



Effective
Education for
Employment:
Madrid,
Spain
Interview
Series



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Escuela de Hostelería Y Turismo in Alcalá de Henares

The Escuela de Hostelería Y Turismo offers students vocational courses in tourism and hospitality, traditionally amongst the strongest sectors in the Spanish economy.

This interview captures the views of students, teachers and the Director of a modern, innovative educational institution which, whilst being driven by a strong ethos also has to deal with the realities of a deep and damaging economic crisis.

This interview with the Director of the institution, Juan Carlos del Mazo Blazquez, and his staff, highlights the relevance of competency-based learning in a difficult economic environment.

Key Findings

- The Community of Madrid has invested significantly in vocational infrastructure.
- Competition for jobs is fierce and, as a consequence, the quality of jobs available, particularly to new recruits, is often very poor.
- The hospitality and tourism sector has suffered more than other sectors during the economic downturn.
- In the current economic climate many companies are less willing to get involved in education.
- Vocational schools often rely, in part, on support and sponsorship from commercial companies to maintain and upgrade facilities and equipment.

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The school's focus is predominantly on giving the students practical experience rather than classroom-based study:

It's probably about 60% or 70% practical study, with 30% or 40% based in the classroom.

The students understand the importance of this practical learning policy:

It's better to know how to do a job if you want to get employed. In university, they don't show me the way to work. Here I see every day the way to work in tourism. It's similar in here to outside, not like university.

“The best thing about the teachers is that they trust us.”

The school's ethos fosters and encourages a closeness and openness between teachers and students, treating everyone on an equal footing and paying less attention than is usual to hierarchy and seniority:

We demand from the students two things: responsibility and effort. For that we try to offer examples every single second. Communication, close but not too familiar, helps us to understand and connect to students. We try to make teachers believe that they teach and they learn at the same time.

Collaboration brings the best out of the students and the teaching staff:

There's no need to treat students, teachers and directors differently. That's the way we try to work – try to join efforts and strengths.

The economic crisis in Spain has impacted negatively on internship opportunities. The work placements that are a core part of every student's educational experience rely on the full and enthusiastic engagement of local businesses.

Even though participating companies get paid to take part, they are less willing to get involved, to take students on.

Competition for jobs is fierce and, as a consequence, the quality of jobs available, particularly to new recruits, is often very poor:

There's currently no investment from employers in future workers because of the crisis. It's very short term.

Students in Spain are struggling to secure that all-important first step on the job ladder:

At the moment, with the crisis, the reality is that when students finish (their education), no one gets a contract.

There are concerns about the level of engagement between vocational schools and industry representatives:

Businesses do have a voice through the Chambers of Commerce; the reality is that we don't always have the time to get businesses involved in developing the curriculum [particularly during the crisis]. The door is always open though.

Competency-based learning is integrated into the everyday practice at the Escuela, and many vocational schools are supporting the drive towards building curriculums around this principle:

Key competencies are starting to be a part of teachers and students lives. We try to help people learn by doing, to know themselves and to develop these key competencies [as a consequence]. We try to get to know the students early on through evaluation, trying to understand their competencies from the very start.

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