



The Lab Hotel

Innovation and Learning Practice

Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) Project

Submitted by Hotelfachschule Thun, Switzerland

The Lab Hotel – a real-life hotel with paying guests – enables students at the Hotelfachschule (Hotel Management School) in Thun, Switzerland, to explore innovative concepts and test experimental approaches to the hospitality industry, including digitalization and sustainable solutions. Experiments at this school-owned hotel have included the use of digital air quality management systems, robots in hotel rooms, and flexible, modular bedrooms.

Start date: March 2021

Type of implementing institution: TVET institution

Target group: TVET students



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THUN**

Hotelfachschule Thun

Hotelfachschule Thun, a college of Professional Education with Training (PET), is an institution co-founded by HotellerieSuisse (the Swiss Hotel Association) that is recognized by the Swiss Federal Government and subsidized by political authorities. It offers a state-of-the-art education for students who are training to work in the hospitality industry. The three-year training programme includes practical work placements and students graduate as PET-qualified hoteliers and restaurant managers. Hotelfachschule Thun offers ISCED level 6 qualifications.

Description of activities

The Lab Hotel's real-world focus enables students to learn practical skills in tourism training whilst also exploring innovative concepts and testing new approaches. By leading real-life projects, students learn to take greater responsibility and develop their leadership skills. This increases their motivation, which has a positive impact on their approach to their studies. The learning effect of such hands-on training is greater and more sustainable than traditional, classroom approaches.

The main activities at the hotel focus not only on students' internships, but also on short practical training units or project work, where students work in collaboration with their lecturers. Each assignment starts with setting objectives and defining obstacles and targets, and ends with reflection on its impact. This work can be assessed either with a grade or an evaluation. In order to provide students with new skills, innovative topics are fed directly into the projects by the innovation department such as sustainability programmes, new technologies or new mobility solutions.

Relevance

Why was the Lab Hotel established?

The Lab Hotel aims to promote young talent and equip students with new skills that will benefit their later professional life in a currently under-staffed hospitality sector. It recognizes the importance of digital and green skills to address environmental challenges and of leveraging technology for sustainable solutions. By developing these digital and green skills, students can not only enhance their

career prospects but also become informed and responsible global citizens who are equipped to tackle the challenges of the future. The initiative also develops the entrepreneurial skills of the students by empowering them to become innovative thinkers, problem solvers, and change-makers who are prepared to navigate the complexities of the hospitality sector in today's economy.

What strategies has the Lab Hotel employed to address these challenges?

By introducing a major innovation to a traditional hotel management school, the Lab Hotel aims to give Hotelfachschule Thun a competitive edge in terms of attracting more students and, ultimately, well-qualified professionals for the hospitality sector. While the aim is to ensure the growth and financial security for the entire institution, the initiative focuses primarily on the needs of the younger generation for active involvement, meaningful work, and skills that can contribute to their profession and support their communities.

The management skills obtained as a result of this hands-on training sets students apart from others on the employment markets and develops their personalities. In addition, their lecturers are able to convey the course content more quickly thanks to this practical approach. By the time they graduate, students are equipped with high-quality skills that can benefit their employers.

Added value

What is new about the Lab Hotel?

The Lab Hotel is the first fully functional hotel on a school campus, partly run by students, which contributes to innovation and sustainability. In the hotel training centre, students put theory into practice, gaining insights into hotel management whilst also developing and testing new innovations together with their expert teachers.

One of the unique features of the hotel is that it has six experimental rooms that can be designed and re-designed by the students on a rotating basis. The so-called 'Lab Rooms' provide hands-on experience enabling students to gain new insights that they would not be able to gain elsewhere. Examples of 'Lab Rooms' include one with upcycled furniture, a smart-tech room, one with sustainable modular elements and another designed to facilitate friends socializing together.

Further examples of students' practical project work include a group of students designing and delivering an event with a focus on sustainable circular gastronomy in hospitality for 200 alumni and business guests, and another group setting up a new start-up liqueur business which has since become an ongoing and successful venture.

What positive outcomes have occurred as a result of the Lab Hotel?

The Lab Hotel enriches the study programme offered by the Hotelfachschule Thun, makes it more attractive to future students, and helps to attract young talent into hospitality.

Feedback from students who have trained at the Lab Hotel is extremely positive. They appreciate working on real, rather than fictitious, projects that make their work more meaningful and purpose-driven. Studying in a real hotel environment fosters personal and professional growth by challenging students to step out of their comfort zone, develop new skills, and gain confidence in their abilities. As students work across all operational areas of the hotel, it provides them with a deep insight and understanding of the industry. Graduates with experience studying in a real hotel setting have a competitive edge in the job market making them desirable candidates for hospitality roles.

Transferability

Could the Lab Hotel model be replicated by other TVET institutions in other regions?

The initiative is transferable to other regions with some adaptations to suit local contexts and needs. The establishment of similar Lab Hotels as learning platforms could support local economies, contributing to both community development and job creation. Local governments could support such an approach as part of initiatives to promote regional economic development and tourism.

The implementation of the Lab Hotel model into various modules of existing training programmes could be challenging. In order to implement the Lab Hotel as a training centre into the teaching programme, special teaching units for projects with practical approaches and coaching resources would be required.

Has the initiative been promoted in any national or international contexts?

The initiative has featured in:

- a documentary on **Swiss National TV and Radio**
- a presentation on the **Swiss Hotel Association Website** (partner of HotellerieSuisse)
- an article about the **integration of this initiative into the EHL Education Group**, which offers a range of learning and business solutions, including campuses in Switzerland and Asia.

There is also potential for the Lab Hotel to test products that could have national applications for Switzerland as a whole, and to supervise exchange projects with international institutions.

Hotelfachschule Thun's initiative 'The Lab Hotel' is one of the BILT project's Innovation and Learning Practices that address systemic challenges within the five work streams of the project.

Specifically, the Hotelfachschule Thun initiative addresses new qualifications and competencies in TVET.



New Qualifications and Competencies in TVET

- *Identifying new qualifications and competencies in a timely manner;*
- *Integrating them into appealing and flexible curricula and training regulations; and*
- *Implementing them in innovative training approaches.*

Additional Innovation and Learning Practices cover the following areas:



Digitalization in TVET



Entrepreneurship in TVET



Greening TVET



Migration and TVET

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More information about this practice:

[Lab hotel website](#)

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About the BILT Project

UNESCO-UNEVOC's Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET (BILT) project is a reference point for innovation and learning in TVET. It utilizes the international UNEVOC Network to create opportunities for collaboration and a platform for bridging innovation and learning between Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. BILT complements developments at the national level in supporting innovative, market-oriented and attractive modes of learning and cooperation in TVET.

The BILT project explores the process of identifying, integrating and implementing new qualifications and competencies in TVET. This is known as the 'three I's process'. In addition to the broad focus on new qualifications and competencies, BILT addresses four complementary themes: Digitalization in TVET, Greening TVET, Entrepreneurship in TVET, and Migration and TVET.

For more information, please visit
www.unevoc.unesco.org/bilt

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New Qualifications and Competencies in TVET

- **Identifying** new qualifications and competencies in a timely manner;
- **Integrating** them into appealing and flexible curricula and training regulations; and
- **Implementing** them in innovative training approaches.

Entrepreneurship in TVET

Unlocking the potential of innovative entrepreneurial activities and fostering entrepreneurial culture

Greening TVET

Responding to new development paradigms for sustainability and reduced environmental impact

Digitalization in TVET

Providing response to new skills demands, as technology has permeated the world of work and is changing the profile of jobs

Migration and TVET

Accelerating the integration of migrants into their host communities, and allowing them to become productive members of the workforce

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