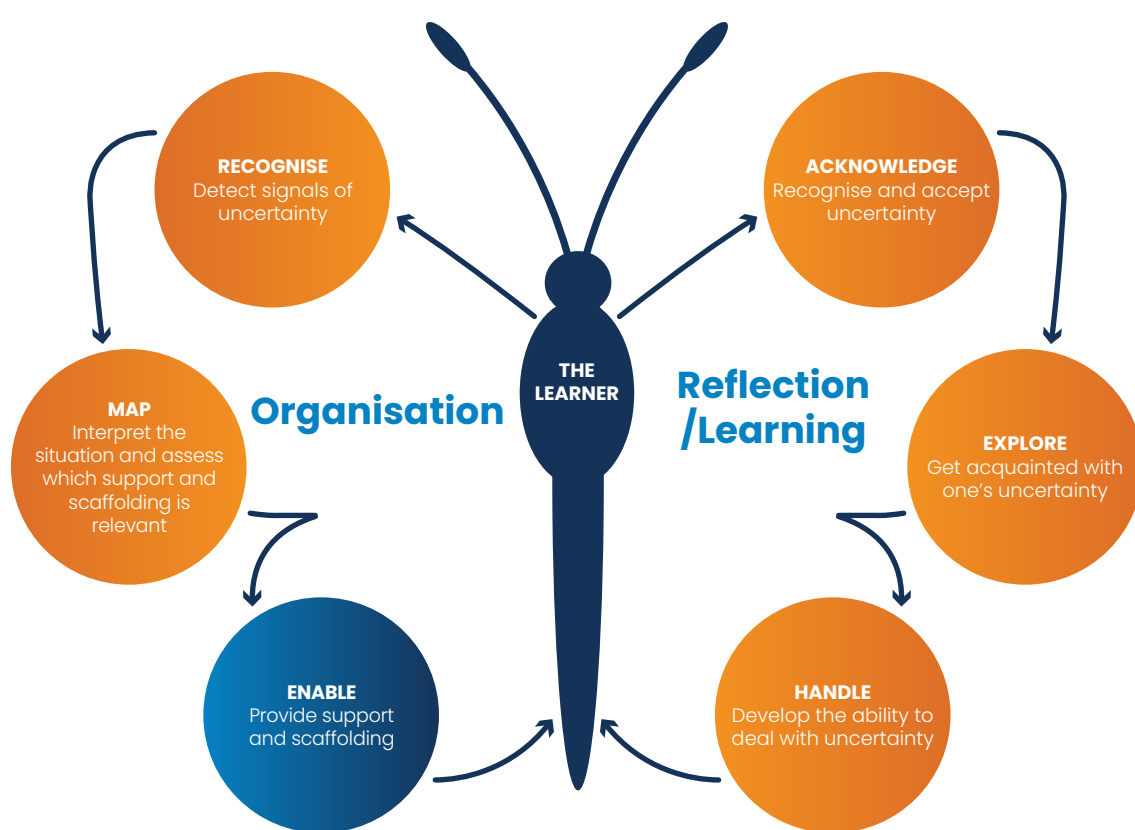


# Uncertainty skills

- A Guide to Exploring, Navigating and Supporting Uncertainty in Transitions



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# 01 Introduction

Welcome to this guide, which warmly invites you to view uncertainty from a new perspective - not as a problem, but as an opportunity to see it as a valuable resource.

This guide has been developed as part of the TRIC project (Towards Innovative Communities: Making Uncertainty Productive), an Erasmus+ funded collaboration between eleven partners from five countries.

The aim of the TRIC project is to identify and strengthen uncertainty competence across different educational and professional life transitions. In this guide, uncertainty competence refers to the ability to navigate, interpret, and act in uncertain situations in a constructive and productive way. It can be understood as a combination of knowledge, skills, and responsibility that can be developed and learned through experience, reflection, and practice. Within the project, a range of tools are being developed, tested, and piloted to support approaching uncertainty as a resource. This guide is one of the first deliverables made during the first year of the project. The content is based on iterative joint work of the project partners including extensive literature reviews, workshops, data collection, and interviews. Also, internal and external reviews were done to test the guide.

The primary target group of this guide consists of educators, trainers, mentors, and guidance professionals working in educational organisations and workplace learning environments. The guide is designed to support those who help learners navigate uncertainty, transitions, and complex learning journeys. In this guide, the term learner is used broadly to refer to students, adult learners, trainees, employees participating in learning processes, and individuals navigating educational or professional transitions.

In today's rapidly changing world, both educators and learners need practical ways to navigate environments that are often unpredictable. To support this need, the guide approaches uncertainty through interconnected chapters, each offering a different perspective on uncertainty and uncertainty competence.

After the introduction, the second chapter introduces several perspectives on the psychology of transitions and change. This guide addresses the following transitions:

- VET (Vocational Education and Training) to HE (Higher Education)
- School to work
- Work to school
- Culture to culture
- One life stage to another

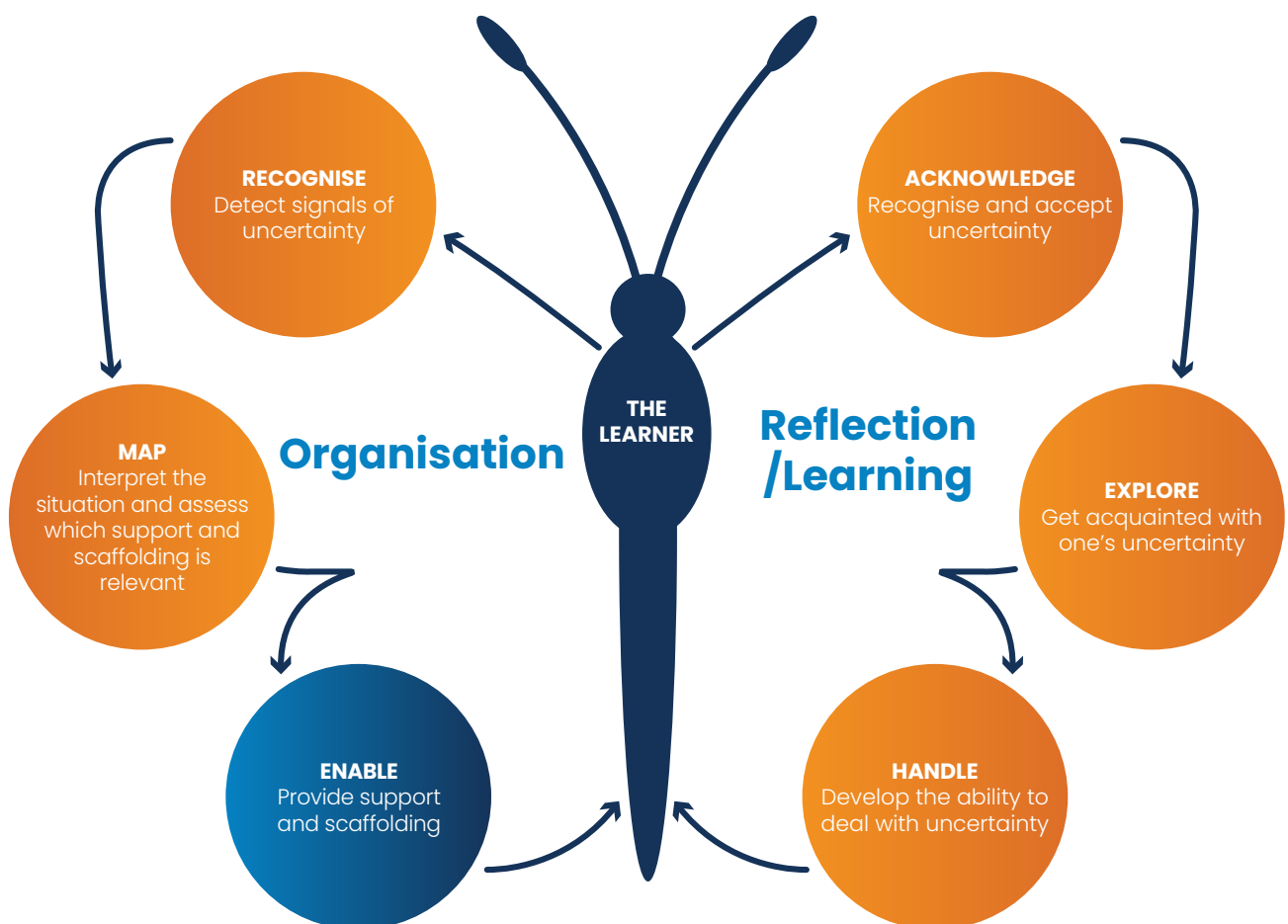
The aim of this chapter is to stimulate interest in and deepen understanding of the experiences that typically arise during periods of change.

The third chapter presents analyses of the five transition contexts explored in the TRIC project. Based on group and individual interviews, the analyses examine how uncertainty is experienced, navigated, and supported by learners and guidance professionals across different transitions.

The fourth chapter introduces the Butterfly Framework which is designed to support how learners and organisations work with uncertainty across different transitions. It builds on the idea of "uncertainty competence".

The fifth chapter presents a set of practical case examples that illustrate how uncertainty appears in transition situations and how it can be navigated. The chapter takes a practical and experiential perspective, highlighting real-life situations and approaches drawn from partner organisations' experiences.

The guide focuses on three transition phases identified in the framework (VET to HE, school to work, and work to school), as these are the most studied transitions at this stage of the TRIC project. In addition, two further transition phases, culture-to-culture and one life stage to another transitions - are introduced as relevant areas, although they will be explored further as the project continues.



## 02 Navigating transitions – A psychological perspective

Transitions are a natural and inevitable part of our educational and professional lives. They occur when individuals move between different roles, environments, or expectations – such as from secondary to higher education, from studies to working life and vice versa, or across cultures and life situations.

While these transitions are often described as structural changes, they are also deeply psychological processes. While this chapter primarily focuses on individual psychological processes, it is essential to recognize the contextual nature of transition experiences.

Individuals do not experience transitions in isolation; their interpretations, opportunities, challenges, and resources are shaped by the social, cultural, educational, and organisational environments in which the transition takes place.

In this guide, we focus on five types of transitions related to educational and professional life:

1. VET to higher education
2. School to work
3. Work to school
4. One life stage to another
5. Culture to culture

Although these transitions differ in context, they share similar psychological dynamics. Understanding these dynamics can help educators, learners, and organisations better support individuals in navigating change.

### What happens psychologically in transitions

From a psychological perspective, transitions involve more than adapting to new tasks or environments. They require individuals to re-evaluate their identity, sense of competence, and belonging.

During these periods, familiar routines may disappear; expectations can feel unclear, and individuals may experience heightened uncertainty and self-doubt. At the same time, transitions also open opportunities for growth, learning, and redefinition of one's goals and values.

Across different contexts, many transitions share common psychological features. These include:

- Uncertainty and ambiguity, as individuals face unfamiliar expectations
- Identity work, as people reconsider who they are and where they belong
- Emotional fluctuation, including stress, excitement, and insecurity
- The need for understanding, reflection, reinterpretation, and meaning-making
- The importance and need for support and guidance, both formal and informal

In the following, these themes are explored in relation to different types of transitions examined in the TRIC project.

# Uncertainty and ambiguity in transitions

Transitions are something we all encounter in life. They are a natural part of the life course, yet at the same time they challenge us in many ways.

It is very human that transitions raise questions about what lies ahead – and whether I am enough in this new situation. These experiences are often closely tied to a temporary weakening in one's sense of competence or control. Uncertainty is not an exception, but rather a central feature of transitions.

Transitions often evoke mixed and even contradictory emotions. A person may feel both excitement and stress or anxiety, hope and despair, or willingness to move forward and hesitation in relation to the same situation. This can be confusing and, at times, even paralysing or overwhelming.

From a psychological perspective, recognizing and allowing these coexisting and even conflicting emotions can be relieving. When individuals no longer need to spend energy on resisting or questioning their own reactions — for example, thinking “I shouldn't feel this way” or “this doesn't make sense” — that energy becomes available for coping, problem-solving, and moving forward.

Understanding that ambiguity is a natural part of transitions can therefore reduce inner conflict. Rather than signaling that something is wrong, conflicting emotions often reflect the meaningfulness and complexity of the situation. Making space for this complexity and reflecting on it is, in itself, an important step in navigating uncertainty.

## Identity work and questions of belonging

From a psychological perspective, transitions are not only about adapting to new tasks or environments. They also involve identity work: a need to reconsider who we are, where we belong, and how we see our place in the world.

Transitions are always connected to an individual's life history. They do not occur in isolation; often, several changes take place at the same time. In addition, previous transition experiences are easily reactivated – often without conscious awareness. This may be felt as a vague sense of anxiety or strain.

Especially when something has remained unresolved in earlier transitions – such as experiences related to belonging or incomplete psychosocial developmental tasks – the current transition may bring these back on an experiential level.

For example:

- The transition to higher education may strongly connect to earlier school experiences and peer relationships
- The transition from school to work may echo earlier processes of separation and becoming independent

If a person has had traumatic or negative experiences in e.g. previous educational or professional settings, for example experiences of bullying, it is almost inevitable that these experiences will, in some form, be reactivated in the person's inner experience when transitioning to a new setting. Recognizing these experiences and reflecting on their impact, either with professional help or through supportive conversations, is essential.

At the same time, these connections to past experiences can be valuable. Reflecting on previous transitions may deepen self-understanding and help identify both effective and less effective ways of coping.

## Emotional fluctuation and psychological load

Transitions almost always involve emotional fluctuation. In the same situation, one may experience excitement, hope, uncertainty, stress, and feelings of insecurity – sometimes simultaneously. This fluctuation is normal and an inherent part of change.

The psychological load of transitions is closely linked to the fact that they can temporarily challenge the fulfilment of basic psychological needs. These include:

- Autonomy (a sense of volition, agency, and the experience of acting in accordance with one's own values)
- Competence (a sense of effectiveness, capability, and being able to manage tasks and challenges)
- Relatedness (a sense of belonging, connectedness, and being part of a community)

The adequate fulfilment of these needs is essential for well-being, learning, and building and maintaining motivation. When transitions disrupt these experiences — for example, when one feels uncertain about one's abilities, disconnected from others, or unable to influence one's situation — the transition may become psychologically more demanding.

There are numerous opportunities to support the fulfilment of these basic psychological needs, provided that organisations recognize their significance. Such an approach can ease the challenges associated with transitions and support individuals' well-being, motivation, and sense of agency. These principles can be translated into concrete and practical measures within education, guidance, and workplace settings.

Considering the relationship between motivation and the fulfilment of basic needs, it is therefore not surprising that motivation may also fluctuate during transitions. This can be a confusing experience, especially if the transition has been anticipated and desired.

On one hand, transitions can initiate change; on the other hand, they require energy and sustained effort to rebuild a sense of competence, re-establish meaningful connections, and regain a sense of agency in a new situation.

However, transitions are not only burdensome. They also often carry expectations of change and opportunities for growth.

It is important to keep in mind that individuals experience transitions in different ways depending on the circumstances of the transition itself, such as whether it is self-initiated or externally imposed, as well as on their physical and psychological well-being, life circumstances, and the wider social context. In some cases, transitions may be experienced as traumatic and may appear overwhelming.

In these situations, access to appropriate support becomes particularly important. Support can help individuals process their change, strengthen their coping resources, and create conditions in which the transition can gradually be understood not only as a source of difficulty but also as an opportunity for learning, adaptation, and personal growth.

## The need for understanding, reflection, reinterpretation, and meaning-making

Transitions highlight the role of interpretation: our experiences are shaped not only by what happens, but by how we make sense of it. Our thinking is not merely observation, but interpretation built on previous experiences.

Especially in stressful situations, thinking tends to become more rigid and automatic, and our perspective may narrow. We may, for example, interpret a situation immediately as a threat or as a sign of failure.

A key skill in transitions is the ability to pause and reflect on one's own thinking:

- What am I telling myself about this situation?
- Why am I telling this "story" to myself?
- Could this be understood in another way?

For instance, the thought "this is frightening" may be complemented by another perspective: "this is also an opportunity."

This kind of flexible meaning-making does not mean denying difficult emotions. Rather, it involves building alternative interpretations alongside them. It is a skill that requires practice – and often also the support of others.

## The importance of support and guidance, both formal and informal

The need for support and guidance is a central part of transitions. This support can be both formal (e.g., counselling, education) and informal (e.g., conversations with others).

Talking about uncertainty and normalising it is important. When uncertainty and related emotions are put into words, these become more understandable and shareable.

Talking involves sharing – and especially in demanding situations, we need other people. Through interaction, it becomes more possible to:

- Make visible that transition-related experiences are common
- Recognize one's own thinking and behavioral patterns
- Construct new meanings for the situation

In education, guidance, and working life, it is possible to intentionally build a climate where uncertainty can be experienced and expressed. Such a culture of dialogue not only supports individuals but also creates a sense of community and reduces feelings of being alone.

At the same time, it enables shared reflection and co-regulation, where others help us to make sense of our experiences and discover new perspectives.

## Understanding transitions through TRIC interview experiences

The psychological phenomena described above – uncertainty, identity work, emotional fluctuation, the need for understanding and reflecting, re-interpretation, and re-meaning-making and the need for support and interaction – are present in different ways across all transitions. However, they do not appear in identical forms; rather, they take shape depending on the context of the transition and the individual's background and characteristics.

In the following, these themes are examined more closely through interview data collected in the TRIC project. The interviews provide insight into how individuals themselves describe their experiences across the five transitions outlined above – what kinds of challenges, meanings, and resources are embedded in their accounts, and how these psychological processes shape the lived experience of transitions in everyday life.

Reference:

"The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior

Edward L. Deci & Richard M. Ryan

Pages 227-268 | Published online: 19 Nov 2009

[https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01)

## 03 Uncertainty as an experience in different transition phases and ways to support learners

This part of the guidebook presents analyses of the five different transition contexts explored within the TRIC project: Vocational Education and Training (VET) to Higher Education (HE), School to Work, Work to School, Culture to Culture and Life stage to Another.

The analysis is based on qualitative data from in depth focus group interviews with a result of more than 25 datasets and participation from more than 66 people. Participants include learners, teachers, trainers and guidance counselors, psychologists and career and recruitment specialists from different educational institutions and private companies across 5 different countries.

The purpose is to understand lived experiences of uncertainty in the five different transition points, and to identify context-specific support needs. This to ensure that the framework presented in the next chapter is grounded in practice and real-life experience, not only theory.

However, the amount of data collected varies, and some transitions are analyzed based on smaller datasets than others. In addition, the knowledge and insights we gain about the different transitions are influenced by the context in which each transition takes place. The findings should therefore be understood as exploratory insights into experiences of uncertainty within the specific transition contexts, rather than as generalized conclusions.

The chapter is concluded with a comparison of similarities and differences between the transitions before moving to the chapter presenting the framework.

## VET to HE

Three focus group interviews were conducted with both learners and teachers. The interviews explored transitions from VET into HE and focused on how uncertainty is experienced, handled, and reduced during this transition. In total, 8 participants contributed to the interviews.

### **How is uncertainty experienced?**

The transition from VET to HE is experienced by many learners as both an opportunity and a source of uncertainty. Through interviews, learners describe uncertainty as connected to academic expectations, identity, independence, and lack of information. Several learners expressed concern about the gap between the practical orientation of VET and the theoretical demands of university.

One learner explained:

*"What scares me most are subjects like Maths and Physics because we didn't take the Bachillerato."* (the traditional academic upper secondary pathway).

Another who had already transitioned to university described the experience as a *"methodological shock,"* where *"months of freedom"* suddenly became overwhelming before exams.

Uncertainty is also experienced socially and emotionally. Learner's fear becoming anonymous in large university environments and doubt whether they are academically capable. A learner described the feeling that:

*"If I ask a teacher, they look at me and don't even know who I am."*

Teachers similarly observed that learners often move from being among the best in school to questioning themselves in higher education. One teacher noted that:

*"They may feel that this is not for them... they start having internal crises."*

### **How is uncertainty handled?**

To handle uncertainty, learners rely heavily on proactive information seeking and peer- and family networks. Learners described using *"the internet, ChatGPT, and friends"* to understand university life. Others emphasized that uncertainty is managed through trial and error. One explained:

*"I failed quite a few exams initially, which forced me to change my approach."*

Support from peers, siblings, and family members is particularly important because institutional guidance is often perceived as too administrative and insufficient.

## **Support and scaffolding**

The analyses point to several important support and scaffolding approaches. Learners need clear and accessible information about university expectations, study structures, and assessment methods. Teachers highlight the importance of predictability, mentoring, structured feedback, and opportunities for reflection. Learners also emphasize the need for earlier orientation activities, practical examples, and stronger peer-support systems.

Practical laboratory work is experienced as especially supportive because it connects to familiar VET learning practices.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the interviews show that uncertainty in the VET to HE transitions is not a problem to eliminate but a condition learners must gradually learn to navigate. Supportive relationships, clear structures, experiential learning, and gradual increases in independence are therefore central elements in helping learners develop uncertainty competence.

# School to Work

Six focus group interviews were conducted with both learners and teachers. The interviews explored transitions from school to work and focused on how uncertainty is experienced, handled, and reduced during this transition. In total, 25 participants contributed to the interviews.

## **How is uncertainty experienced?**

The transition from school to work is experienced by many learners as a significant and often emotionally demanding life change. Across the interviews, uncertainty is connected not only to employment and career opportunities, but also to identity, belonging, responsibility, and adulthood. Several learners describe the transition as moving from a familiar and structured educational environment into an unknown world with new expectations and pressures. One learner explained:

*"It was very scary... going from not having worked for months and then suddenly you're going to wake up and go to work."*

Similarly, learners from VET described fear of entering workplaces where they did not yet understand the hierarchy, culture, or expectations.

Uncertainty is often experienced emotionally as fear, anxiety, self-doubt, and pressure regarding future choices. A learner expressed uncertainty about career direction by saying:

*"I am not completely sure, yet what I want most."*

Other learners feared making irreversible mistakes or not being qualified enough for working life. Learners from university approaching the labour market also described frustration about unrealistic employer expectations, with one stating:

*"They expect experience from people who have just graduated."*

Financial insecurity and fear of unemployment further intensified uncertainty.

### **How is uncertainty handled?**

To handle uncertainty, learners rely on both proactive and emotional coping strategies. Many learners actively seek information, practice job interviews, build networks, and gain work experience early. One learner explained:

*"I go to job interviews — I practice them."*

Others emphasized networking and relational support:

*"Networks don't form on the graduation day - we should build them during studies."*

At the same time, some learners cope by avoiding thinking too much about the future or by relying on the belief that *"something will work out"*.

### **Support and scaffolding**

The analyses highlight the importance of structured support and scaffolding during the transition. Learners request clearer guidance about career paths, contracts, labour market expectations, and available opportunities. Mentoring, individual conversations, and role models are repeatedly emphasized as important forms of support. Learners also stress the value of practical experiences such as internships, workplace visits, and gradual exposure to responsibility. One highlighted the importance of gradual transition by describing how starting work only two days a week reduced stress and made the transition manageable.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the interviews show that uncertainty in the school-to-work transition is both structural and emotional. Supportive relationships, practical experiences, individualized guidance, and gradual increases in responsibility are central in helping learners navigate uncertainty and develop confidence in their future pathways.

## **Work to School**

Three focus group interviews were conducted with learners and teachers. The interviews explored transitions from working life into higher education and focused on how uncertainty is experienced, handled, and reduced during this transition. In total 9 participants contributed to the interviews.

## How is uncertainty experienced?

Across the interviews, uncertainty was described as more than an academic challenge. Both learners and teachers explained that transitioning from work to education affects finances, routines, identity, and social belonging. Learners described uncertainty beginning even before the studies started because admission decisions came late, creating stress around resigning from jobs and reorganizing everyday life. One learner explained:

*"You get the answer so late. It's really hard."*

Financial insecurity was one of the strongest sources of uncertainty. Learners worried about moving from salary to student support while still managing everyday expenses. Teachers also observed that the learners often feel pressure connected to family responsibilities and future employment. Concerns about internships and career opportunities played a central role in the transition.

Learners also described uncertainty related to adapting to a new life rhythm. Several explained that student life differs from work because responsibilities continue outside the classroom through assignments and self-directed study. One learner stated:

*"At work you're off when you're off."*

Returning learners have also experienced insecurity connected to digitalization and unfamiliar digital learning systems.

## How is uncertainty handled?

Both teachers and learners described structure and clarity as important ways of managing uncertainty. Teachers observed that learners actively ask questions, seek clear plans, and want examples that help them understand expectations. Learners similarly described building new routines and learning to balance time, energy, finance, and study demands.

Managing uncertainty also involves self-regulation and gradual adaptation to a new educational identity. Learners described developing strategies for coping with stress and maintaining balance in everyday life. Teachers emphasized that uncertainty decreases when learners feel psychologically safe and understand that doubt and mistakes are normal parts of learning.

## Support and scaffolding

Supportive relationships and clear structures were identified as essential. Teachers highlighted the importance of teacher–learner relationships, development conversations, alumni role models, and safe learning environments where it is "safe to fail." Learners emphasized support from family, partners, friends, and peers. Everyday peer practices such as sharing notes and helping each other functioned as important "safety nets."

Scaffolding approaches included clear frameworks, practical examples, company visits, and support with digital systems and assessment formats. Both learners and teachers stressed that relatable role models and visible success stories helped normalize uncertainty and created confidence that the transition into higher education was manageable.

## Conclusion

The interviews show that uncertainty in the transition from work to education is closely linked to finances, identity, responsibility, and belonging. Clear expectations, supportive relationships, and structured guidance help reduce uncertainty and support learners in adapting to new educational environments and routines.

## Culture to Culture

Two focus group interviews have been conducted: one with learners and one with guidance counsellors. In total, four participants took part in the interviews.

The focus group interviews explored how newly arrived migrant students experience and manage uncertainty when entering the Spanish educational system. The interviews included two vocational students and two experienced guidance counsellors.

### How is uncertainty experienced?

The students described uncertainty as closely connected to moving to a new country, adapting to a different culture, and entering an unfamiliar educational system. One learner explained:

*"For me, it felt like the end of the world because I thought I was going to fail."*

Fear of exclusion and rejection also shaped the experience:

*"I was very afraid that they would exclude me."*

The counsellors emphasized that uncertainty increases because learners lose their familiar support systems while also having to navigate a new school structure and a bilingual environment. As one counsellor explained, students discover that *"it is not one language they have to learn, but two"*. Uncertainty was also linked to future opportunities, internships, and official accreditation.

### How is uncertainty handled?

The interviews highlighted curiosity, initiative, and resilience as important ways of handling uncertainty. One learner emphasized the importance of asking questions:

*"I would say that they should inform themselves well. That they ask questions, that they don't stay with the doubt."*

The counsellors similarly described willingness to learn and ask for help as factors that can support learners in navigating the transition. However, these individual strategies should be understood in relation to the educational and social context in which the transition takes place. The interviews also show that learners' opportunities to manage uncertainty are supported by access to guidance, language support, teachers, administrative staff, peers, and family.

Adaptation was described as gradual:

*"At first it was hard, but in the end you adapt."*

The learners also showed determination to improve their situation despite uncertainty:

*“Look, I want to improve my living conditions and well, I’m going to try, and here I am.”*

### **Support and scaffolding**

Support from teachers, administrative staff, peers, and family played a central role in reducing uncertainty. The learners described how help with paperwork and positive relationships with classmates and teachers made adaptation easier.

The counsellors highlighted introductory classes and peer support as important scaffolding approaches. Linguistic volunteering and gradual educational progression were seen as valuable ways to help students build confidence and integrate socially and academically.

### **Conclusion**

The interviews indicate that, for the newly arrived migrant students, uncertainty was strongly connected to language barriers, unfamiliar educational systems, and the loss of familiar support systems. Learners described resilience, curiosity, and active help-seeking as ways of navigating this uncertainty, while the interviews also highlighted the importance of support from teachers, guidance counsellors, administrative staff, peers, and family.

The findings therefore suggest that, in this specific culture-to-culture transition, navigating uncertainty involves an interaction between individual strategies and the support available in the learner’s educational and social environment. Given the small number of participants, these findings should be understood as exploratory insights into this specific transition context rather than as general conclusions.

## **Life Stage to Another**

Interviews for the transition ‘Life stage to Another’ included learners, trainers, guidance professionals in transition between education, training, unemployment, and work. The interviewees represented different educational and vocational pathways, including apprenticeship training, production schools, adult compulsory education, and transitions into employment.

In total 20 participants contributed to the interviews.

### **How is uncertainty experienced?**

Across the interviews, uncertainty was closely connected to transitions into unfamiliar educational and work environments. Learners described fear, anxiety, insecurity, and self-doubt when moving from school, unemployment, or inactivity into training or employment. One learner explained:

*“I had mostly only negative expectations... I had the fear that I would be judged here.”*

Another learner described entering work after a long period without structure as:

*“Very scary.”*

Trainers and guidance professionals observed that uncertainty was often intensified by a lack of orientation, previous negative experiences, and fear of failure. Some learners struggled with performance pressure and low self-confidence, while others feared they would not meet expectations in school or work settings. Trainers described how some learners felt that “no one believes in me,” which influenced their confidence in their own abilities.

Uncertainty was also connected to future choices and identity. Learners worried about entering unknown workplaces, fitting into social environments, or making the “wrong” educational or career decision. One learner described uncertainty as “anxiety and pressure,” while another questioned:

*“What if I chose wrong?”*

Language barriers, previous school dropouts, and repeated rejections in apprenticeship applications also increased feelings of frustration and helplessness.

### **How is uncertainty handled?**

The interviews highlighted resilience, openness, and persistence as important ways of handling uncertainty. Learners described learning to “not get stressed so quickly” and gradually accepting that confusion and insecurity are part of transitions and learning processes.

Learners used different coping strategies such as sports, gaming, talking with friends or family members, and focused on gradual progress rather than immediate success. Trainers emphasized the importance of transparency and clearly explaining expectations, routines, and goals. Several learners also described coping through a mindset that “something will work out”. Reflection and understanding that decisions are not permanent help reduce pressure connected to educational and career choices.

### **Support and scaffolding**

Supportive relationships were described as essential for managing uncertainty. Learners emphasized the importance of trainers, colleagues, peers, and family members who provided encouragement, emotional support, and practical guidance. Learners also valued supportive workplaces and patient learning environments where they could develop confidence gradually.

Scaffolding approaches included gradual responsibility, internships, structured routines, practical learning, and supportive educational settings. Practical experience helped reduce fear by making unfamiliar situations more manageable. Trainers also used visible progress tools and internships to help learners experience success and develop self-confidence. Learners highlighted the importance of individualized guidance and support that could *“help me find my strengths and values.”*

### **Conclusion**

The interviews show that uncertainty is experienced both as a structural challenge connected to education and employment systems and as an emotional experience related to identity, confidence, and belonging. Supportive relationships, gradual transitions, and individualized guidance play an important role in helping learners navigate uncertainty and build confidence in future educational and vocational pathways.

## Summary of findings across transitions

Across the five transition analyses, uncertainty emerges as a shared and fundamental experience connected to entering unfamiliar educational, social, and professional environments. Although the transitions differ – from VET to HE, school to work, work to school, culture to culture, and life stage to another transitions – the participants consistently describe uncertainty as involving self-doubt, pressure, fear and concerns about belonging, identity, and future opportunities. Learners across all contexts expressed insecurity about whether they would meet expectations, fit into new environments, or make the “right” decisions regarding education and career pathways. At the same time, the analyses show that uncertainty is not only an individual challenge, but also shaped by structural conditions such as unfamiliar systems, unclear expectations, financial insecurity, language barriers, and changing social roles.

Across all five transitions, learners handled uncertainty through proactive information-seeking, social support, reflection, and gradual adaptation. Learners relied heavily on peers, family members, teachers, mentors, and guidance professionals to reduce feelings of isolation and to create orientation in unfamiliar situations. Many learners also described learning through trial and error, resilience, and gradually accepting that uncertainty, doubt, and mistakes are natural parts of learning and transition processes.

The analyses further show similarities in the types of support and scaffolding that help learners navigate uncertainty. Across all transitions, clear structures, transparency, and explicit expectations were emphasized as important. The importance of accessible information, guidance, communication, and well-structured learning environments is also highlighted.

At the same time, some differences between the transitions become visible. In the Culture to Culture study, which focused on newly arrived migrant students entering a new educational system, uncertainty was strongly connected to language barriers, belonging, and navigating unfamiliar educational systems. Here, linguistic support, intercultural sensitivity, reflective practices, and safe environments are emphasized, where learners feel welcomed and included. In the Life Stage to Another transition, uncertainty is more closely related to identity, self-confidence, previous experiences, and adapting to changing life conditions.

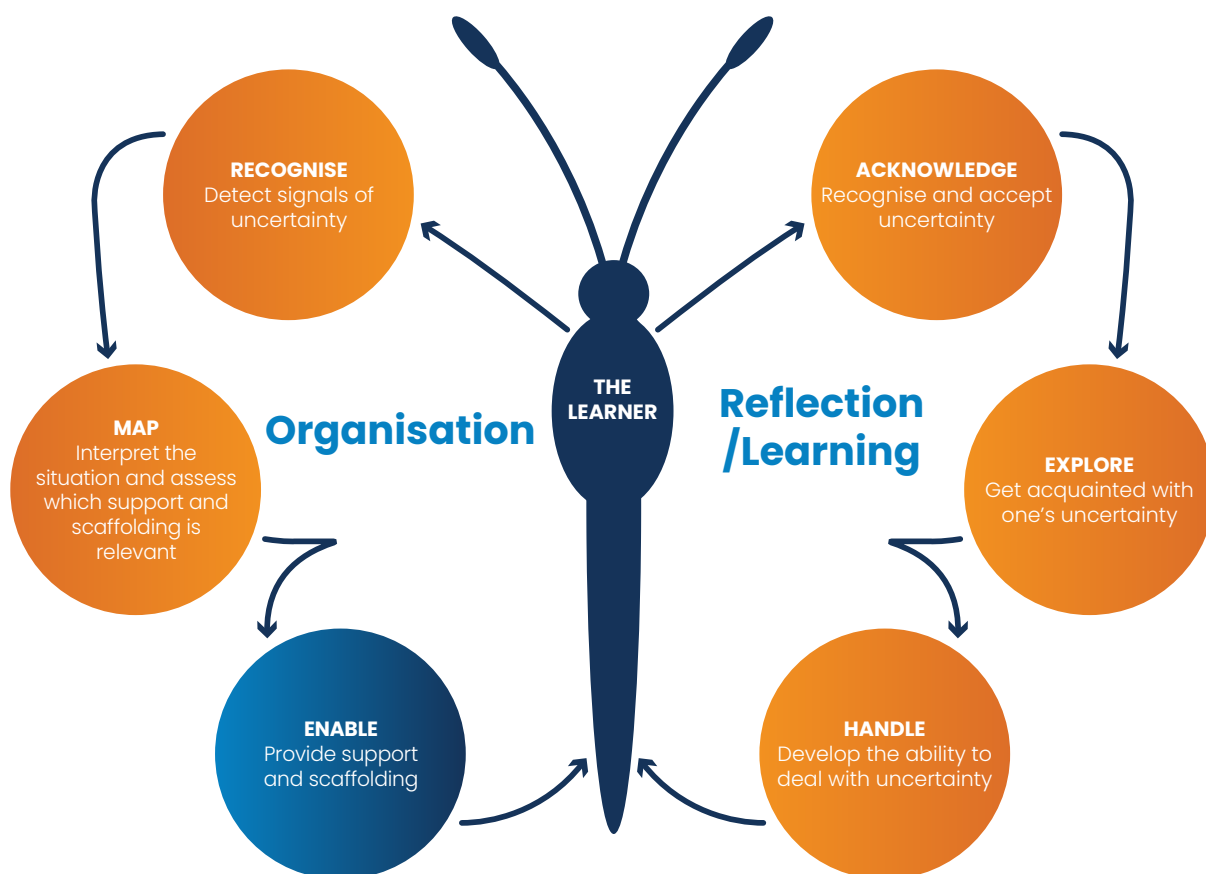
Overall, the analyses demonstrate a high degree of consistency across the five transitions. Regardless of context, uncertainty is experienced as both emotional and structural, while supportive relationships, practical experiences, dialogue, peer communities, and clear scaffolding approaches help learners gradually develop confidence and uncertainty competence.

The findings across the five transitions provide an important foundation for the Framework presented in the next chapter. They show that uncertainty is shaped by both individual experiences and the educational, social, and organizational contexts in which transitions take place. At the same time, the analyses highlight the importance of learners’ own reflection and actions as well as the support, structures, and relationships provided by their environment. Building on these insights, the Framework translates the findings into a practical approach for recognizing, exploring, and working with uncertainty. The next chapter introduces the framework and shows how it can support both learners and organizations in navigating uncertainty in transitions.

## 04 TRIC Butterfly Framework

The Butterfly Framework is a practical framework for working with uncertainty in transitions. It helps learners, teachers, trainers, mentors, counsellors, communities and organisations recognise uncertainty, explore what it means in a specific situation, and identify relevant forms of support. In the Butterfly Framework, a learner is understood broadly as a person experiencing a transition, not only as a student in formal education.

The framework is based on the idea that uncertainty should not only be reduced or avoided. Instead, uncertainty can become productive when learners are supported in understanding, reflecting on and acting in uncertain situations. The butterfly illustrates the relationship between the learner's own reflection and the support provided by the organisation or learning environment.



### Purpose

The butterfly framework supports working constructively with uncertainty.

### Focus:

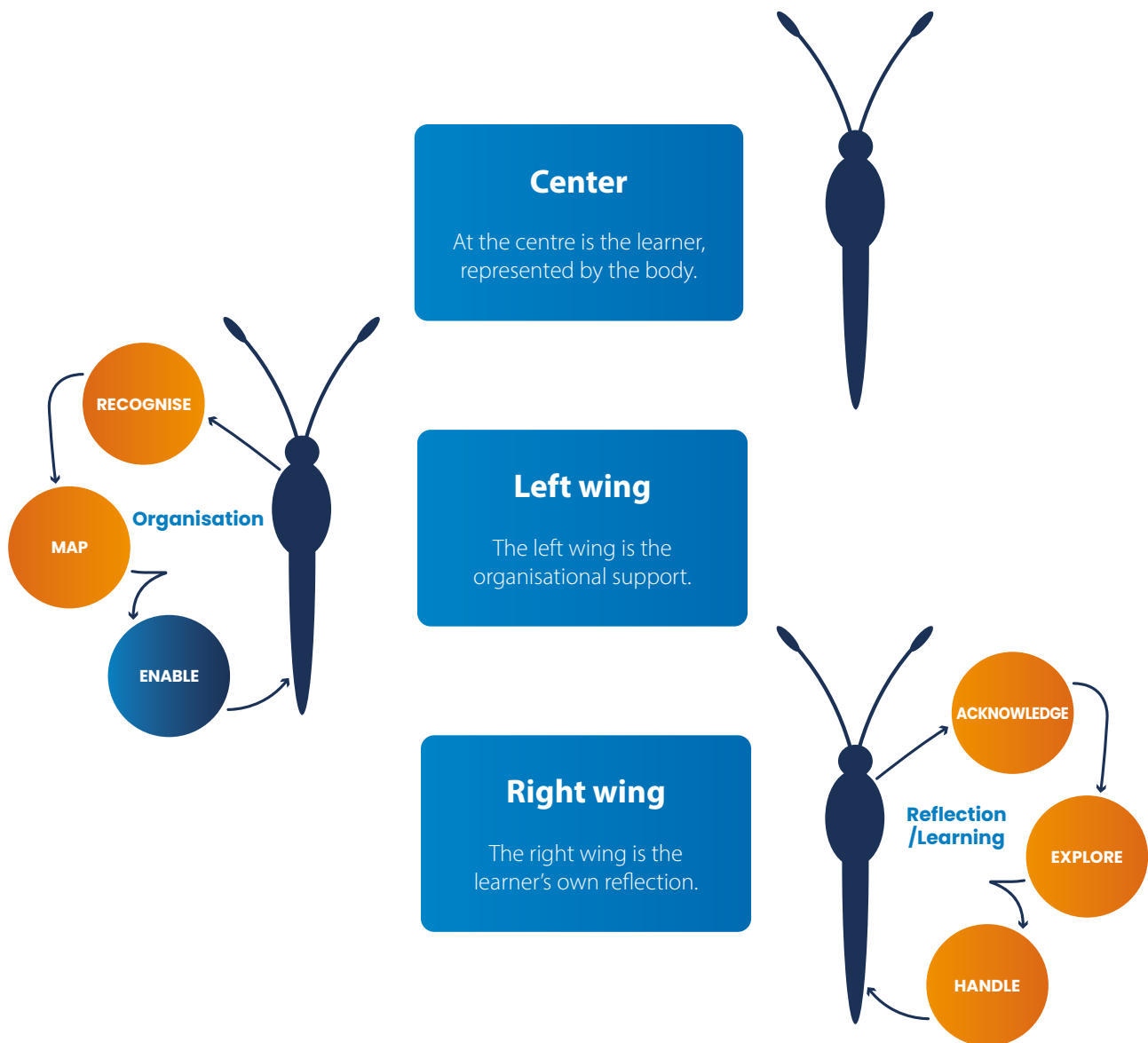
- Uncertainty in transitions
- VET to higher education
- School to work
- Work to school
- Culture to culture
- One life stage to another

### Who is it for?

Learners, teachers, trainers, mentors, counsellors, communities and organisations

The learner is placed at the centre of the model. The right wing represents the learner's reflection and learning process, while the left wing represents organisational support, structures, tools and relationships.

In order to "fly", both wings are needed. The learner's own reflection and learning must be supported by organisational practices, tools and relationships.



## Menus as a practical tool

The framework also includes a number of menus, developed through an extensive literature review and focus group interviews. The menus are practical tools that support the use of the Butterfly Framework by helping users identify what may be relevant to work with in a specific transition, both from the learner's perspective and from the organisation's perspective.

The framework includes a core menu, which contains elements relevant across all transitions, and a transition-specific menu for each transition, focusing on the particular aspects that may arise in that context.

A menu is not a checklist that must be completed from beginning to end. It is a flexible set of elements that can be selected, combined and adapted depending on the learner, the transition and the organisational context.

The menu can for instance be used to start a conversation, identify areas for reflection or decide where support may be needed.

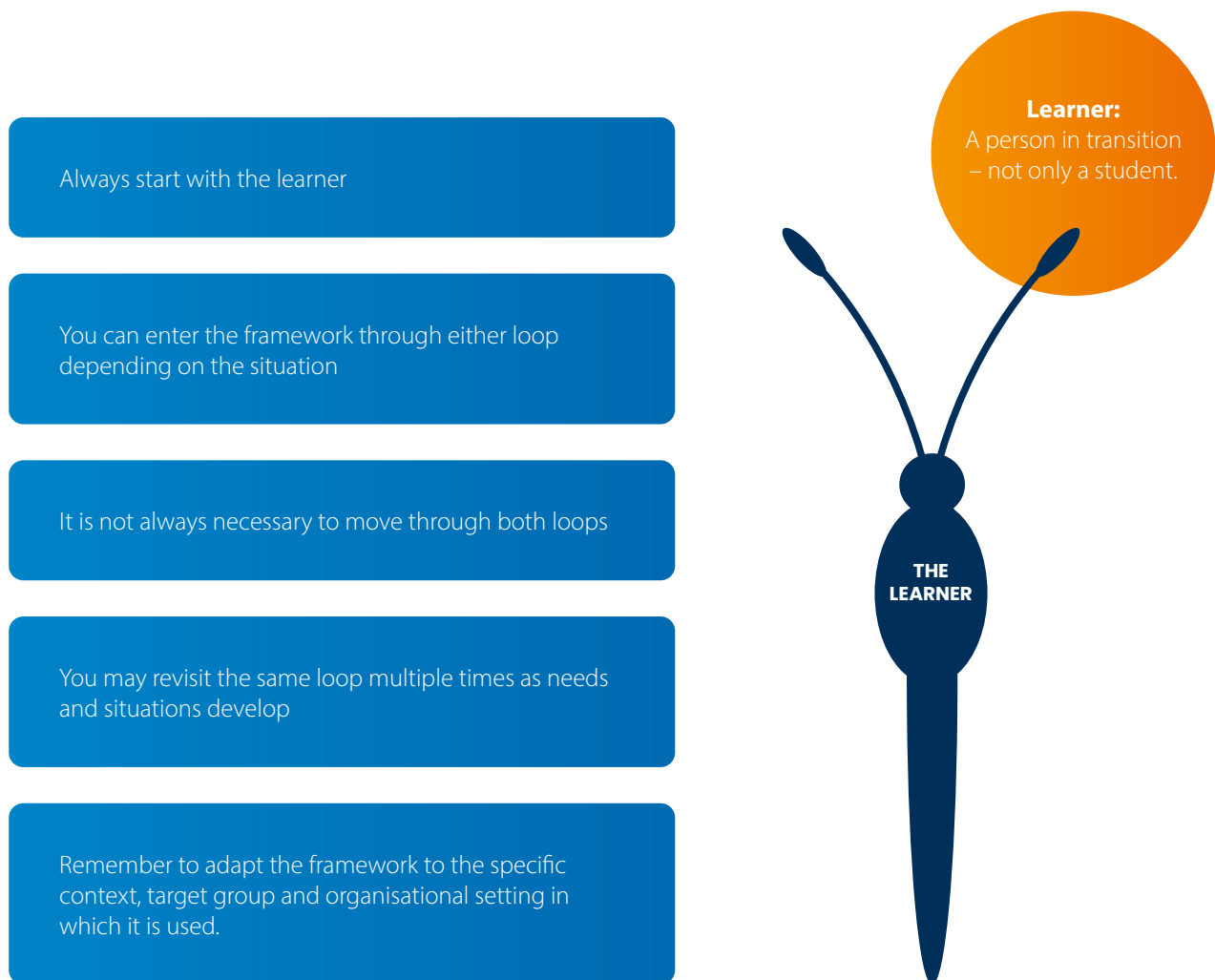
The menus can be found in the appendix at the end of the guide.

## How to use the Butterfly Framework

The Butterfly Framework can be used flexibly. Depending on the situation, users may begin with either the learner's reflection process or the organisational support process.

The framework should be adapted to the context, target group and organisational setting in which it is used.

It is not always necessary to move through both loops. In some situations, the learner may mainly need support for reflection. In other situations, the organisation may need to adjust its support structures, guidance practices or learning environment.



## The organisational loop

The organisational loop focuses on how teachers, trainers, mentors, counsellors or organisations can recognise and respond to uncertainty.

First, the organisation recognises signs of uncertainty. These may be identified through everyday observations, such as withdrawal, hesitation, lack of participation, stress, confusion or difficulties in navigating expectations, but also through indicators such as wellbeing surveys, dropout rates, high absenteeism and other relevant data.

Second, the organisation maps the situation together with the learner or learner group. Third, the organisation enables relevant support and scaffolding, for example through guidance, peer support, clearer structures, mentoring or adapted learning activities.

The aim is not to remove uncertainty completely, but to make it manageable and productive.

## Support and scaffolding - examples from the menus

| Support - How organisations can support learners                   | Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Provide clear information on expectations, structures and pathways | Facilitate reflection on learning, goals and decisions             |
| Offer tools for planning and navigating pathways                   | Adjust support and gradually increase independence                 |
| Create opportunities for peer interaction and networking           | Enable active choice and participation in learning                 |
| Enable safe and supportive learning environments                   | Clarify expectations regarding courses, assignments and assessment |

### Scaffolding:

Structured support that helps learners reach a goal they cannot yet achieve independently. The support is gradually reduced as the learner becomes more confident.



# The reflection and learning loop

The reflection and learning loop focuses on how the learner experiences and works with uncertainty.

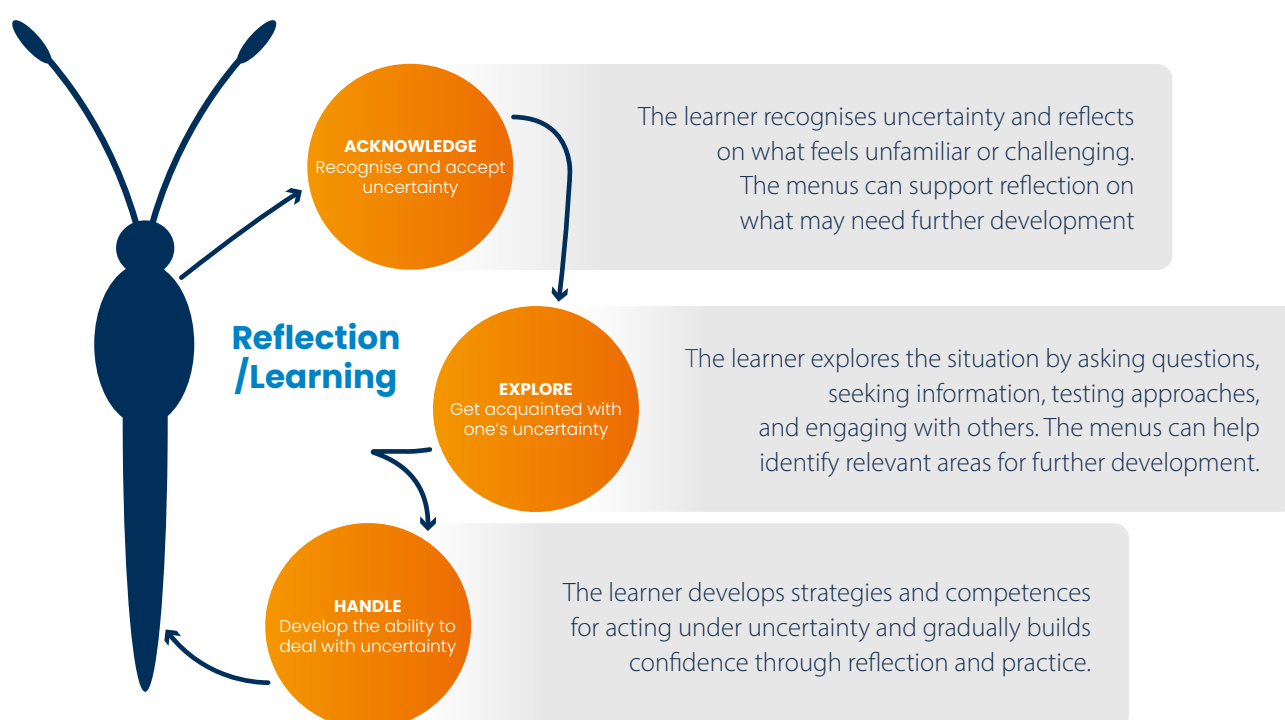
First, the learner acknowledges uncertainty by noticing what feels unfamiliar, unclear or challenging. Second, the learner explores the situation by asking questions, seeking information, talking to others and testing possible strategies.

Third, the learner gradually develops ways of handling uncertainty. This does not mean that uncertainty disappears, but that the learner becomes more able to act and participate in new situations.

Butterfly Framework menus can be used throughout both loops to identify relevant areas for reflection and development.

## Knowledge, skills and responsibility examples from the menus

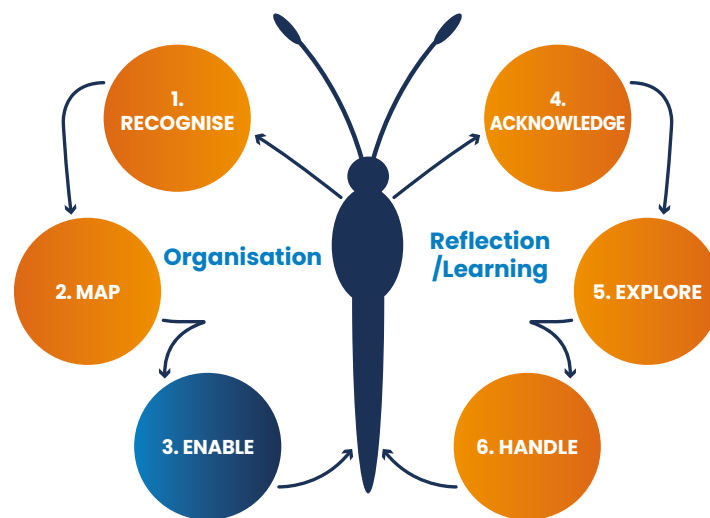
| Knowledge: I know/ I understand/ I'm aware of...      | Skills: I'm able to...                                       | Responsibility: I take initiative to/I choose to...                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| My strengths, support needs and areas for development | Manage my time and priorities                                | Be self-reflective and actively develop my self-efficacy and personal growth |
| Where to seek information and support                 | Communicate and express my thoughts and feelings effectively | Accept uncertainty and setbacks as part of learning                          |
| That not everyone follows the same career path        | Adapt and be flexible.                                       | Ask for help and support                                                     |



# An example of how to use the Butterfly Framework

This example shows how the Butterfly Framework can be used in a concrete transition situation. Peter has moved from VET to higher education. He is uncertain about the less structured academic environment, unclear expectations, his new student role and how to participate socially and academically.

Peter has started higher education after completing VET. He feels uncertain about the less structured academic environment, unclear expectations, his new student role, and how to engage socially and academically.



## 1. Recognise

A lecturer notices that Peter is unusually quiet and less engaged in class discussions. In this phase, the lecturer draws on the Butterfly framework to interpret these signals and recognise that Peter may be experiencing uncertainty related to the transition.

## 4. Acknowledge

Peter begins to recognise that feeling uncertain is a natural part of the transition. In this phase, he engages with the core menu and the VET to HE menu to better understand and accept his situation.

## 2. Map

Peter meets with a study advisor to explore his situation more systematically. Together, they use the core menu and the VET to higher education menu to map his challenges, strengths, and development needs, creating a shared understanding of his situation.

## 5. Explore

Peter explores his uncertainty by asking questions, seeking guidance, and talking with peers and teachers. Using the menus, he identifies development needs and reflects on how his prior VET experience connects with new academic demands.

## 3. Enable

Based on this mapping, the institution activates relevant support. Here, the support and scaffolding menus are used to guide both the types of support offered and how the learning environment is structured to help Peter move forward.

## 6. Handle

Over time, Peter becomes more confident in dealing with uncertainty. In this phase, he continues to draw on what he has learned about knowledge, skills and responsibility to guide his actions and develop his ability to manage new and unfamiliar situations.

The example illustrates how both loops can be activated. On the organisational side, a teacher recognises signs of uncertainty, a study advisor helps map Peter's situation, and the institution enables relevant support. On the learner side, Peter begins to acknowledge his uncertainty, explore his situation and gradually develop strategies for handling the transition.

In Peter's example, a reflection and learning menu from VET to HE includes the following aspects:

## **Knowledge**

### **I understand/ I'm aware of ...**

- How higher education works (assessment systems, course expectations, administrative procedures)
- Differences between VET and HE learning environments
- Academic requirements and theoretical expectations
- Academic strategies

## **Skills**

### **I'm able to...**

- Interpret expectations across different courses
- Adapt and refine learning strategies
- Evaluate and develop my study skills
- Identify and act on opportunities to influence outcomes
- Cope with academic pressure
- Develop a sense of belonging to study community

## **Responsibility**

### **I take initiative to/ I choose to...**

- Be goal-oriented
- Face new challenges
- Be able to adapt
- Be interested in others

In Peter's example, the organisational support includes the following aspects:

## **Support - How organisations can support learners**

### **Structure and Transparency**

- Provide clear and accessible information about university expectations, structures and systems
- Ensure communication goes beyond administrative requirements to include everyday academic practices
- Arrange structured introduction activities
- Provide phased transition models
- Introduce learners to HE learning environments

### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Offer preparatory modules that help bridge theoretical gaps
- Gradually introduce learners to academic expectations
- Train learners in study skills
- Support learners' time management skills development
- Help learners to seek information through peers, internet and digital tools

### **Belonging and Community**

- Create opportunities for interaction between VET learners and HE learners
- Develop mentoring and peer-support programmes
- Help learners build peer relations

### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Strengthen transition guidance between VET and HE

When looking at how a teacher can scaffold learning, Peter's example includes the following aspects:

## **Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning**

### **Structure and Transparency**

- Clarify expectations regarding courses, assignments and assessment
- Ensure clear course structures
- Provide structured guidance in the early stages of transition

### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Gradually increase learners' independence
- Provide learners with opportunities for choice in learning tasks
- Provide continuous constructive feedback on academic performance and study strategies

### **Belonging and Community**

- Facilitate peer support
- Develop meaningful learning activities
- Ensure teaching staff are approachable

### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Facilitate reflection on learning approaches and academic challenges
- Provide learners with opportunities for reflection
- Engage learners in dialogue about their progress, doubts and goals
- Provide learners with constructive feedback
- Create supportive learning environments that reduce fear of failure
- Establish learning environments where learners feel recognized and supported
- Maintain constant and systematic meta level - discussion about normalizing and solving uncertainty issues with learners in daily situations

# 05 Best practice cases - Approaching uncertainty as a resource in learning

This chapter offers insight into how uncertainty can be recognised, faced, explored, and transformed into learning experiences that develop uncertainty-related skills and competences.

The best practice cases presented in this chapter have also contributed to the development of the Butterfly Framework. Therefore, the relationship between the framework and the cases should not be understood as a linear process in which the examples are derived directly from the framework. Rather, the framework and the cases have evolved in dialogue with each other.

The cases represent partners' practical descriptions of existing good practices, learned lessons, experiences, and successful experiments in which uncertainty has been transformed into a strength for learners, educators, or organisations.

These following eight themes illustrate how uncertainty in the cases is present and addressed across the learner journey in different contexts.

- 01:** Before entering studies
- 02-03:** During studies
- 04:** Uncertainty in learning and creativity
- 05:** Curriculum-level responses to uncertainty
- 06:** Transitions back to education across life stages
- 07-08:** Work, networks and societal perspectives

These cases aim to illustrate not only what was done, but also how uncertainty was present, identified, explored, and navigated. This enables both learners and educators to develop agency, resilience, and the ability to move forward in complex situations and transitions.

The main purpose for the reader is to offer inspiration for adapting and trying these experiences in new contexts, transition phases, and learning environments.

# 01 How to study – Preparing students for uncertainty

**Partner:** SEA – Business Academy / Denmark

**Transition phase:** VET to HE

**Core idea:** A short digital pre-course which helps students recognize and normalize uncertainty before starting their studies.

## Context and background

Many students experienced significant uncertainty when transitioning to higher education. This includes students from both upper secondary education and from work life. Uncertainty often arises before the program begins and can lead to withdrawal or a difficult start to study.

*“How to Study”* is a digital preparatory course consisting of four mandatory modules that students complete before starting their studies. Each Module takes approx. 15-20 min. to complete. The course is delivered via digital learning platform and includes interactive, reflective activities and videos from students and teachers.

### Key actors and target groups:

- Students: actively engage and reflect on their transition
- Teachers: follow up and facilitate dialogue
- Student counselling team: support reflection and transition
- Organization (SEA): develop and implements the course

## Uncertainty type

Learners have doubts about their academic ability. Also, uncertainty about social belonging and making friends. Lack of knowledge about expectations and study life. Emotional challenges like anxiety, insecurity and self-doubt.

**Information or knowledge:** Limited understanding of what higher education actually involves. Uncertainty about expectations, academic demands, and study practices. Lack of insight into how to navigate the transition into a new learning environment.

**Skills:** Doubts about their ability to succeed academically. Uncertainty about their capacity to manage independent learning. Lack of confidence in social and study-related skills (e.g. making friends, engaging in class).

**Attitude:** Feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. Fear of not fitting in or not belonging. Hesitation about whether they are “good enough” for higher education. General insecurity about starting something new.

## Signals of uncertainty

- Pre-study anxiety and doubt
- Risk of withdrawal before starting
- Lack of networks to share concerns with
- Hesitation and low confidence about beginning studies

## Exploring uncertainty

Learners were supported by a digital course before study started to address uncertainty early. The course includes:

- Reflective and interactive learning activities
- Video testimonials from current and former students
- Teacher videos clarifying expectations (focus on curiosity, not expertise)
- Strong emphasis on normalising uncertainty
- Follow-up activities during the first week with teachers and counsellors

Uncertainty as a learning opportunity:

Students received and structured activities through the course. This helped reduce feelings of isolation and self-doubt and supported students in continuing despite uncertainty. Students were encouraged to reflect on their own uncertainty. And as being exposed to peer perspectives, it was showing that others share similar concerns. This means an uncertainty is often a shared experience and a starting point for learning.

## Acting under uncertainty

- Uncertainty was normalised through shared experiences
- Students reflected on their own concerns and recognised them in others
- Peer perspectives reduced feelings of isolation
- Structured reflection supported self-awareness and learning readiness
- Students were encouraged to act despite not having full clarity
- This helped transform uncertainty into resilience, confidence, and active engagement

## Outcomes and key learnings

### Outcomes:

Students felt less alone or different in their uncertainty

Improved understanding of study expectations and increased confidence in starting studies.

### Key learnings:

- Uncertainty is reduced when it is shared
- Early interventions support transitions

### Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:

- Normalization of uncertainty
- Emotional regulation
- Reflection and meaning-making
- Acting without full information

## Support toolbox and scaffolding

Key contributors to develop learners' uncertainty competence:

- Structured reflection activities
- Peer-based learning through student testimonials
- Clear expectations from teachers
- Follow-up dialogue and sharing in class
- Accessible digital format before study start

These elements created a safe and supportive learning environment.

## Transferability

This approach can be applied to other educational transitions and onboarding contexts such as:

- Transition from study to internship
- Transition from study to work
- Other educational transitions
- Different learner groups (used in companies as a pre-boarding tool for new employees or other transitions you experience as an employee, for instance from work to retirement)

**Possible limitations to be considered:**

- Requires digital infrastructure and access
- Depends on active participation from students
- Needs contextual adaptation to different educational settings

# 02 Learning through multidisciplinary uncertainty

**Partner:** Turku University of Applied Sciences/Finland

**Transition phase:** Culture to culture

**Core idea:** Real-life, client driven projects in diverse teams develop students' ability to act, collaborate and learn under uncertainty.

## Context and background

Turku University of Applied Sciences organizes a Sustainable Development Project course, where learners work in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams on real-life assignments provided by external clients.

Students take responsibility for both independent and collaborative tasks, strengthen their communication with diverse stakeholders, and learn to evaluate the impact of their work from both learning and sustainability perspectives. The learning process takes place in a diverse team setting, where working practices, communication, and collaboration are shaped by varied backgrounds and perspectives.

The course follows a project-based approach, where students plan, implement, and complete a client-driven assignment while defining team roles and responsibilities. Sustainability is integrated throughout the process, alongside the development of communication and presentation skills. Continuous reflection supports students in assessing their learning, team collaboration, and the broader implications of their work.

### **Key actors and target groups:**

- Students: responsible for planning and executing the project
- Team leader: 3rd year student, who supports teamwork and communication within the group
- Teacher: provides guidance and pedagogical support throughout the process
- Client: provides the project assignment and represents the external stakeholder

### **Uncertainty type**

Students experienced uncertainty related to:

**Information and knowledge:** Learners experienced uncertainty due to several unfamiliar elements in the course. The working language is English, which created a language barrier for some. Sustainable development was a new topic for many, and the project themes did not necessarily relate to students' own fields of study. In addition, the project assignment was distributed randomly and only revealed during the first meeting, which increased ambiguity about the content and expectations.

**Competences and skills:** Students were often unsure about their own competences, particularly as the course took place early in their studies, during the basic studies phase at the beginning of the second academic year. This uncertainty was further heightened by working outside their disciplinary expertise. Although students had prior group work experience, it had typically lacked structured guidance in teamwork and project management, which contributed to their insecurity. Many questioned their ability to succeed ("Can I manage?", "Do I have the skills?", "Will I find my role in the team?").

**Timelines and outcomes:** The short duration of the project (7 weeks) created pressure and uncertainty. There was little time for team formation or orientation, and work had to begin immediately. Group formation was noticeably slower in bilingual teams. This raised concerns about whether meaningful outcomes could be achieved within the given timeframe.

**Social dynamics and reactions:** Working in unfamiliar teams caused social tension and uncertainty. Students did not know their group members beforehand and were unsure about their roles and group expectations. Social anxiety and concerns about fitting in were common. In bilingual teams, language-related challenges further complicated interaction and participation; some students felt unable to perform at their best due to language limitations, and some were even ready to give up for this reason. Additionally, working with an external client for the first time introduced uncertainty about communication, expectations, and feedback.

**Emotional and cognitive challenges:** Emotionally, learners experienced stress, insecurity, and social anxiety. The combination of a foreign language, unfamiliar content, and new group dynamics could lead to self-doubt.

Cognitively, learners had to cope with ambiguity, process new information quickly, and simultaneously develop subject knowledge, teamwork skills, and project management capabilities under time pressure.

## Signals of uncertainty

Learners' uncertainty was reflected in several observable behaviors.

- During discussions, silence was common, and many students appeared passive rather than actively engaging in conversation. Communication could also be avoidant, with some students delaying responses or minimizing interaction
- Noticeable hesitation in taking on roles or responsibilities within the team, and students relied on the teacher or the team leader for guidance instead of making independent decisions
- Feelings of frustration emerged, and in some cases even bitterness, particularly among those assigned to bilingual groups, where language-related challenges intensified the sense of uncertainty and discomfort

## Exploring uncertainty

Several structured key actions and strategies were implemented to address uncertainty while enabling learners to move forward without full clarity.

- An individual orientation task supported self-awareness and reflection on personal strengths and development needs. This was complemented by a group-level orientation activity, where teams defined shared goals, roles, working practices, and communication methods, as well as agreed on participation, problem-solving, and ways to monitor progress. Also, collaborative tasks and reflections throughout the course ensured active engagement and strengthened shared responsibility
- Weekly meetings provided structure and predictability. Continuous teacher guidance and feedback helped students validate their progress, make decisions, and build confidence
- Support was offered through meetings with team leaders and project managers, alongside peer meetings between project managers to encourage shared reflection and problem-solving
- Students maintained individual learning diaries, which helped them structure their learning, recognize challenges and progress, and set goals

Together, these elements - structure, guidance, and collaboration - helped learners act despite uncertainty and gradually build confidence. At the same time, uncertainty was explicitly framed as a natural and valuable part of learning. Working on real-life projects with an external client exposed students to authentic complexity.

Through these combined practices, uncertainty was gradually reframed from a source of stress into a meaningful opportunity for developing professional competences such as teamwork, communication, and self-direction.

## Acting under uncertainty

Students gradually learned to act despite incomplete information by:

- Dividing tasks and making decisions collaboratively
- Participating in smaller roles where they felt more confident
- Building trust and shared responsibility within the team
- Engaging in continuous reflection on their progress

Agency developed over time as students gained confidence through action, support, and experience. Teacher guidance, structured processes, and collaboration created a sense of safety that enabled participation and initiative.

## Outcomes and key learnings

### Outcomes

- Increased confidence in handling uncertainty, even when tasks are initially unclear
- Stronger teamwork and communication skills, uncertainty does not need to be faced alone
- Improved language confidence
- Development of self-efficacy and proactive behavior

### Key learnings

- Progress does not require full clarity from the beginning
- Uncertainty can be managed through action and collaboration
- Teamwork enables individuals to cope with uncertainty more effectively

Overall, uncertainty was reframed as a normal and meaningful part of learning, supporting the development of resilience, agency, and collaborative competence.

This case illustrates especially:

- Normalization of uncertainty as part of learning and working life
- Acting without full information through experimentation and collaboration
- Reflection and meaning-making as tools for learning and development
- Emotional regulation through acceptance and shared experience

## Support toolbox and scaffolding

The course design contributed significantly to the development of learners' uncertainty competence by combining **orientation, structure, guidance, and reflection** into a coherent learning process.

### Key support elements:

- Structured orientation (individual and group level)
- Clear but flexible project structure
- Continuous teacher guidance and feedback
- Peer support and role-based teamwork
- Continuous individual and group reflection

### Essential conditions:

- Time for group formation and orientation
- Active facilitation and pedagogical support
- Opportunities for reflection and dialogue
- Willingness to engage in collaboration

## Transferability

This approach can be applied across different transition phases, such as:

- Project-based and multidisciplinary courses
- Internship preparation
- Transitions to working life
- Team-based learning environments
- Diverse learner groups (including adult learners)
- Especially group-level agreements on shared practices can be effectively integrated into any group work to support clarity, collaboration, and psychological safety

**Possible limitations to be considered:**

- Requires sufficient time for orientation and reflection
- Depends on active student participation
- Less suitable for highly rigid or time-constrained contexts

## 03 Adopt a student – Connecting VET learners with workplaces

**Partner:** Business College Syd – Denmark

**Transition phase:** School to work

**Core idea:** A structured, long-term relationship between students and companies helps learners navigate uncertainty by building familiarity, confidence, and real-world understanding.

### Context and background

Business College Syd (BC Syd) is a vocational education and training (VET) institution. The school offers EUD and EUX programmes within commerce, retail and office administration.

A recurring challenge for VET learners has been uncertainty related to finding apprenticeships, understanding workplace expectations, and making early and informed career choices. The initiative 'Adopt a Student' was developed as a school-led practice to address these challenges by strengthening the connection between school-based learning and real workplace contexts already during the foundation programmes.

The initiative creates a long-term, structured relationship between each learner and a partner company. From early on in the foundation programme and throughout, learners are matched with a specific retail or commercial company (an 'adoption company'). Each learner follows the same company across the programme.

**Key elements of the practice include:**

- Matching learners with companies based on interests and competencies
- Company involvement in designing practice-oriented assignments linked to real workplace tasks
- A compulsory internship week during the foundation programme and regular internship
- Continuous contact with a company mentor
- Targeted preparation of CVs and job applications before internships
- Company visits to the school together with current apprentices acting as role models

**Key actors and target groups:**

- EUD/EUX learners in foundation programmes
- Learners, who actively engage with the company and practice-oriented learning tasks
- Teachers and guidance staff, who coordinate the process and support learners before and during internships
- Adoption companies, which provide mentors, internship opportunities and real-life tasks

## Uncertainty type

**Knowledge-related** uncertainty involved limited understanding of:

- How the apprenticeship system functions in practice
- What employers expect from apprentices
- How school-based learning translates into workplace performance

**Skills-related** uncertainty reflected gaps in:

- Application competencies (CV writing, job applications)
- Communication with companies
- Self-presentation in professional contexts

**Attitudinal and emotional** uncertainty included:

- Fear of rejection and negative evaluation
- Low self-efficacy and lack of confidence
- Uncertainty about belonging in a professional environment

## Signals of uncertainty

Uncertainty manifested through observable behavioural and emotional indicators. These included:

- Hesitation and delayed action in applying for apprenticeships
- Passive behaviour and reliance on others for direction
- Expressions of doubt regarding own competences
- Reduced participation in career-related activities
- Absenteeism during internship periods

## Exploring uncertainty

The initiative works through three key mechanisms:

- Structuring uncertainty: Early and continuous matching with a company creates predictability and reduces ambiguity
- Bridging contexts: Practice-based assignments connect school learning with real workplace expectations
- Relational support: Ongoing mentorship provides guidance and feedback

## Acting under uncertainty

Uncertainty was transformed into a learning resource through gradual exposure and scaffolding. Initially, uncertainty was strongest when learners lacked both experience and reference points. Through repeated interactions with the same company, learners developed familiarity and confidence.

Agency emerged when learners:

- Participated in real workplace tasks
- Received feedback from mentors
- Began to understand expectations through experience

## **Outcomes and key learnings**

### **Outcomes:**

The initiative resulted in both measurable and experiential outcomes:

- Increased learner confidence and self-efficacy
- Improved understanding of workplace expectations
- Higher motivation and engagement
- Earlier and more successful apprenticeship agreements

Importantly, learners developed a more nuanced understanding of uncertainty as manageable and inherent to transition processes.

### **Key learnings:**

This case demonstrates that uncertainty competence develops through:

- Normalization of uncertainty via exposure
- Emotional regulation through supported experiences
- Reflection and meaning-making in real contexts
- Acting despite incomplete information

The case highlights the importance of combining cognitive, emotional, and practical dimensions of learning.

### **Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:**

- Normalization of uncertainty through continuous exposure
- Emotional regulation through supported workplace experiences
- Reflection and meaning-making in real-life contexts
- Acting without full information through guided practice

## **Support toolbox and scaffolding**

Key scaffolding elements include mentorship, feedback loops, practice-based learning, and preparation activities.

The model contributes by creating structured pathways for engaging with uncertainty:

- Providing predictable yet evolving learning environments
- Integrating real-world tasks into curriculum
- Offering continuous relational support (teachers + mentors)
- Gradually increasing learner responsibility

## **Transferability**

The approach is transferable to other contexts where uncertainty is linked to transitions.

- Different transition phases
- Different learning environments
- Different target groups

It can be adapted by:

- Establishing partnerships with local companies
- Embedding practice-based learning early in programmes
- Creating structured mentorship systems

**Possible limitations to be considered:**

Limitations include dependency on strong organisational collaboration and availability of partner companies. The approach also requires coordination and institutional commitment.

## 04 Getting unstuck - art-based co-creation

**Partner:** Innocamp / Poland

**Transition phase:** Culture to culture

**Core idea:** Artistic co-creation transforms uncertainty into a shared learning and empowerment process

### Context and background

In educational and community-based work, complex social issues - such as inclusion, identity, and belonging - often lack clear solutions, generating uncertainty. The “Getting Unstuck” project intentionally embraced this uncertainty as a learning opportunity rather than a barrier.

By combining art, co-creation, and reflection, an environment is created where participants experience agency - even (or especially) in ambiguous situations. Iterative workshops and reflection exercises in co-creative spaces where participants collectively experienced and processed uncertainty bring focus on building trust and shared insights.

**Key actors and target groups:**

- Local youths and adults from diverse backgrounds
- Facilitators (Innocamp and international partners), target groups educators and artists

### Uncertainty type

**Information or knowledge:** unclear solutions for social issues (inclusion, identity).

**Skills:** participants and facilitators had to learn to navigate ambiguous situations.

**Timelines:** flexible scheduling due to the iterative nature of workshops.

**Outcomes:** unpredictable participant reactions (emotional, artistic).

**Reactions:** of others / oneself in emotional reactions during co-creative sessions.

**Emotional and cognitive challenges emerged:** frustration, self-doubt, fear of failure, loss of control, uncertainty about progress, self-reflection, adaptability, empathy, group dynamics.

## Signals of uncertainty

Non-verbal signals:

- Hesitation to participate in artistic exercises
- Physical tension (e.g., rigid posture, silence)

Verbal signals:

- Expressions of doubt about their own creativity or contribution

Behavioral signals:

- Reluctance to engage in group discussions
- Need for additional guidance or structure

Emotional signals:

- Frustration, confusion, but also curiosity toward unexpected outcomes

## Exploring uncertainty

Participants were supported to move forward without full certainty and uncertainty approached as a learning opportunity by using:

- Art-based methods: drama, performance and storytelling to make uncertainty visible and discussable and with the aim to normalize ambiguity
- Iterative workshops in which participants were encouraged to experiment without fear of mistakes. Aim regarding uncertainty: learning to act with incomplete information
- Reflection exercises: group discussions about experiences with uncertainty. Aim / uncertainty: sensemaking and emotional regulation
- Co-creative spaces to create a shared responsibility for the process. Aim / uncertainty: empowerment and agency
- Summary meeting in which partners shared local experiences and analyzed patterns. Aim / uncertainty: collective sensemaking

Uncertainty as a learning opportunity:

Uncertainty was made visible and explored together

## Acting under uncertainty

**Uncertainty was navigated or turned into a source of learning or strength because:**

Agency and safety were created as participants experienced ownership by making their own artistic choices (e.g., in storytelling). Facilitators created a safe space where mistakes were embraced as learning moments.

Acting despite incomplete information: workshops proceeded without predetermined outcomes - focus was on the process. Unexpected artistic results (e.g., improvisations) were celebrated as innovative insights.

Supporting factors were trust between participants and facilitators and flexibility in the methodology (adjustments based on group dynamics). Reflection was built as a fixed part of every session.

## **Outcomes and key learnings**

### **Outcomes for participants:**

- Participants saw uncertainty as a natural part of creativity
- Better management abilities of frustration and doubt
- Participants developed new meanings for their experiences
- Participants dared to act quickly in unclear situations

### **Outcomes for facilitators:**

- Facilitators adapted their own practices
- Increased confidence in guiding ambiguous processes
- Partners identified common principles
- Methodology became scalable for other contexts

### **Key learnings:**

- Creativity thrives in uncertainty
- Shared experience build resilience

### **Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:**

- Uncertainty became a source of strength through co-creation
- Normalization of uncertainty: uncertainty as a normal part of learning
- Emotional regulation: managing emotions through artistic expression
- Reflection and meaning-making: group reflection as a tool for insight
- Acting without full information: acting based on intuition and trust

## **Support toolbox and scaffolding**

### **Key contributors to develop learners' uncertainty competence:**

- Art-based methods: made abstract uncertainty concrete and manageable
- Iterative learning: participants learned that making mistakes is allowed and contributes to growth
- Reflection: helped participants recognize patterns in their approach to uncertainty
- Co-creation: strengthened sense of community and shared responsibility
- Facilitator role: facilitators acted as guides rather than authorities. This promoted agency among participants

## **Transferability**

This approach can be applied to other educational transitions and onboarding contexts such as:

- Different transition phases: e.g. phase School to work
- Different learning environments: suitable for diverse groups (youth, adults, professionals)
- Different target groups: applicable in corporate training (e.g., innovation teams)

### **Possible limitations to be considered:**

Requires openness to creative methods. This may not work if participants are not open to artistic methods (e.g., in highly structured environments).

Furthermore, this approach requires time and trust to embrace uncertainty as a learning moment.

## 05 Redesigning curriculum to support uncertainty competence

**Partner:** University of Gdańsk – Institute of Psychology /Poland

**Transition phase:** School to work

**Core idea:** Curriculum redesign integrates adaptive and emotional skills to better prepare students for uncertain career paths.

### Context and background

Uncertain labour market characterized by unpredictability, instability, and ambiguity, is especially affecting young people entering adulthood and employment.

Students often face unclear career paths, rapid technological change, unstable employment conditions, and high levels of anxiety and uncertainty.

In response, the psychology programme was redesigned to strengthen student's adaptability, social, and emotional competences, and better prepare them for functioning in uncertain environments.

A comprehensive modification of the psychology curriculum focusing on:

- Strengthening practical and soft skills
- Integrating content on stress, adaptation, and coping with uncertainty
- Implementing psychosocial support and career counselling mechanisms
- Increasing collaboration with labour market stakeholders

### Key actors and target groups:

- Students – main beneficiaries; provided feedback and expressed needs
- Teachers / lecturers – designed and implemented new teaching modules
- Organization (Institute of Psychology) – coordinated programme changes and ensured compliance
- Labour market representatives – provided input on expected competences

### Uncertainty type

Students experienced uncertainty related to:

- **Competence uncertainty:**  
Students (and teachers) questioned whether students' skills (especially practical and soft skills) were sufficient and relevant for the labour market
- **Adaptation uncertainty:**  
Students experienced difficulties in adapting to academic and professional expectations
- **Career uncertainty:**  
Unclear career paths, fear of unemployment, lack of clarity about future roles
- **Psychosocial uncertainty:**  
High levels of anxiety, stress, and mental health challenges affecting motivation and well-being

## Signals of uncertainty

- Increased anxiety about future careers
- Reduced sense of control and predictability
- Difficulties in adapting to university life and social environments
- Lack of confidence in skills and preparedness
- Emotional strain and stress-related difficulties

## Exploring uncertainty

To increase students' adaptability, enhance employability, and reduce uncertainty related to career development, the curriculum was redesigned through:

- **Labour market analysis and consultations**  
Identified mismatch between students' competences and employer expectations
- **Curriculum modification**  
Added or strengthened modules on interpersonal skills, stress management, motivation, and practical professional tools
- **Psychosocial support and career counselling**  
Introduced structured support systems to help students cope with anxiety and career decisions
- **Partnerships and placements**  
Strengthened cooperation with external institutions to provide real-life experience

## Acting under uncertainty

Uncertainty was treated as a driver for focusing curriculum development and learning which helped students reinterpret uncertainty as a natural and manageable aspect of professional life.

- Students developed adaptive skills, emotional regulation, and resilience
- Learning focused on coping with change, ambiguity, and stress
- Support mechanisms increased sense of safety and agency
- Practical experiences enabled acting despite incomplete information

## Outcomes and key learnings

### Outcomes:

- Increased practical and adaptive competences
- Improved adaptation to academic and social environments
- Stronger interpersonal relationships among students
- Reduced anxiety regarding future careers
- Improved readiness for labour market entry

### Key learnings:

- Curriculum can actively reduce uncertainty
- Combining emotional and practical skills is essential

**Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:**

- Normalization of uncertainty as an inherent part of development
- Emotional regulation through structured support systems
- Reflection and meaning-making via curriculum design
- Ability to act without full information through practical learning experiences
- Strengthening agency and empowerment in ambiguous contexts

**Support toolbox and scaffolding**

The programme contributed through:

- Integrated curriculum focusing on soft and adaptive skills
- Psychological support systems
- Career counselling
- Practice-oriented learning and labour market exposure

Essential support structures:

- Mentoring and counselling
- Safe learning environment
- Opportunities for reflection and feedback
- Cooperation with external stakeholders

**Transferability**

**This approach can be applied to:**

- Other study programmes
- Early career training
- Career transition programmes
- Adult reskilling contexts

**Different contexts:**

- Career change situations
- Organisational adaptation to change

**Possible limitations to be considered:**

- There is no institutional support or flexibility in curriculum design
- Approach requires cooperation with labour market stakeholders, trained staff, and access to support services

## 06 Recognition of prior learning – supporting adult learners

**Partner:** University for Continuing Education Krems (UWK)/Austria

**Transition phase:** 1. Work to school/ 2. Culture to culture, 3. Life stage to another

**Core idea:** Recognizing prior learning supports learners in managing uncertainty by validating their existing competences and enabling flexible educational pathways.

### Context and background

The case is situated in continuing higher education, where adult learners return to studies while balancing work, family responsibilities, and changing professional demands. Many face uncertainty related to career transitions, economic pressures, and evolving labour market expectations.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used as a learner-centered approach that values competences gained through work and life experience.

This includes competences gained through:

- Professional work experience
- Non-formal learning
- Informal learning
- Previous educational experiences.

By validating these competences, the approach reduces barriers to education and supports participation under uncertain life conditions.

The RPL approach includes:

- Assessment and validation of previously acquired competences
- Recognition of professional and experiential learning
- Reduction of unnecessary repetition in education
- Shortening of study duration
- Guidance and advising throughout the recognition process

Rather than viewing learning only as formal classroom-based achievement, the approach acknowledges that valuable knowledge and competences are developed across life and work experiences. This creates more flexible educational pathways for adult learners facing uncertain professional and societal conditions.

### Key actors and target groups:

- **Adult learners:** professionals, migrants, job changers, and workers affected by technological or economic transformation seeking upskilling or reskilling opportunities
- **RPL assessors and programme coordinators:** evaluated prior learning experiences and supported learners in navigating recognition procedures
- **Academic staff and curriculum designers:** aligned curricula and recognition practices with learning outcomes and labour market needs
- **Institutional support services:** provided advising, information, and pathway guidance
- **Peer communities:** supported informal exchange and confidence-building among learners experiencing uncertainty

## Uncertainty type

Adult learners experienced several forms of uncertainty connected to participation in continuing education:

- **Skills uncertainty:** uncertainty regarding whether existing competences would remain relevant in changing labour markets
- **Labour market uncertainty:** insecurity related to employability, changing professional profiles, and future career opportunities
- **Economic uncertainty:** concerns about the financial and time-related costs of education while balancing work and family responsibilities
- **Educational uncertainty:** uncertainty about whether previous experiences and competences would be recognised or valued within formal education systems
- **Emotional and cognitive challenges included:** fear of starting education “from zero” despite extensive experience, anxiety about balancing studies with professional and personal responsibilities, frustration regarding possible non-recognition of competences, lack of confidence in returning to formal learning environments, uncertainty about the value of investing in education under unstable economic conditions

For many learners, uncertainty was experienced as an ongoing aspect of contemporary professional life rather than a temporary challenge.

## Signals of uncertainty

Signals of uncertainty observed among learners included:

- Hesitation to enter formal education programmes
- Concerns about the length and cost of studies
- Repeated questions about whether prior work experience would “count”
- Fear of not fitting into higher education environments
- Insecurity regarding academic requirements
- Preference for flexible and shortened pathways
- Concerns about managing studies alongside work and care obligations

Many learners expressed a strong need for reassurance that their prior experiences and competences were recognised and valued.

## Exploring uncertainty

To support learners in navigating uncertainty, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes was implemented as a key strategy. The approach included:

### Recognition of professional, informal, and non-formal learning

- Systematic validation of competences gained outside formal education
- Assessment of professional experiences and existing skills
- Reduction of duplication in learning

### Reduction of educational barriers

- Shortening of study duration
- Reduction of learning load
- Lowering financial and time-related pressures for adult learners

### **Guidance and advising**

- Transparent communication about recognition procedures
- Advising processes supporting informed educational decisions under uncertainty
- Individual pathway guidance

### **Supportive learning environment**

- Inclusive and flexible learning structures
- Peer exchange opportunities supporting confidence and belonging
- Hybrid learning opportunities compatible with adult life conditions

Uncertainty as a learning opportunity:

Uncertainty was approached not as a deficit, but as a condition requiring flexible and adaptive educational structures. Recognizing prior learning helped transform uncertainty into a starting point for meaningful learning pathways.

### **Acting under uncertainty**

Uncertainty was navigated by validating learners' previous experiences and reducing the risks associated with entering or re-entering education.

Learners experienced increased agency through:

- Acknowledgement of existing competences
- Reduced study duration and workload
- Clearer educational pathways
- Increased confidence that their professional experiences had value

Uncertainty felt strongest when learners doubted whether they belonged in higher education or whether continuing education would be worth the investment.

A sense of agency began to emerge when learners realised that:

- They were not starting from zero
- Their previous learning experiences mattered
- Educational pathways could be adapted to their realities and responsibilities

Key factors supporting action and uncertainty competence included:

- Transparent recognition systems
- Supportive advising
- Institutional flexibility
- Validation of experiential knowledge, peer support and encouragement

## **Outcomes and key learnings**

### **Outcomes:**

The use of RPL contributed to:

- Increased participation in continuing education
- Reduced perceived barriers to higher education
- Stronger learner confidence
- Improved adaptability and employability orientation
- Greater persistence in educational pathways

### **Key learnings:**

Learners developed a different understanding of uncertainty:

- Uncertainty became viewed as manageable rather than paralysing
- Prior experiences became recognised as valuable learning resources
- Education became understood as flexible and adaptable rather than rigid and linear

### **Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:**

This case illustrates that uncertainty competence can be strengthened when learners experience recognition, validation, and flexibility

The case particularly relates to:

- Normalization of uncertainty
- Reflection and meaning-making based on prior experiences
- Acting without full information
- Strengthening agency through recognition and validation

The case demonstrates that recognising prior learning is not only an administrative process, but also a psychological and empowering process that supports adult learners in uncertain transitions.

## **Support toolbox and scaffolding**

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) approach contributed to uncertainty competence by:

- Validating learners' existing competences
- Reducing educational and financial risks
- Creating more flexible and manageable learning pathways
- Supporting confidence and belonging in higher education
- Enabling adaptive and non-linear educational participation

Essential scaffolding and support structures included:

- Transparent RPL procedures
- Learner advising and mentoring
- Flexible curriculum structures
- Institutional commitment to recognition
- Supportive and inclusive learning environments

## Transferability

This approach can be applied to other educational transitions and onboarding contexts such as:

- Lifelong learning institutions
- Vocational education and training (VET)
- Higher education institutions
- Migrant integration and qualification recognition programmes
- Workforce reskilling initiatives
- Professional continuing education systems

The approach may support:

- Transitions between work and education
- Adult return-to-learning pathways
- Career change processes
- Inclusion of non-traditional learners

The case demonstrates that recognition of prior learning can transform uncertainty from a barrier into a source of empowerment by validating learners' experiences and supporting flexible participation in lifelong learning.

### Possible limitations to be considered:

- The approach requires institutional commitment to recognition practices
- Transparent assessment procedures are necessary
- Trained assessors and advising structures are essential
- Implementation may be difficult in highly rigid qualification systems

## 07 Navigating entrepreneurial uncertainty

**Partner:** Universitat Politècnica de València's (UPV) / Spain

**Transition phase:** School to work

**Core idea:** A staged entrepreneurship pathway combines mentoring, practical training, experimentation and external validation to help students and graduates move from an initial idea towards a viable venture without requiring certainty before action.

### Context and background

The case is situated within UPV's institutional commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship. IDEAS UPV is the university's entrepreneurship unit, while StartUPV is the ecosystem through which students and graduates are supported in developing innovative ventures.

The model responds to the uncertainty involved in moving from academic life into entrepreneurial and professional action. Entrepreneurship includes open-ended decisions, unclear timelines, risk, public exposure and unstable outcomes. Learners therefore need not only motivation, but also structure, guidance and a supportive environment.

IDEAS UPV / StartUPV combines incubation and acceleration, mentoring, practical workshops and milestone-based activities. Through the phases of preincubation, Ready, Steady and Go, learners progress from an initial idea towards business consolidation. The process is experiential and based on

learning by doing: participants test ideas, receive feedback, build entrepreneurial skills and gradually make more informed decisions.

**Key actors and target groups:**

- UPV students and alumni exploring or developing entrepreneurial projects
- IDEAS UPV staff, advisors and mentors providing guidance, training and phase-specific support
- IDEAS UPV as the organisation designing and coordinating the entrepreneurship ecosystem, institutional resources and opportunities for visibility and validation

**Uncertainty type**

**Information or knowledge:** Learners may lack a clear mental map of the entrepreneurial process, the meaning of progress, the next appropriate step, available support, market response and the likelihood of turning an idea into a sustainable venture.

**Skills:** Uncertainty concerns the ability to test ideas, make decisions with incomplete information, pitch and network, seek feedback, balance entrepreneurship with studies and respond to changing evidence.

**Attitude:** Self-doubt, fear of failure or judgement, legitimacy concerns and low confidence may affect whether learners see themselves as credible entrepreneurs. Role and identity uncertainty may emerge as students begin to move towards becoming founders or professionals.

**Signals of uncertainty**

Hesitation to apply or commit to an entrepreneurial project

- Delayed decision-making, procrastination or withdrawal
- Avoidance of pitching, networking or public presentation
- Reluctance to seek support or uncertainty about where to find it
- Stress or overload when combining academic responsibilities with entrepreneurial activity
- Low confidence, fear of being judged and doubts about being credible enough for mentors, juries or potential partners

**Exploring uncertainty**

The programme turns the entrepreneurial journey into a guided learning process rather than an isolated leap into the unknown. Its complementary strategies include:

- A phase-based pathway that breaks the journey into manageable stages and clarifies expected progress and next steps
- Mentoring and advisory support for discussing doubts, reframing decisions and receiving personalised guidance
- Bootcamps, workshops and practical training linked to real startup needs, including finance, sales and pitching
- Calls, awards and presentation opportunities that create milestones, deadlines, external feedback and visibility

These structures help learners identify what they know, what remains uncertain and what can be tested next. They reduce ambiguity without pretending that entrepreneurial outcomes can be made fully predictable.

## Acting under uncertainty

Learners are encouraged to act before full certainty is available. They move step by step, test assumptions, present ideas, collect feedback and revise their decisions through iteration.

The phased structure reduces cognitive overload, while mentoring helps learners interpret fear, self-doubt and setbacks. Practical activities turn unknowns into evidence and experience. Instead of treating uncertainty only as risk, the model uses it as a context for developing entrepreneurial competence and personal growth.

Through supported action, learners strengthen reflective decision-making, resilience, help-seeking behaviour, self-efficacy and tolerance for ambiguity. Uncertainty becomes more manageable as exploration, commitment and reflection are balanced throughout the process.

## Outcomes and key learnings

**Outcomes:** At learner level, the model supports confidence, entrepreneurial skills, decision-making and the capacity to act with incomplete information. At institutional level, IDEAS UPV reports a long record of supporting entrepreneurs, startups and company creation through its ecosystem.

**Key learnings:** Uncertainty competence can be strengthened when learners have a clear but flexible pathway, access to mentoring, repeated feedback and opportunities to act in authentic conditions. Entrepreneurial uncertainty should not be treated only as a risk or individual weakness, but as a developmental context that can be supported institutionally.

**Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:** Make uncertainty visible and normal; provide psychologically safer opportunities for feedback; combine structure with room for experimentation; and help learners interpret progress through meaningful milestones. Key competences include tolerance for ambiguity, resilience, self-efficacy, help-seeking behaviour and evidence-based decision-making.

## Support toolbox and scaffolding

- A clear staged pathway: preincubation, Ready, Steady and Go -programme
- Individual mentoring and advisory support aligned with each phase
- Practical workshops, bootcamps and entrepreneurship training
- Peer and community contact within the entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Regular feedback, pitching and presentation opportunities
- Milestones, calls and awards that support progression and external validation
- Institutional visibility, resources and recognition

## Transferability

The approach can be transferred by replicating its core mechanism rather than the specific institutional brand. Other organisations can:

- Create clear, staged pathways from exploration to implementation
- Combine mentoring with practical workshops and learning by doing
- Provide regular moments for feedback, pitching and reflection
- Use milestones, calls or challenges to support commitment and progression
- Connect learners with peers, experts and opportunities for external validation

The model can be adapted for universities, vocational education, innovation hubs, youth entrepreneurship programmes and organisational intrapreneurship. Its central principle is that uncertainty can be navigated productively when learners receive structure, support, feedback and room to experiment.

## 08 The mielenturvaa (safe mind) network

**Partner:** Kukunori ry./Finland

**Transition phase:** Culture to culture (transition toward a psychologically safe work culture)

**Core idea:** A collaborative network model supports organisations and individuals in addressing uncertainty through shared reflection, dialogue, and collective responsibility for mental well-being.

### Context and background

The Mielenturvaa (Safe Mind) network was established in Finland to address the growing crisis of mental health-related sickness absences and the systemic uncertainty in modern working life. The model was born from a need to shift workplace culture from individual coping to shared responsibility. It provides a proactive framework for organizations to support mental well-being before challenges escalate into long-term disability.

Mielenturvaa is a collaborative workplace mental health framework and a multi-sectoral network. It consists of a structured set of organizational commitments (the Mielenturvaa-model), such as annual mental health check-ups and low-threshold support (e.g., short-term psychotherapy). The model utilizes peer-learning, expert webinars ("morning coffees"), and a digital community to normalize discussions about mental health and build psychological safety.

#### Key actors and target groups:

In the context of the Mielenturvaa network, the roles of learners, teachers, and organizations are defined by a collaborative and systemic approach to mental health and uncertainty competence.

#### 1. Learners (The Primary Target Group)

a) Young adults and employees: These are the individual learners in the "culture to culture" transition (moving from education to work). Their role is to engage with the network's tools to navigate the mental load and social risks of modern professional life.

b) Organizational leaders and HR professionals:

Within the network, they act as learners who adopt new leadership methods and communication styles to foster psychological safety and collective meaning-making.

#### 2. Facilitators and Experts ("teachers"):

a) Kukunori ry: Acts as the primary facilitator and coordinator. Its role is to manage the network, provide the platform for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and oversee the Mielenturvaa-label process.

b) Expert partners (e.g., MIELI ry, mental health specialists): Their role is to provide evidence-based psychological expertise, offer specialized tools, and deliver "low-threshold" interventions, such as short-term psychotherapy.

### 3. Organizations (The Learning Environment):

a) Participating workplaces: These include companies, public sector employers, and NGOs. Their role is to provide the actual environment where the model is implemented. They commit to organizational actions (e.g., annual mental health check-ups) and transform their internal culture from individual coping to shared responsibility.

b) Strategic partners (e.g., Akava, SAK, STTK, Barona – Finnish trade unions): These actors act as framework providers and resource the network. Their role is to seed the activities and ensure the model has a broad reach across different sectors of the labor market.

#### Uncertainty type

What was uncertain:

Uncertainty in this case was both individual and systemic:

- **Future and societal uncertainty:** ongoing crises in the world and lack of clear direction
- **Cultural uncertainty:** reluctance to talk about mental health at work due to stigma related thinking
- **Relational uncertainty:** difficulty in open communication and collaboration
- **Outcome uncertainty:** unclear impact of actions and variability in responses

#### Signals of uncertainty

- Hesitation to share experiences openly
- Limited engagement in group discussions
- Fear of representing one's organization negatively

Emotionally, uncertainty manifested as pessimism, hesitation, and difficulty expressing experiences in ways that others could relate to.

#### Exploring uncertainty

Uncertainty was approached through:

- Peer network discussions and facilitated dialogues
- One-to-one support and mentoring
- Online events, "morning coffees", and shared reflection spaces
- Development of shared "rules of engagement" (Safe Mind code)
- Facilitation that encourages participation and constructive dialogue

#### Uncertainty as a learning opportunity:

Uncertainty was approached through shared sense-making rather than predefined solutions. The network created spaces where participants could reflect together, share experiences, and gradually build understanding. Learning emerged from interaction, dialogue, and collective exploration rather than structured instruction.

#### Acting under uncertainty

Uncertainty was navigated and turned into a source of learning or strength because participants and facilitators acted without full clarity by:

- Engaging in open-ended discussions without knowing outcomes in advance
- Responding to emerging needs in the network
- Co-creating practices and shared norms
- Encouraging participation from both active and quieter members

Agency emerged gradually as participants became more comfortable sharing, contributing, and influencing the direction of discussions.

Furthermore, facilitators played a key role in enabling safe dialogue and guiding interaction, while learning themselves through continuous reflection within the facilitation team.

## **Outcomes and key learnings**

### **Outcomes:**

- Increased openness in discussing mental health
- Stronger peer connections and shared understanding
- Greater engagement in collective problem-solving
- Improved confidence in addressing sensitive topics

### **Key learnings:**

Uncertainty becomes easier to navigate when it is shared. Dialogue and reflection are essential for making sense of complex issues. Also, collective processes can transform uncertainty into action and learning

### **Key takeaways – uncertainty competence:**

- Normalization of uncertainty as part of working life
- Emotional regulation through shared experiences
- Reflection and meaning-making through dialogue
- Acting without full information through facilitation and participation

## **Support toolbox and scaffolding**

Key contributors to develop learners' uncertainty competence:

- Actively facilitated peer network and facilitation that balances participation and creates inclusion
- Regular online interaction opportunities (events, discussions)
- Safe and structured dialogue formats to engage in dialogue (trust-building and psychological safety)
- Shared codes and participation principles (Safe Mind code)
- A culture that values shared learning over expert-driven solutions

## **Transferability**

### **This model is applicable in**

- Workplace development and organisational change
- Network-based learning environments
- Communities and peer learning groups
- Cross-sector collaboration

### **Possible limitations to be considered:**

- Requires active participation and engagement
- Less effective without trust and facilitation

# 06 Conclusions

The purpose of this guide has been to explore uncertainty from multiple perspectives, including learning, transitions, and working life, recognising it as a central and significant aspect across these contexts.

The guide brings together the Butterfly Framework, insights into transitions and the experiences of uncertainty within them, and a set of best practice cases. Together, these perspectives illustrate how uncertainty manifests, how it can be recognised, and how it can be supported in practice. The aim is therefore not to eliminate uncertainty, but to make it visible, understandable, and workable.

Uncertainty is not something exceptional; rather, it is a normal and natural part of human experience, particularly in different transition phases of life. It can be understood both as a structural phenomenon (systems, expectations, and contexts) and as an emotional experience (identity, confidence, and belonging). Uncertainty often triggers feelings of insecurity, hesitation, and reduced self-confidence among learners. However, when approached constructively, it can also open up opportunities for learning and development. In this sense, uncertainty becomes meaningful depending on how it is experienced, interpreted, and supported.

Uncertainty competence can be developed through:

- Clear structures and explicit communication of expectations
- Encouraging peer support
- Reflection and meaning-making
- Opportunities to act despite incomplete information
- Gradual exposure to real-life practices and working environments

The Butterfly Framework supports this process by helping to recognise uncertainty and by providing tools for exploring and interpreting it, as well as structures for support. In other words, both the learner's active role and organisational support (scaffolding) work together. Uncertainty is therefore not only an internal individual experience, but also a shared and supported process.

For this reason, uncertainty should be normalised, and learning environments should be designed in ways that allow uncertainty to emerge, be supported, and still leave room for independent action and experimentation. This enables learners to recognise uncertainty, connect it to their own experiences, and act as active agents in different situations.

When recognised and supported, uncertainty does not become a barrier, but a bridge to learning, development, and new opportunities.

# 07 A glossary of terms and abbreviations

**Ambiguity** refers to situations that allow for multiple plausible interpretations rather than one clear or objectively correct understanding. Individuals are therefore required to actively interpret and make sense of their experiences, particularly when information is incomplete, contradictory, or evolving.

**Belonging** refers to an individual's experience of how they are socially connected and in what ways they relate to other people, groups, and communities. It encompasses feelings of inclusion, acceptance, participation, and having a meaningful place within a social environment.

**HE** Higher Education

**Identity work** is the ongoing process of reflecting on, interpreting, and reshaping one's sense of self in relation to changing circumstances and social environments. It is informed both by present experiences and by the individual's previously constructed experiential world.

**Meaning-making** is the process through which individuals interpret and assign meaning to their experiences and observations. These interpretations are not created in isolation but are shaped by internal models that have developed through earlier experiences, relationships, and learning. As a result, people may understand and respond to the same situation in different ways.

**RPL** Recognition of Prior Learning

**Scaffolding** Structured and gradually adjusted support that helps learners act, learn, and build confidence in unfamiliar or uncertain situations until they can manage more independently.

**TRIC** Towards Innovative Communities: Making Uncertainty Productive

**Uncertainty Competence** The ability to navigate, interpret, and act in uncertain situations in a constructive and productive way. It combines knowledge, skills, and responsibility that can be developed through experience, reflection, and practice.

**VET** Vocational Education and Training

# 08 Appendix

# Menus

## Core Menu

Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility

### Knowledge

(How I understand myself, others, and my environment under uncertainty)

#### I know/ I understand/ I'm aware of...

- The importance of acknowledging and normalizing uncertainty.
- My strengths and support needs, and areas for development.
- Where to seek information and support and understand the importance of asking for help.
- How different environments function, including expectations, norms and ways of working.
- The meaning and importance of peer support, as well as the value of networking, co-operating, and finding opportunities.

### Skills

Self-regulation (How I self-regulate under uncertainty)

#### I'm able to....

- Develop my self-regulation skills and apply coping strategies.
- Manage my time and priorities.
- Define goals, plan proactively and work hard to reach goals.
- Stay on track despite doubt.
- Reflect on and assess my progress and development.

Agency (How I act and make individual decisions under uncertainty)

#### I'm able to....

- Recognise and navigate uncertain situations by making informed decisions.
- Seek reliable information from multiple sources and explore different options.
- Solve problems through critical thinking in both structured and open-ended situations.
- Adapt and be flexible.

Socially embedded learning and action (How I act, learn, and receive support in social contexts))

#### I'm able to....

- Communicate and express my thoughts and feelings effectively in interaction with others.
- Collaborate effectively by cooperating in teamwork and understanding, accepting, and including others.
- Listen, give and receive constructive feedback, and use it to support learning and improvement.
- Build and engage in networks and relationships, including seeking support when needed.

## Responsibility

(How I choose to act)

### I take initiative to/I choose to...

- Be self-reflective and actively develop my self-efficacy and personal growth.
- Adapt my thinking, remain open to change, and face new challenges with flexibility.
- Accept uncertainty and setbacks as part of learning, and to experiment and learn from failure.
- Stay motivated, hopeful, and persevere when facing challenges.
- Take initiative, set goals, and take an active role in collaborative settings.
- Be empathetic, open to feedback, and use it to improve my learning, professional growth, and collaboration with others.

## Support and Scaffolding

### Support

#### Structure and Transparency

- Provide clear information on expectations, structures and pathways
- Ensure accessible services, guidance and orientation
- Offer structured transition models and support frameworks

#### Learning Capability and Agency

- Provide learning and personal development skills support and personal development skills
- Offer tools for planning and navigating pathways
- Enable opportunities for choice and progression

#### Belonging and Community

- Create opportunities for peer interaction and networking
- Provide mentoring and connections to different organisations
- Support communities and collaboration structures

#### Support and Psychological Safety

- Provide accessible support services and inclusive practices
- Recognise diverse learner needs and life situations
- Enable safe and supportive learning environments

## Scaffolding

### Structure and Transparency

- Provide clear goals, instructions and expectations in specific context
- Make processes and requirements explicit
- Guide learners into new practices step by step

### Learning Capability and Agency

- Facilitate reflection on learning, goals and decisions
- Provide continuous feedback and guidance
- Adjust support and gradually increase independence
- Enable active choice and participation in learning

### Belonging and Community

- Build dialogue and relationships in everyday interaction
- Facilitate peer support and collaborative learning
- Connect learning to meaningful communities and practices

### Support and Psychological Safety

- Create psychological safety in interactions
- Normalize uncertainty, doubt and mistakes
- Provide individual support through mentoring and dialogue
- Support confidence, balance and persistence

# Transition: School to Work

## Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility

### Knowledge

#### I understand/ I'm aware of...

- The labour market and employment conditions
- Workplace culture and professional expectations (e.g. communication norms, autonomy, teamwork, feedback, responsibility and adaptation to organisational contexts)
- That not everyone follows the same career path
- Recruitment and job-search processes
- Planning tools for transition from university to work (e.g. CVs, job search plans, and goal setting)
- My own competences and professional profile
- How to balance study, work, and family responsibilities

### Skills

#### I'm able to...

- Adapt and be flexible when facing uncertain career paths
- Present myself through CVs, job applications and job interviews
- Articulate my competences
- Gradually build confidence through practice
- Use job-search plans, reflection templates, and structured feedback
- Translate educational experiences into work-relevant skills

### Responsibility

#### I take initiative to/I choose to...

- Be open to non-linear career paths and tolerate uncertainty while adapting to changing opportunities
- Be self-confident combined with humility
- Have perceived employability
- Build a clear story about future career path
- Accept temporary positions
- Be open to continuous development of my competences
- Develop and use networks for career opportunities

### **Support - How organisations can support learners**

#### **Structure and Transparency**

- Give examples of successful transition pathways
- Provide structured career guidance
- Provide structure mentoring programs
- Ensure that career services and opportunities are clearly communicated and accessible
- Offer workshop on labour market navigation

#### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Offer workshops on CV writing
- Offer workshop on how to do job interviews
- Help learners in adjusting their plans through regular feedback
- Provide work-integrated learning

#### **Belonging and Community**

- Increase collaboration with companies/employers
- Create networking events with companies
- Provide role models
- Provide structure mentoring programs
- Provide pre-job training and special apprenticeships for young people with disabilities

#### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Provide structured career guidance (also fits here as ongoing support)
- Provide team meetings and individual transition plans and coordinated support for learners with disabilities, specific support needs or additional barriers to labour-market access

## **Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning**

### **Structure and Transparency**

- Gradually expose students to workplace expectations (through projects, visits or internships)
- Introduce labour market knowledge and career pathways early in the curriculum
- Provide structured feedback on job applications, CVs and interview preparation
- Align between curricula and labour market needs

### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Support students in identifying their competences and articulating them to employers
- Provide tasks that match students' current level of competence.
- Support students in developing mastery during apprenticeships.
- Use authentic learning activities that link theory with practical applications

### **Belonging and Community**

- Promote positive interactions with guidance services and peer communities during transitions
- Provide individual mentoring conversations to discuss uncertainty and career plans

### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Facilitate reflection activities about career choices
- Facilitate reflection activities about strengths
- Facilitate reflection activities about future goals
- Provide individual mentoring conversations to discuss uncertainty and career plans

# Transition: VET to HE

## Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility

### Knowledge

#### I understand/ I'm aware of ...

- How higher education works (assessment systems, course expectations, administrative procedures)
- Differences between VET and HE learning environments
- Academic requirements and theoretical expectations
- Academic strategies

### Skills

#### I'm able to...

- Interpret expectations across different courses
- Adapt and refine learning strategies
- Evaluate and develop my study skills
- Identify and act on opportunities to influence outcomes
- Cope with academic pressure
- Develop a sense of belonging to study community

### Responsibility

#### I take initiative to/ I choose to...

- Be goal-oriented
- Face new challenges
- Be able to adapt
- Be interested in others

### **Support - How organisations can support learners**

#### **Structure and Transparency**

- Provide clear and accessible information about university expectations, structures and systems
- Ensure communication goes beyond administrative requirements to include everyday academic practices
- Arrange structured introduction activities
- Provide phased transition models
- Introduce learners to HE learning environments

#### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Offer preparatory modules that help bridge theoretical gaps
- Gradually introduce learners to academic expectations
- Train learners in study skills
- Support learners' time management skills development
- Help learners to seek information through peers, internet and digital tools

#### **Belonging and Community**

- Create opportunities for interaction between VET learners and HE learners
- Develop mentoring and peer-support programmes
- Help learners build peer relations

#### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Strengthen transition guidance between VET and HE

## **Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning**

### **Structure and Transparency**

- Clarify expectations regarding courses, assignments and assessment
- Ensure clear course structures
- Provide structured guidance in the early stages of transition

### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Gradually increase learners' independence
- Provide learners with opportunities for choice in learning tasks
- Provide continuous constructive feedback on academic performance and study strategies

### **Belonging and Community**

- Facilitate peer support
- Develop meaningful learning activities
- Ensure teaching staff are approachable

### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Facilitate reflection on learning approaches and academic challenges
- Provide learners with opportunities for reflection
- Engage learners in dialogue about their progress, doubts and goals
- Provide learners with constructive feedback
- Create supportive learning environments that reduce fear of failure
- Establish learning environments where learners feel recognized and supported
- Maintain constant and systematic meta level - discussion about normalizing and solving uncertainty issues with learners in daily situations

# Transition: Work to school

Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility

## Knowledge

### I understand/ I'm aware of...

- Learning takes time
- That learning experience is built together
- That in transitions it's normal for identity, everyday life, and roles to change

## Skills

### I'm able to...

- Make use of work/professional experience
- Behave competence-based: self-management and structuring (planning time and energy, creating routines and balance)

## Responsibility

### I take initiative to/I choose to...

- Reflect on professional self-understanding and ask, 'Who am I now?'
- Avoid diminishing comparisons (self-acceptance)
- Show autonomy in learning
- Be resourceful and manage available resources effectively

### Support - How organisations can support learners

#### Structure and Transparency

- Provide pre-entry orientation sessions and realistic expectation-setting
- Align expectations early and provide relatable role models

#### Learning Capability and Agency

- Support students in building a new everyday rhythm, regulating energy, and sustaining balance

#### Belonging and Community

- Arrange social activities facilitating connections among mature students
- Arrange peer groups for mature students

#### Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety

- Reduce uncertainty through normalization and visibility
  - Normalization ("it's okay to fail / it's normal to doubt")
  - Visibility ("someone like me has done this; I can too")
- Address structural barriers affecting adult learners

### Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning

#### Structure and Transparency

- Provide institutional guidance and clear frameworks
- Use a structured course design
- Define goals clearly
- Set explicit expectations
- Ensure transparency

#### Learning Capability and Agency

- Promote autonomy and flexibility in teaching
- Recognise prior learning and value adult learners' professional experience
- Provide scaffolding around digital systems and assessment formats
- Use peer practices as everyday scaffolds

#### Belonging and Community

- Build teacher–student relationships that foster psychological safety
- Use company visits and real-world cases
- Match students with alumni to show that success is achievable

#### Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety

- Conduct development conversations

# Transition: Life stage to another

## Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility

### Knowledge

#### I understand/ I'm aware of...

- That transitions are gradual and non-linear processes that require time and adjustment.
- The loss of familiar environments may create both challenges (uncertainty, isolation) and opportunities (new learning and growth).
- The emotional, social, and institutional dynamics of transition.
- Common emotional responses to transition (uncertainty, stress, loss) and how they may affect learning and decision-making.
- How roles, expectations, and identity may change during life stage transitions.
- Strategies for managing and reducing uncertainty in new situations.
- Awareness that access to information and support may vary, and ability to identify and navigate potential barriers.
- How to judge reliable information
- That access to opportunities and support may be shaped by social, economic, and cultural factors.
- Available pathways and options
- Rights, responsibilities, and available services
- Financial implications

### Skills

#### I'm able to...

- Focus on building skills and acting.
- Learn and adapt to the language, communication styles, and norms of the new environment.
- Navigate institutional processes and systems (education, employment, support services).
- Communicate needs, set boundaries, and advocate for appropriate support.
- Recognise the limits of one's knowledge and seek appropriate support or expertise.
- Understand how actions and decisions lead to specific outcomes.
- Generate alternative solutions and perspectives when facing unfamiliar challenges (lateral thinking).
- Manage unfamiliar problems by identifying when and how to seek additional expertise or resources.

### Responsibility

#### I take initiative to/I choose to...

- Evaluate short-term opportunities for gaining experience while balancing long-term career goals, rights, and recognition.
- Acknowledge and plan for financial changes while seeking available support and resources.
- Consider multiple possible future pathways and alternatives.
- Develop the willingness to take informed and reasonable risks under uncertainty.
- Ask for help and support.
- Critically reflect on personal, social, and structural factors influencing the transition.
- Show self-compassion and recognise that challenges and setbacks are part of the transition process.
- Be open to redefining one's identity, roles, and expectations in new contexts.

### **Support - How organisations can support learners**

#### **Structure and Transparency**

- Give learners a “trial day” or “internship beforehand”
- Provide flexible work structures
- Gradual increase in working hours
- Provide aftercare or vocational training assistance

#### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Build resilience and agency through practical experiences, internships, and micro-practices
- Give more support than traditional apprenticeships, allowing learners to “take it slower”

#### **Belonging and Community**

- Provide an opportunity to build on pre-existing familiarity with staff
- Provide access to diverse role models representing varied pathways, experiences, and outcomes
- Facilitate access to inclusive and institutionally supported networks, particularly for learners with limited social capital
- Be aware that parental socioeconomic background influences trajectories and perceptions of transitions

#### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Provide respectful, autonomy-supportive engagement that recognises learners’ prior experiences
- Support opportunities through personal networks (also emotional/identity support layer)

## **Scaffolding - How teachers/mentors can scaffold learning**

### **Structure and Transparency**

- Provide transparency and “basic structures” such as punctuality, routines and clear expectations
- Give structured guidance through the curriculum
- Help with writing applications
- Provide instructions and help with exam preparation

### **Learning Capability and Agency**

- Use visual tools like “competence boards”
- Facilitate smoother transition and skill development for youth through work-based education, mentoring, and dual systems
- Allow learners to “take it slower”
- Go through techniques more thoroughly

### **Belonging and Community**

- Utilize NGOs, UNHCR, teachers, social workers, mentorship programs, and organizational systems (dual training, apprenticeships) as scaffolds
- Facilitate activities that support “finding new friends”
- Create positive atmosphere

### **Guidance, Reflection and Psychological Safety**

- Provide respectful, autonomy-supportive engagement that recognises learners’ prior experiences
- Maintain a “real-world” reference in training
- Use external benchmarks, such as country-of-origin information to help objectify credibility assessments for refugees
- Provide a safe, supportive and patient work environment
- Provide company visits and real cases
- Develop trust through consistent support structures

