

Regional Network – Berlin

Annual Report – 2023 gss Schulpartner – Germany

Reporting period: January 2023 - December 2023

Overview

In 2023, the Berlin Regional Network for Reality Check was established and actively coordinated across schools, companies, chambers, public agencies and non-profit partners. Within the calendar year we convened two formal network meetings (27 March and 3 July), complemented by bilateral exchanges and desk research on good practice. The network’s purpose was twofold: (1) to build a trusted, multi-professional community that improves the transition from school to vocational education and work, and (2) to translate regional needs into concrete, ready-to-pilot “RealityChecks” that are practical for schools and meaningful for pupils.

Key 2023 outcomes include: a shared problem map of the Berlin transition system; a curated list of good-practice formats; initial design criteria for Berlin RealityChecks (with emphasis on meaningful internships, hands-on career fairs and structured company visits); and a set of operational next steps (e.g., lighthouse implementation at selected schools, a common information and scheduling interface, and stronger parent and peer involvement). The network has matured from an exploratory forum into a working platform with agreed priorities and an implementation pathway that links WP2 (Regional Networks) to WP3 (Development, Testing and Evaluation).

Introduction: Purpose and objectives

The Berlin Regional Network is part of the Erasmus+ “Reality Check” partnership. Its mandate in 2023 was to:

- Bring together relevant actors—schools (general and vocational), chambers (IHK/HWK), employers (SMEs and larger firms), the Employment Agency, municipal stakeholders and NGOs—to address structural gaps in Berlin’s school-to-work transition.
- Identify obstacles that hinder equitable access to high-quality career orientation (e.g., fragmented provision, underused internships, limited company capacity, uneven implementation of career guidance strategies).
- Collect and validate good practice that demonstrably increases pupils’ motivation, provides real-world learning opportunities, and supports informed decision-making.
- Co-define the design features of new “RealityChecks” tailored to Berlin’s context, with special attention to pupils with additional needs, multi-professional collaboration in schools, and benefits for companies (so that cooperation is sustainable).
- Agree on concrete, time-bound steps to prepare pilots and evaluation activities in 2024.

This report documents how these aims were pursued through two structured network meetings and ongoing coordination throughout the year.

Network and members

The network draws on a deliberately diverse membership to ensure that design and delivery reflect the complexity of the transition system. Core stakeholders include: senior and middle leadership from secondary schools (integrated secondary schools and special focus schools), careers advisers and practitioner teams embedded in schools, the Berlin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK) and Chamber of Crafts (HWK), the Federal Employment Agency, representatives of the Senate Administration for Education, social partners and youth service providers, as well as project partners from the Erasmus+ consortium. The combined perspective enables the network to look beyond isolated projects and to co-create formats that make pedagogical sense in schools, operational sense for companies, and strategic sense for the city.

First network meeting

Date & Time: Monday, 27 March 2023, 15:00–17:00

N. of participants: 11 (schools, Employment Agency, Senate Administration, IHK, NGO providers, project coordination)

Summary

The inaugural session set the baseline. After introductions and a short project briefing, participants mapped current strengths and pain points in Berlin's school-to-work ecosystem.

Key observations from the baseline scan

- Fragmentation and uneven implementation. Career orientation (BO/BSO) is not implemented uniformly across Berlin. Schools vary widely in how systematically they embed vocational learning in curricula, schedule guidance time, engage external partners and track outcomes. This leads to unequal opportunities for pupils across the city.
- Company capacity and access barriers. Many SMEs lack dedicated resources for outreach and recruiting, which makes it difficult for schools to secure company visits, mentors or structured placements. Where access exists, coordination is often ad hoc and not anchored in shared planning cycles.
- Internships underused as a learning instrument. Too many pupils choose “convenience placements” (nearby retail, generic roles) rather than interest-driven internships aligned with strengths and goals. Preparation and follow-up are inconsistent; learning remains implicit instead of explicit and assessed.
- Motivation and relevance. Teachers report pupils asking “Why do I need this?” in core subjects. Without visible links between classroom learning and real work, engagement dips. Biographical work and hands-on experiences help—but are not scaled.
- Transitions start too late. Participants argued for earlier, age-appropriate exposure (primary and early secondary), with parents actively involved as multipliers and role models.
- Peer-to-peer works. Programmes with apprentices or recent graduates as ambassadors resonate strongly with pupils and should be expanded.

- Bring companies into schools (and vice versa). More authentic encounters on school premises (workshop days with real tools/materials) and more systematic teacher/job-shadowing in companies are both needed.

Good practice—initial set

- Integrated Vocational Preparation (IBA), workshop days with prior potential analysis, “Occupations in a Bag” (low-threshold exploration format), apprentice ambassadors (IHK), school coaching models, and school–housing association partnerships that link neighbourhood exploration with vocational themes. These examples demonstrate that Berlin already has promising building blocks—but they lack a shared framework and scaling pathway.

Orientation for WP2 → WP3

The group validated the project’s direction: use WP2 to (a) align actors around design principles and (b) specify Berlin-ready RealityChecks that are practical to implement, then take these through piloting and evaluation under WP3.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- Document and expand the good-practice pool with a common template (scope, target group, time, resources, roles, learning objectives, evaluation).
- Prepare a second meeting for early July focusing on specification: from “what works” to “what we will build and pilot” in 2023/24.
- Involve pupils in subsequent sessions to test assumptions and language.
- Strengthen school-company brokerage, exploring a lightweight online interface that aggregates offers, calendars and contact points, and that is usable by schools with minimal overhead.

Second network meeting

Date & Time: Monday, 3 July 2023, 15:00–17:30

N. of participants: 12 (including additional representatives from the Chamber of Crafts and further schools)

Summary

The July meeting moved from diagnosis to design, translating the March baseline into Berlin-specific criteria for the first wave of RealityChecks.

Design priorities validated by the network

1. Meaningful Internships (Internships with Purpose).

- **Before:** Interest profiling (e.g., Talent Check), structured company previews (on-site tasters), and family briefings.
- **During:** Clear tasks aligned with real workflows; a named mentor; safety and behaviour briefing; and a simple daily reflection scaffold.
- **After:** Guided reflection (what I did, what I learned, what this means), documentation that can be graded/recognised, and pathways to next steps (e.g., trial day, apprenticeship open day).

2. Hands-on Career Fairs (JobAction approach).

- Fairs should include **try-outs** (micro-tasks, tool handling, realistic scenarios) with a digital companion (e.g., challenge trails, check-ins, exhibitor dialogues) that nudges purposeful conversations and captures evidence of learning.
- Pre-briefing for pupils and teachers and a debrief back at school turn fairs from passive browsing into **curated exploration**.

3. Tailored Company Visits in Interest Groups.

- Visits organised by **inclination** (e.g., “mechanics & making”, “care & health”, “commerce & service”), including short workplace workshops where feasible.
- Teachers receive a **linking sheet** to connect what pupils observe with curricular content (maths for measurements and geometry; language for customer communication; science for materials and safety).

4. Coaching and multi-professional teamwork in schools.

- School-based teams (teachers, social workers, external partners) provide **light-touch coaching** around decision-points (selecting internships, preparing for fairs, contacting companies).
- Where possible, add **teacher job-shadowing** in companies to equip staff with up-to-date workplace knowledge.

5. A central, low-friction interface.

- A simple, Berlin-relevant information and scheduling layer that lists company offers, visit slots, mentoring opportunities and contacts (with IHK/HWK support), aligned to school calendars. This is pragmatic rather than a large IT build: start small, iterate.

Why these priorities?

They directly respond to Berlin's bottlenecks: uneven provision, underused internships, capacity constraints in SMEs, and low perceived relevance of classroom learning. They also foreground benefits for companies—predictable scheduling, prepared pupils, and fewer “cold” enquiries—making sustained cooperation more realistic.

Additional insights

- **Lighthouse implementation.** Selecting one or two schools as lighthouse sites creates visibility and a **modular blueprint** other schools can adapt. Results should be shared via short case notes and open sessions.
- **Rules, safety and cadence.** Adolescents (13–16) benefit from **clear introductions**, the four-step method for skills demonstration, and **compact sequencing** (e.g., consecutive days) to build momentum.
- **Parents and peers as multipliers.** Parents remain the most important career influencers. Interventions that mobilise parents (briefings, “bring your child to work” days) and peers (apprentice ambassadors) both increase motivation and normalise vocational pathways.

Key decisions & Future milestones

- **Specify three Berlin RealityChecks** for piloting: (i) Internships with Purpose; (ii) JobAction – a hands-on fair companion; (iii) Interest-group company visits with on-site mini-workshops.
- **Define resources and roles** for each format (time, materials, safety, mentoring, documentation), including simple teacher guides and pupil reflection sheets.
- **Coordinate with chambers and the Employment Agency** on brokerage and target groups; identify a first cohort of SMEs willing to host visits/placements.
- **Plan evaluation** using short, age-appropriate learner feedback and a practitioner survey to inform iteration.
- **Prepare autumn 2023 bilateral workshops** to ready lighthouse schools and company partners for winter/spring pilots.

Conclusions and recommendations

The 2023 cycle demonstrates that Berlin has the right actors at the table and a workable consensus on what matters most: earlier and more meaningful exposure to real work; internships that are prepared, mentored and reflected; hands-on exploration at fairs and in companies; and a school-centred support structure that is light on bureaucracy and heavy on learning.

What worked well

- **Diversity of perspectives.** Bringing together school leaders, chambers, public agencies and practitioners created a shared vocabulary and built trust.
- **From talk to design.** The second meeting successfully shifted the network from general problem-solving to **concrete, implementable formats** with clear roles.
- **Pragmatic ambition.** The focus on low-friction tools (simple guides, reflection scaffolds, a lightweight interface) is realistic for schools and SMEs.

Areas to strengthen in 2024

1. **Scaling the brokerage function.** Begin with a small, curated pool of committed companies and expand iteratively. Chambers can help filter and match.
2. **Teacher professional development.** Offer compact CPD on supervising internships, linking subject content to workplace tasks, and using the four-step method for skills instruction.
3. **Parent engagement.** Institutionalise pre-internship briefings and pilot “Bring Your Child to Work” activities with clear safeguarding and documentation.
4. **Measurement and feedback loops.** Keep evaluation lean and useful: short learner pulses, practitioner reflections, and one end-of-cycle synthesis per format to inform the next iteration.
5. **Equity of access.** Ensure that pupils with additional needs, those in alternative provision, and students from private/independent schools are explicitly included. Provide travel support or mobile formats where access barriers exist.