students would inadvertently learn about the value of alumni through continued exposure to and interaction with former students. As we have already covered in the previous section, developing a coherent portfolio of relevant and purposeful alumni activities based on student/alumni needs through different life stages sends a message that can be further reinforced by highlighting the importance of alumni engagement both at the start and at the end of every activity.

Do not wait too long, get consent and stay in touch

Staying in touch and maintaining a meaningful connection with former students is a key aspect in alumni engagement. No matter how hard we try, all our efforts may be useless if we wait too long. Alumni loyalty builds progressively over time. So, don't wait until students walk across a graduation stage to establish these relationships (Vanderlelie, 2019).

Vanderlelie (2019) argues for the need to dispel one of the most pervading myths in alumni engagement, the one that assumes "alumni are not interested in connecting". By the same token, it is also important to mention that not all students want to become part of an alumni network and this is perfectly fine.

"We should focus on those alumni that want to be a part of our network and try to make our network as appealing as possible for future alumni. Too often I see schools trying to reach all their alumni, but it's about the quality of alumni relations, not quantity". (Tim van Der Ploeg, Alfa-college).

For example, Alfa-college, one of our partner schools, had great success to sign students to their alumni network during the graduation ceremony, when everyone is in an euphoric state. Alternatively, you can elicit this information some months before graduation. Either way, make sure you explicitly formulate this question to them before they leave school. Question 29 in TRACKTION pre-graduation survey is a good example.

29. Would you like to keep in touch with your VET school? Yes/ No

The question was formulated in a straightforward way while students were still at school (2-3 months before graduation). Pre-graduation survey data (March 2019) showed 66.6% of students in our sample (n=624) expressed an interest in keeping in touch with their VET school after graduation. Responses to this basic question introduce a useful distinction in your alumni base as you can discriminate students opting out, that is to say those not willing to be contacted.

School year			
Category	TOTAL (A)	Not willing to keep in touch (B)	Contactable Count (A-B)
1. Graduates			
2. Non-Graduates			
3. Certificates or Award			
4. Other: (e.g. Visiting students)			
[add rows as needed]			

Expressions of interest are a promising start but it is wise to ask students to specify the kind of relationship they want to maintain with their former school after graduation.

TRACKTION pre-graduation survey includes two interrelated questions that signal different ways to get involved.

Would you like to keep in touch with your VET school? (Y/N)	
IF YES...	
What kind of activities or services would you like to have with your VET School when you graduate? (GET)	What kind of activities or services would you like to offer your VET school when you graduate? (HELP)
• Information on events • Job opportunities • Business start-up support • Other (please specify)	• Career talks • Guest lecture • Mentoring • Workplace visits

Again, this is a set of helpful data to programme and further advance your alumni activities. For instance, 54 % of students at Alfa College (The Netherlands) showed interest in keeping in touch. They would like to receive information on job opportunities and events but they are also keen to give back and contribute to school activities as guest lecturers or giving career talks.



Interested in keeping in touch	54%
Services they like to receive after graduation	Job opportunities (76%)
	Information on events (52%)
	Business start-up support (17%)
Services they like to offer after graduation	Gues lecture (62%)
	Career talks (30%)
	Mentoring (20%)
	Workplace visitis (17%)
	To become part of the alumni network (12%)

Get consent and stay in touch

The new privacy legislation (GDPR) poses strict requirements for schools. Transparency is the key here. Getting consent is a must but students will appreciate an explanation in lay terms of the reasons and motivations of the school to collect their personal data and the way it will be used and processed.

Obtaining consent is a prerequisite to register alumni in our customer relationship management system (CRM system) but the next big challenge is keeping data up to date. In any case, while building a successful alumni network can greatly benefit from a CRM-system, there are many activities that can be undertaken without. Not having a CRM-system in place is a poor excuse for not moving the alumni agenda forward.

Staying in touch

A good way to find more effective methods to communicate with alumni and engage them in a true dialogue is eliciting their opinions on the best channels to stay in touch or preferred method of contact.

What's the best method to stay connected with alumni? There's not a single answer. We asked partner schools to reflect on the pros and cons of the methods they use and this is the summary:

Method	PROs	CONs	Time	Cost
e-mail	• Easy way to reach a broad recipient base. • Non-intrusive: it does not disturb the alumni, and they can respond whenever it is convenient to them. • you have the written answer.	• may not use email frequently. • may be viewed as spam or ignored, particularly mailing campaigns. • After graduation they are likely to change email.	LOW	LOW
Instant messaging services (WhatsApp, Telegram)	• Popular way of communication • No cost. • Simultaneous interaction. • Good for small, discipline-specific groups.	• Too informal. • Conversations bound to lose focus.	LOW	LOW

3 · KEY STRATEGIC GOALS

Método	Ventajas	Desventajas	Inversión en tiempo	Coste
Phone calls	• Personal contact with alumni strengthens the relationship • Possible to ask more details	• Phone calls may not come at a convenient time for alumni • Alumni may decide to avoid responding to calls from unrecognised or private numbers used by centralised telephone systems. • alumni may change their numbers	HIGH	HIGH
Social media	• Popular and spontaneous • Stay in touch with alumni to be involved from afar • Re-engage with “lost” alumni	• May be seen as informal • Prompts low level of engagement (e.g. likes) • Need to funnel the individual to your website where they can take action	MEDIUM	LOW
Alumni engagement software	• Facilitate integration of services (job offers, events, mailing, mentoring) • Enables segmentation of alumni services • Collect and publish vital and up-to-date statistics	• Costly investment, particularly for small schools or schools with a budding alumni engagement strategy. • Staff needs training • Updates and maintenance of content	MEDIUM	VERY HIGH

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

SCHOOL LEADERS	TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS
Celebrate the success of your alumni widely. Leverage the power of social media to transform the ways in which you connect and engage alumni. Connect communication and fundraising activities with the Alumni office. Coordinate teachers from all departments in involving students and alumni about their multiple roles at school.	Waiting until graduation is too late. Begin on day one by helping students to understand what it means to be an alumnus and the value of remaining connected. Create a sense of belonging! Elicit opinions of alumni about what they expect and the best channels to stay in touch or preferred method of contact. Keep all students informed about the alumni initiatives taking place at the school and their possibilities of participation. Create an alumni section on the school’s website/collect alumni stories.

#4. MEASURE BEYOND ENGAGEMENT METRICS

In this section we will:

- Identify existing measures of alumni engagement in your school
- Define and improve the process

Identify existing measures of alumni engagement in your school

The consistent and accurate measurement of the number of actions, participants and volunteers are essential aspects in the monitoring of an alumni engagement strategy in a TVET School.

► TASK: IDENTIFY EXISTING MEASURES OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL

Think about the last school year. Can you provide a precise figure of any of the following?

- % Alumni engaged
- Alumni engagement actions (per type)
- Volunteers and volunteering time

Partial and inconsistent recording of data hampers our ability to assess the quality of actions, note growth, identify improvement areas and take action.

The process of tracking and reporting alumni engagement can appear to be deceptively simple but requires a series of carefully orchestrated steps involving different actors:

CONSENSUS BUILDING	DATA COLLECTION & SHARING	DATA AGGREGATION & ANALYSIS	REPORTING
Get staff buy-in for data collection and management Agree on a common set of definitions, categories of alumni engagement experiences, inclusion criteria. Keep the data collection processes simple and clear to all staff. (metrics, instruments).	Alumni staff, teachers and/or volunteers collect data. Do not keep secret lists. Information is entered into a shared spreadsheet periodically.	Data is reviewed and cleaned (e.g. at the end of the school year). Data is entered into school CRM (not always). Analyse alumni engagement and examine trends.	Share key insights (reports) with all parties involved and released in different formats. Showcase how data informs decision-making.

Consensus building: Categories of alumni engagement

Before we start quantifying the overall number of alumni or actions undertaken, it is important to agree on a segmentation of engagement practices.

TRACKTION has selected and adapted some of the primary categories of alumni engagement and inclusion criteria proposed by CASE's Alumni Engagement Metrics Task Force³:

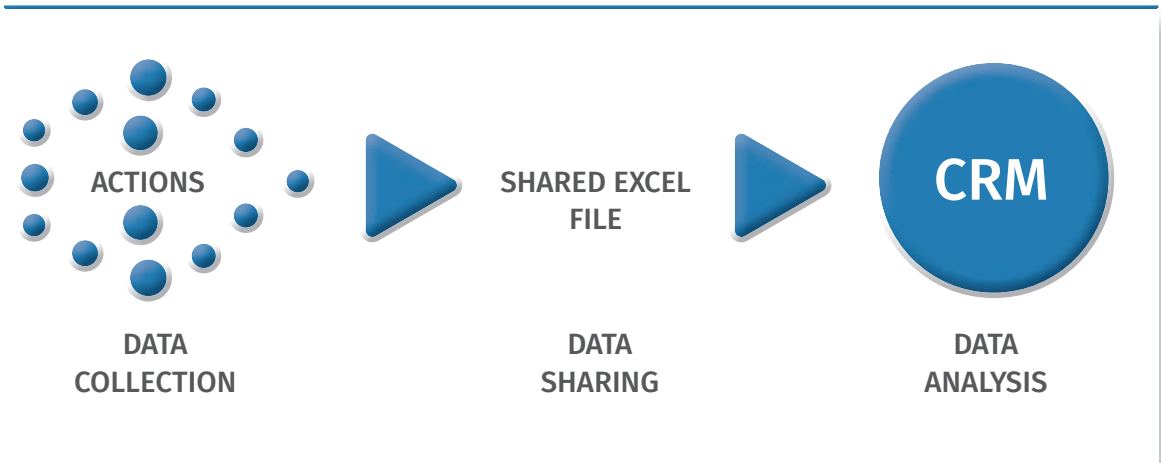
Category	Alumni role & examples
COMMUNICATIONS "Interactive, meaningful and informative communication with alumni that supports the institution's mission and strategic goals."	Alumni as recipients of information (GET) • Responded to an alumni survey. • Submitted an event evaluation form. • Responded to a call for job openings, nominations, awards, and the like. • Interacted on social media (e.g. Made likes, comments, retweets on content originally posted by TVET School).
EXPERIENTIAL "Meaningful experiences that inspire alumni, are valued by the institution, promote its mission, celebrate its achievements and strengthen its reputation".	Alumni as Attendees (GO) • Event/ training participant. • Career Services user. • Member of alumni association. • Alumni who have participated in meaningful or substantive calls or in-person meetings for which a contact report has been captured and recorded.
VOLUNTEERING "Formally defined and rewarding volunteering roles that are endorsed and valued by the institution and support its mission and strategic goals."	Alumni as (Pro)active contributors (HELP) • Interviewee for alumni profile/story. • Classroom speaker. • Career mentor. • Guest lecturer. • Governing/advisory board member. • Job placement provider, in-company tutor.

Based in CASE (2018)

³ Created by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) the Task Force has attempted to integrate the work of many institutions and communities of practice across the globe that have successfully developed promising and innovative alumni metrics practices.

Data collection & sharing

There will be multiple points and occasions to gather data. What’s crucial at this stage is to ensure all parties involved have a clear understanding of the protocol and standard tools and templates to collect and share the data.



Communications

Consider collecting e-mail and newsletter metrics such as open rate, click-through rate and unsubscribe rate. Gather social media data like number of followers, likes and interactions.

Experiential

Attendance sheets are a vital first step to record this information. Eliciting information about the year of graduation and Qualification is essential for a more fine-grained analysis.

Name	Sex	Age	Year of graduation	Qualification	Contact (Optional)

A basic template to record “Experiential” actions would ideally contain the following information:

Type of action	Organizers	Date	Duration	Venue	Number of participants	% Female

Volunteering

Alumni delivering guest lectures, career talks or participating in industry panels are giving away their precious little time and therefore making a substantial contribution to their former school.

You can create a basic template to record all volunteering actions that would ideally contain the following information:

Type of contribution	Date	Volunteer name	Graduation year	Qualification	Volunteering hours	Organizer

Optional: An individual declaration signed jointly by each volunteer and the organizer of the activity (e.g. teacher) at the VET.

Volunteer time recognition

Computing the number of volunteer hours is a good way to report Return on Investment of efforts to engage alumni. The hourly value of time spent by volunteering alumni is to be determined by each individual organisation. Factors you can take into account to perform this calculation:

- The minimum wage in the country where the activity is taking place.
- The average salary of a professional in the same sector.
- The cost of a salaried replacement.

Collecting qualitative feedback

Questionnaires for collecting feedback from alumni may address issues such as the possibilities for participation, satisfaction with alumni actions they've engaged in and the communication and information policy. In addition to collection of feedback via questionnaires, teachers and trainers should be encouraged to gather qualitative feedback either through informal interviews or focus groups where participants are free to talk and exchange views in a thoughtful and permissive atmosphere.

A measure for Experiential actions: The Net Promoter Score

The Net Promoter Score is calculated from the responses of event participants to the following question.

How likely are you to recommend this event/activity to a colleague or friend (0 to 10 scale)?

NET PROMOTER SCORE		
% PROMOTERS (score 9 or 10)	% DETRACTORS (score < 6)	% Promoters - % Detractors

Data aggregation and analysis

Alumni Engagement software or commercial platforms excel at this but they are a costly option. A shared excel file may be a good way to start. With the input of all departments, the alumni office or appointed staff could start aggregating data. Basically, the idea is to record the number of activities and participants on an annual/school year basis.

You may consider alumni as a single group or maintain separate records for each alumni category.

ALUMNI		Volunteer (V)	Experiential (E)	Communication (C)
1	Graduates			
2	Non-Graduates			
3	Certificates or Award			
4	Visiting students			

[add rows as needed]

Take stock of the number of actions implemented by each school department

ACTIONS	Volunteer (V)	Experiential (E)	Communication (C)
Department 1			
Department 2			
Department ...			
TOTAL			

Reporting

One of the most immediate outcomes of this process is our ability to showcase alumni engagement in a visual way. Summarise key insights in a factsheet, graph or interactive dashboard that you can insert in a presentation, report or, why not, in the brand new alumni section on your school website

Quantitative aspects

- Number of alumni actions by type
- Alumni engaged by type: e.g. volunteers, event participants
- Engagement rate
- Volunteering hours and ROI
- % increase in the last months

Qualitative aspects

- Satisfaction, relevance (e.g. Net Promoter Score index)
- Testimonials of alumni (sourced from questionnaires, interviews of focus groups)

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

SCHOOL LEADERS	TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS
Get staff buy-in for data collection and management.	Enter information regularly into shared spreadsheet or CRM.
Reach consensus for coding.	Share key insights in the appropriate format with students and alumni.
Keep the data collection processes simple and clear to all staff.	If your school doesn't have a CRM system in place, look at activities you can do without.
Share key insights (reports).	
Showcase how data informs decision-making.	
Set a scoreboard of outcomes to evaluate annual performances in Alumni engagement.	

4

CHAPTER

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Connecting the dots

4. CONNECTING THE DOTS

In this section we will

- Discuss ways to integrate alumni engagement in the school strategy
- Consider implications for quality assurance

Attempts by TVET/ FE schools to engage alumni are unlikely to be successful if they represent a ‘bolt-on’ to mainstream activities. To what extent are alumni considered a strategic stakeholder in your school? How have TVET schools recognised the value of alumni to contribute to advancing the institution? **Alumni engagement should be integrated into a clear institutional strategy.**

Our consultation with TRACKTION partner schools brought to the fore alumni are seldom mentioned in strategic documents or yearly Action Plans. References are shallow and rarely translated into clear, measurable and actionable goals. The example below comes from the Netherlands.

Alumni engagement in national policies and institutional documentation (Alfa College, Netherlands).

Explanation	Excerpt
National VET Policy There is not a law surrounding the use of alumni within the Netherlands. Goals are formulated by the Inspectorate of Education. Some of the goals are alumni-related. For instance, when the Inspectorate audits courses VET schools have to show that we have knowledge about graduate destinations, this is called ‘follow-up success’.	OR3. Follow-up success Definition: The destination of the students after leaving the course is known and meets at least the expectations of the training. Base quality: The institution has knowledge of developments in the (regional) labor market. It has information about the continuation of the career of students who leave the course before or after graduating. This may involve switching to further education, a place in the labor market or a suitable follow-up for students with a specific educational need. Follow-up success at least meets the expectations of the program in relation to the average national results of comparable training and the situation on the regional labor market.

Explanation	Excerpt
Alfa College School Strategy (2019-2023) Alfa-college has a separate chapter about alumni in the school strategic action plan. Also, alumni are often referred to as 'partners' in the document.	'We will maintain more contact with our alumni. We would like them to play an active role in developing content and organizing our training courses. After all, they are experts with experience within the VET-programs in our school. On the basis of the experience they have gained after their program within Alfa-college, they are pre-eminently able to indicate how we organize our training to further improve what they have missed and where we have to set accents. They can also play a role in conducting our training. For example by giving guest lessons or activities in professional practice to guide. In addition, they are also a potential target group in the context of lifelong development and they can provide their input for the content of the short-cycle courses.'
Alfa College Quality Agenda In the Netherlands, VET-schools have to submit their 'quality agenda' based on the themes that are formulated at national level and agreements that have been made. The agenda then get checked by the Ministry of Education. Upon approval, each school gets a certain amount of money to realize these goals. Alfa-college's agenda has been recently approved.	1. 'For the continued social success of our students, it is important that they continue to develop throughout their lives. As Alfa-college, we also want to be there for them. We want to do this by strengthening the bond with our alumni and by increasing our lifelong development efforts. This starts within the study programs by stimulating lifelong development skills among our students. The relationship with our alumni also offers us the opportunity to gain a better insight into the social effects of our educational efforts.' 2. 'The importance of our alumni is included in our strategic policy. We want to use this group of former students even more emphatically in the coming period for our educational innovation. At the moment, this is already happening in some programs as a guest teacher, as an assessor for exams, as an information officer for further education, etc. We want to broaden this within the organization. By assessing the additional and continuing education needs of them, we can tailor our offer to their needs. We also use this information as input for reviewing our education programs for our students.' 3. 'Our school leavers are dear to us. With their reflections and feedback, they can help us get a better view of our areas for improvement. We therefore actively approach these alumni and want to involve them more in our education.'

In line with the logic followed in other sections of the guide, it is reasonable to have a clear idea of where your school is standing.

► **TASK: FIND ALUMNI REFERENCES IN YOUR SCHOOL INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Search for any references to alumni in:

- TVET School website
- School-level strategy documentation
- National/Regional TVET Education Strategy

Defining clear institutional strategy and support

- **Consider which school document(s)/ policies would be best suited to embed references to alumni engagement.**
- **Clarify your intentions and communicate it to staff, students and alumni.**
This mission statement taken from Pepperdine University Alumni Engagement Strategy encapsulates in a short and powerful statement the rationale for alumni engagement.
"To engage alumni in a mutually beneficial partnership that generates meaningful connections and strengthens the school community".
- **Find the space and time to discuss with your staff possible ways forward**
Elicit opinions and views of academic staff, careers staff and other institutional stakeholders on current initiatives for engaging with alumni and possible ways forward. Discussions may stretch over months and that is not a problem. This is a long-distance race not a 100 m sprint.
- **Take little and actionable steps.** If the idea of coming up with a multi-year strategic roadmap for alumni engagement ever crosses your mind, forget it. It may be more realistic to concentrate on 1 or 2 actionable goals at a time.

► TASK: EMBED ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Take little steps. Consider the 4 key strategic goals and some of the actions covered in this guide, select and fine-tune accordingly bearing in mind your school priorities.

Area	Examples of qualitative goals
Coordinate engagement of all actors	Create a strong partnership between alumni offices and teaching staff to leverage alumni relationships. Formalize the process by which teachers and alumni staff share Alumni contacts for student career support.
Develop coherent portfolio of alumni actions	Define major milestones and opportunities where alumni can engage with students. Create a standard taxonomy to describe and classify alumni engagement actions (e.g. experiential, communications, volunteering). Develop/fine-tune processes to identify and communicate job opportunities to former students.
Communicate value of alumni relations	Develop methods and processes to recognize alumni annually (e.g. alumni stories). Create web section to communicate with students on what it means to be an engaged alumnus. Provide more effective methods to communicate with alumni and engage them in a true dialogue.
Measure beyond engagement metrics	Establish key performance indicators to assess effectiveness of your alumni engagement actions. Standardize data definitions, collection processes, management, and reports. Form a data governance committee to set standards for maintaining the quality of data.

Staffing

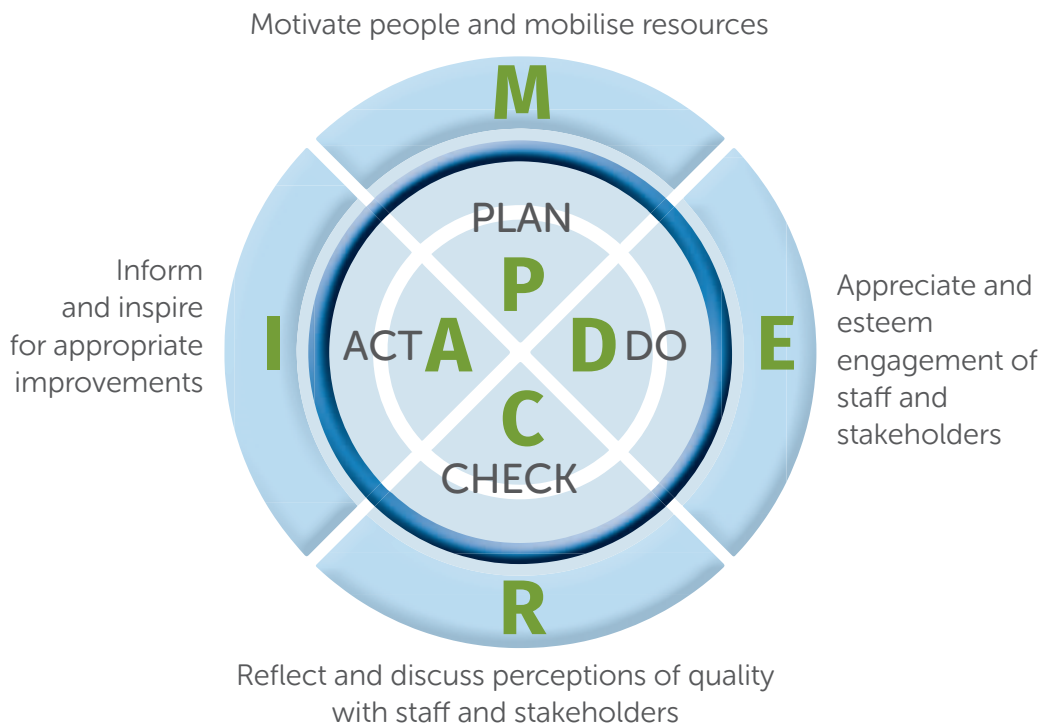
Strategic goals look great on paper but enacting them requires a careful consideration of staff workload, rewards and recognition and training needs. Orchestrating a sound strategy requires the engagement of a wide range of actors and teaching staff are key enablers in building student/graduate loyalty to the institution. Having said so, it is not wise to rely only on volunteering teachers willing to go the extra mile.

Vanderlelies (2019) sends three important messages TVET School Leaders should take into consideration:

- **Workload planning.** Engaging alumni takes time so provide allocated workload to staff in charge.
- **Reward and recognition.** This is a team effort. Find the opportunity to publicly appraise and endorse staff who work collaboratively to support alumni engagement.
- **Build capability.** Consider staff training needs in relation to alumni engagement and provide training opportunities in alumni relationship management, event planning, communications and so on.

A final word on quality assurance

The starting point of activities to improve quality is self-assessment (CEDEFOP,2015). This guide is meant to assist VET organisations in the process of identifying its strengths and areas for improvement in alumni engagement, deriving from this an improvement plan and developing and implementing specific activities, thereby increasing its quality.



CEDEFOP (2015) adds an outer layer to the PDCA cycle that highlights the human factor in quality assurance.

MERI	SECTIONS in this GUIDE
I - Inform and inspire for appropriate improvements.	#1 Coordinate engagement of all actors.
M - Motivate people and mobilise resources.	#2 Develop coherent portfolio of alumni actions.
E - Appreciate and esteem engagement of alumni.	#3 Communicate value of alumni relations.
R - Reflect and discuss perceptions of quality with alumni, students and staff.	#4 Measure beyond engagement metrics.

Following the PDCA cycle and the EQAVET framework suggestions, the application of a circular quality assurance framework to alumni engagement entails:

- PLAN: set goals and strategic planning.
- DO: define rules and regulations for implementation, continuous monitoring and measurement of results according to predefined goals.
- CHECK: analyse factors contributing to quality and management of change in view of the achieved results.
- ACT: review strategic planning and goal-setting and adapt it to new developments, thus starting a new cycle for continuous improvement.

Building on the MERI/PDCA cycle, our final suggestion is to expand the idea of alumni engagement and let alumni have a say in all stages of the quality assurance cycle.

	Plan	Do	Check	Act
#1 - Ensure there is a management culture which is committed to alumni engagement and support staff training in relation to alumni engagement				
#2 - Develop a coherent portfolio of alumni actions which reflect your school's circumstances				
#3 - Communicate the value of alumni relations				
#4 - Measure beyond engagement metrics and use alumni engagement data and feedback to improve VET				

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

SCHOOL LEADERS AND CAREER STAFF	TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS
Communicate your school alumni engagement philosophy, strategy and intentions to staff, students and alumni. Work with Heads of Department to identify academic champions to lead alumni engagement across the institution (if applicable, liaise with the Alumni Office). Leverage employability as a ‘foot in the door’ to connect teachers and alumni in efforts to enrich the curriculum. Make the processes for engagement with the Alumni Office clear to all staff. Celebrate the success of your alumni widely. Implement training programs for staff that support academics to develop skills in relationship management, alumni engagement practices and establishing and maintaining online networks.	Waiting until graduation is too late. Begin on day one by helping students to understand what it means to be an alumnus and the value of remaining connected. Provide a supportive student experience that offers opportunities to connect with alumni during the degree. Leverage employability as a ‘foot in the door’ to connect students and alumni in efforts to enrich the curriculum. Celebrate the success of your alumni widely. Leverage the power of social media to transform the ways in which you connect and engage alumni. Provide tailored support for alumni in their transition to the world of work.

(Vanderlelie, 2019)

5

CHAPTER

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Alumni engagement themes

5. ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT THEMES

In this series of user journeys represent some typical scenarios of alumni engagement based in the alumni services delivered by Tracktion partners. User journeys will help the reader work out how alumni (as well as students and/ or staff) interact with the service and what's expected from them in each phase.

5.1. JOB & PLACEMENT OFFICE (COMETA, ITALY)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after event/experience
Our Job & Placement office checks the labour status of our former students on the regional job service platform. If they result unemployed we call them and ask for the reason. We receive job offers by our company partners and we try to find the right alumni.	Alumni may benefit from this service by signing an agreement with our Job & Placement office. They have to be convinced to take part in an active job search.	Initially alumni receive talks on skills, career guidance and active job search methods with a member of our Job & Placement Office. Any active employment policy measures are activated (e.g. Youth Guarantee). Unemployed alumni are supported in the development of job search and presentation skills, as well as strategies to complete job interviews. If the candidate is successful, the Job & Placement Office provides additional support in the mediation process with the company for the identification of the most suitable contract.	Through periodic tutoring sessions during the internship. Through periodic phone calls to update the employment status in the event of hiring. If they are hired as apprentices, we take care of the planning of the training path and of the relationship with the company as well as of the tutoring activities during the school year. If they are hired with a professionalizing apprenticeship contract, they can attend compulsory basic and transversal training hours at Cometa.

5.2. ALUMNI AS GUEST LECTURERS (ALFA COLLEGE, NETHERLANDS)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after?
who have signed consent to receive communications from school after graduation are sent an email with information on the guest speaker. Alternatively they may be also informed by their former teachers.	Interested alumni confirm attendance by contacting their former teachers and/or marketing department.	• Provide information - Q&A - Distribute useful information (i.e. folders of link to website)	Teachers stay in contact with guest lecturers by phone or email. They may also be contacted by our marketing and communication department and can stay in contact with them.

5.3. START-UP SUPPORT FOR ALUMNI (TKNIKA, SPAIN)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after?
URRATSBAT is a regional business start-up support programme promoted by the Deputy Ministry of Vocational Education and Training of the Basque Country and coordinated by TKNIKA. Urratsbat aims to convert VET schools into incubation units. The in-house incubation unit is run by specifically trained staff, normally a VET teacher, whose role is to raise awareness about self-employment as a real way of getting access to the labour market	The service is available for final year VET students, alumni and any person with some sort of academic relationship with the institutions (e.g. non-formal training system or distance training.)	The goal is to encourage and support VET students and alumni to create their own company. Staff guide and support users in the business planning phase. If required, alumni are able to use further facilities such as school workshops to design and manufacture prototypes of the product at study stage.	The teacher in charge contacts via phone the alumni between September and December to know if the company is still active. Then, survival data is uploaded to the Ekingune Platform, whose responsible is TKNIKA

5.4. CAREER EVENTS (COMETA, ITALY)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after?
We call alumni in order to stay in touch with them and ask them about their availability to participate in activities.	Shortly after the phone call, alumni receive an e-mail with more detailed information and they might sign up for the event.	During some events (for example diploma delivery, fundraising events, themed conferences...) alumni are invited to tell others about their Cometa Training experience and the professional pathways into employment and/or further studies.	The school remains in contact with alumni through periodic phone calls to track the employment situation.

5.5. ALUMNI AS PROVIDERS OF INTERNSHIPS FOR APPRENTICES (PKHK, ESTONIA)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after?
Direct contact with the alumni. The class teacher/group leader or the coordinator of work placements has direct contact with the alumni or vice versa. Alumni are eager to take apprentices and workers from their former school because they already know the level and quality of the teaching	Practice coordinator has access to a database of local companies providing job placements. It is also possible to know which companies are run by former students. Alumni entrepreneurs get the information directly from the school	Alumni contact the school with a request for high-quality trainees and skilled workforce	The employer (former student) gives written feedback to the school about the curriculums and study quality from the alumni because they interact more directly with the school than other entrepreneurs.

5.6. ALUMNI AS MENTORS TO REDUCE SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM AND DROP-OUTS (CISLAN, SPAIN)

AWARENESS How do you raise awareness?	JOIN How do alumni join/ sign up?	ACT What do they do? Describe action/event	LEAVE How do you stay in touch with them after?
Securing the loyalty of alumni is one of the goals in the School Yearly Action Plan. Two staff are involved. A coordinator and a support teacher. In October, teachers are briefed about the scheme and asked to identify students with a high-risk of dropping out. In November, the project is presented to alumni who could potentially fulfil a mentoring role and previously identified students are invited to join the project.	In December both alumni and students agree to take part by signing a document. Alumni meet on an individual basis with the two teachers in charge to clarify all aspects regarding the mentoring role. Same for selected students that sign consent before their contact details are passed on to the mentor. Alumni mentor receives basic guide in paper and contact details of mentee.	The first meeting takes place in December. Mentor and mentee met on a regular basis (every 2 weeks) outside school premises. The coordinator supervises the process identifying incidences, providing support and intervening when necessary.	After each meeting, mentor and mentee have to submit a basic report to the coordinator. A template is facilitated. At the end of the process, the mentor completes a satisfaction survey. The mentee delivers the last reporting sheet. The coordinator aggregates data and submits final report.

6

CHAPTER

TEMPLATES

Templates

6. TEMPLATES

6.1. STOCKTAKING TOOL OF ALUMNI INITIATIVES

VET Alumni culture

Do you have any initiative to keep in touch with your alumni? Please, describe them briefly.

(e.g. alumni database, alumni associations, alumni facilities).

Which are your institution's main motivations to start alumni relations?

- ☐ Fund-raising
- ☐ Enhancement of study programmes
- ☐ Information on career paths
- ☐ Mentoring
- ☐ Other

What do you offer your alumni?

- ☐ Info on events
- ☐ Job opportunities
- ☐ Access to incubation facilities
- ☐ Networking
- ☐ Other

Which are the most effective channels to maintain contact?

- ☐ Social networks (Facebook, Instagram...)
- ☐ Professional social networks (LinkedIn, Twitter, ...)
- ☐ Online surveys
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ E-mail
- ☐ Other

Which are the strengths of your alumni initiatives?

Which are the weaknesses of your alumni initiatives?

Do you see opportunities or threats in the implementation of alumni initiatives?

Are there sources of further information on your alumni initiatives you would like to share with us? (E.g. reports, web sites, etc)

6.2. ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Stage & activity ideas	Actions already undertaken at school	What else can be done?
AWARENESS • Sharing alumni stories with students at feeder schools. • Alumni stories in promotional materials. • Alumni presence at “Open Days”.		
BELONGING • Build professions awareness with alumni examples of diversity of pathways to “success”. • Invite alumni to classroom. • Connect first year students with alumni mentors.		
COMPETENCE • Make skills for the profession explicit. • Invite alumni to present at career guidance sessions. • Provide industry relevant examples for teaching.		
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE • Connect final year students with alumni mentor (e.g. in final year/capstone projects). • Alumni as hosts/providers of Industry visits, work experience and internship opportunities.		
ALUMNI SUPPORT • Professional development and lifelong learning. • Contribute to curriculum renewal. • Alumni-alumni mentoring & networking. • Employ other graduates.		

6.3. ALUMNI STORIES FORM

ALUMNI PROFILE (Insert photo here)	
Name *	
Age *	
Vet school name*	
VET Qualification	
Graduation Year *	
Current status*	☐ Working for others
	☐ Self-employed
	☐ Further studies
	☐ Volunteering
	☐ Other (Specify)
Current status/Job Role*	
QUESTIONS	
Briefly describe what you're doing now*	
How did you get there (since graduation)?*	
Looking back, what's the most valuable aspect of your vet school experience?*	
Would you recommend your VET School to others? Why?	
Do you (or word you like to) stay in touch with your former VET School? How? Why?*	
Who is your greatest role model?	
What would be the next step in your professional career?*	
Links (eg. Your company website, linkedin profile)	
SUBMISSION	
Story submitted by *	
Email	
Consent to alumni profile being published in TRACTION Website? *	Yes/No
Photo submitted?	Yes/No

6.4. RECORDING SHEETS FOR ALUMNI ACTIONS

Experiential

Attendance sheets are a vital first step to record this information. Eliciting information about the year of graduation and Qualification is essential for a more fine-grained analysis.

Name	Sex	Age	Year of graduation	Qualification	Contact (Optional)
(add rows as needed)					

A basic template to record “Experiential” actions would ideally contain the following information:

Type of action	Organizers	Date	Duration	Venue	Number of participants	% Female

Volunteering

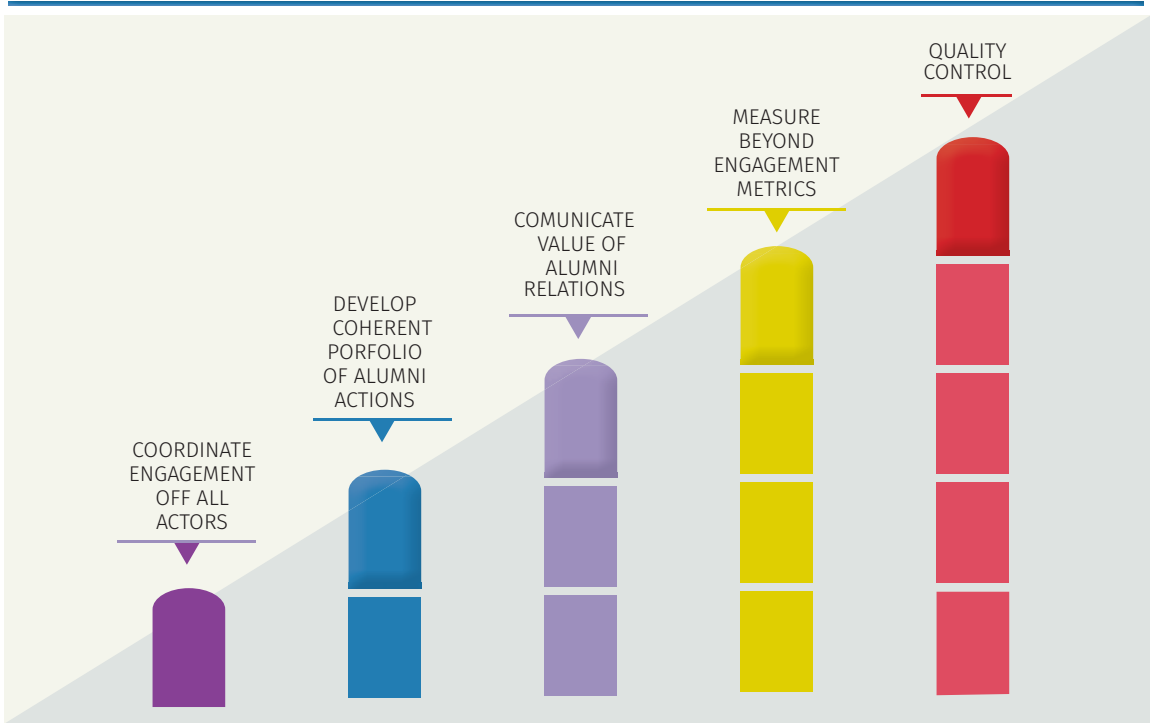
Alumni delivering guest lectures, career talks or participating in industry panels are giving away their precious little time and therefore making a substantial contribution to their former school.

You can create a basic template to record all volunteering actions that would ideally contain the following information:

Type of contribution	Date	Volunteer name	Graduation year	Qualification	Volunteering hours	Organizer

Optional: An individual declaration signed jointly by each volunteer and the organizer of the activity (e.g. teacher) at the VET.

6.5. ACTIONS TO DEVELOP THE QUALITY ASSURANCE CYCLE IN ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT



Building Blocks	Plan	Do	Check	Act
Ensure there is a management culture which is committed to alumni engagement and support staff training in relation to alumni engagement				
Develop a coherent portfolio of alumni actions which reflect your school's circumstances				
Communicate the value of alumni relations				
Measure beyond engagement metrics and use alumni engagement data and feedback to improve VET				

7

CHAPTER

FURTHER READING

Further reading

7.1. FURTHER READING

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