

Recommendation Pack



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Introduction

Within the Erasmus+ project, Quality Qualification for VET, the 6 members of the project from Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Belgium and Italy designed a document, called “recommendation pack” that synthetize the outcomes of these last 2 years experience in the project. This document is mainly based on the analyzes of the answers of the questionnaires regarding the mobility, on the experience shared with the partners during interviews and on the knowledge acquired by the partners during their daily work.

This document was created by putting in practice a collaborative and constant work between the partners during the entire period of the project, as well as on a constant inter-exchange of best practices, feedbacks and ideas among each others.

The document takes into consideration all stakeholders involved directly and indirectly into a WBL experience: VET students, teachers, trainers, VET providers, enterprises, policy makers and public bodies in charge of education and employment.

The recommendations listed below have the objective of improving the quality of WBL experiences (traineeships, apprenticeships, dual scheme, job shadowings) al local, regional, national or transnational level by focusing on aspects that can be improved as well as actors that can make a change in positive in this field. The recommendation pack identifies some mainstream innovative successful strategies that can ensure that WBL experiences will reflect the needs and expectations of the business world and the needs and expectations of the VET students, VET teachers and trainers, VET providers and public bodies in charge of education and employment.

The recommendation pack initial idea started from analyzing one of the objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme that is to increase quality mobility within vocational education and training (VET) and support the European internationalization of VET organizations in the Erasmus+ Programme countries.



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Recommendations for VET students on how to participate to a WBL experience

Become part of the Erasmus+ generation!

Analyzing the answers given by the students in the questionnaires administered in all the 6 countries and based on the daily work of some of the partners that are in constant contact with the students, we created the following list of recommendations:

- Students should be invited to scheduled pre-departure meetings before publishing the internship call. In those events students should acquire information about Erasmus+ programme and the possibilities offered to do a internship abroad (type of beneficiaries, costs for the participants, requirement, documents, deadline, information about what an internship is) in order to give to the students the necessary tools and information in order to decide if applying for a mobility abroad or not.
- Once selected students should receive more pre-departure information about the experience abroad, about the country where they will live and, very important, about the culture in which they will be living during all the experience. A period of time is needed before the departure for students to get used to and assimilate all this information. If done properly students will avoid like this any kind of cultural shock and will learn to be more flexible and adapt to new situations. These sessions are also important to help students avoid misunderstandings or misinterpretations of some situations.
- Students should attend a language course before the departure or in the destination country as a basic mean to facilitate the integration process in the new context. From the experience of the different partners and feedbacks from the students, the conclusion is that is much more effective a course in the classroom then one online as students get more concentrated and learn much more.



- Students and families should be informed about the services that the Erasmus+ programme covers during a mobility abroad.
- A good way of keeping track of all the experience and have a real idea of the acquired or improved competences is to use a diary to be filled in every day. Take time and reflect on what happened that day, the emotions you felt and the situations in which you were and how you solved them. The diary will be a perfect base from where to start when you will be asked to list the soft skills acquired.



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Recommendations for teachers and trainers on how to organize quality WBL

Support the growing Erasmus+ generation!

Teachers have a fundamental role when it comes to mobilities' experience of their students. They are the most direct person, together with the parents, that can support, inform and guide the students into choosing a mobility experience abroad. This affirmation is supported also by the answers given in the questionnaires (IO1). Students from all the 6 countries expressed that they mostly receive information about mobility programs through their teachers. In five of the six countries the main source of information about VET mobility programmes are the teachers, with percentages that go from 64% in Italy to 95% in Portugal. Only in Belgium the situation is more balanced, with percentages similar between the sources (teachers, students and internet).

- Support the students in their decision of doing an internship abroad
- Create moments of conversation and sharing experiences between students that are preparing to go abroad and students that finished their experience
- Guide the students towards the most appropriate mobility project
- Dedicate time to hear and analyze the motivations of the students if part of the Erasmus+ commission of the school. From the past experience partners of the project saw that the success of a mobility is mainly based on the motivation and adaptability, and less on the results scored at school by the students.
- Organize a pre-departure language course. In this way students will feel more self-confident when abroad.
- Ask your institution about the possibility to participate in a staff mobility abroad. Erasmus+ programme offers possibility of doing a mobility abroad also to teacher. They can participate in job shadowing experiences or training courses in order to skilled on a specific topic. The majority of teachers from all the countries participating in the questionnaires expressed their interest in participating in a mobility.



Recommendations for enterprises on how to provide and tutor quality WBL experiences

Integrate new practices into your business and give it a European dimension!

Each stakeholder has its own role and responsibilities in the WBL experience, so the companies receiving the interns as well. These responsibilities come together with a list of advantages. By hosting a foreign intern the company will create a more international corporate identity, increase the international contact network, have a more heterogeneous and international working environment and become like that more competitive in the globalized market.

The following recommendations for companies are listed in order to guide them in providing and tutoring quality WBL experiences.

- Search for agencies in your city that can explain you the Erasmus+ programme and the benefits of receiving an intern (costs, rules, timing, benefits). Often the lack of information on receiving intern makes companies have a negative idea about a mobility experience. Sometimes companies refuse this great opportunity only based on the lack of information regarding costs and bureaucracy.
- Assign a tutor before the arrival of the intern. The tutor should contact the intern before the arrival by skype or e-mail in order to have a first contact and also receive all the information needed for the preparation of the WBL experience in the company.
- Inform yourself and your staff about the intern's cultural and personal background. It is important to have information about the intern before the arrival. After gathering this information, the tutor should prepare the staff for the intern's arrival. This activity is fundamental for the good integration of the intern in the new working context. Staff could take some time and learn a short vocabulary in the intern's language in order to ease the integration process. Remember that interculturality is a both-sides process



- Discover the intern's language and culture, so you can demonstrate empathy when needed. Most of the conflicts and problems at work are due exactly to a misperception of the other's culture, tagging some behaviors as strange or rude. Having a basic knowledge of the customs of other culture will help in understanding more the intern, especially when the case of 2 very different cultures, for example Finnish intern in a Spanish company.
- Organize a working schedule for the intern previous to the arrival and discuss it on the first day of internship. In that occasion explain the rules applied in the company and the values on which is based, so the intern can have a clear idea of the company's policy and vision.
- Prepare the documents needed to recognize the competences acquired during the internship. Recognition of the competences acquired by the intern is a fundamental aspect of the mobility, both for the company and for the intern. Often an internship is a springboard for entering the job market. That is why it is extremely important to recognize officially the trainee's internship experience by issuing a company Certificate, signing the Europass and issuing the Reference letter.

Companies have an important role in the quality WBL experiences for future workforce to access to the job market in an efficient way, so is important that companies are informed and supported in this path.



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Quality Qualification Vocational Educational Training

Recommendations for VET directors on how to support quality WBL experiences

Improve the quality of the VET studies!

Including WBL experiences abroad in the curricula shows students the relevance of their courses to future jobs, and so makes them more interested in studying. This can be important for increasing participation and outcomes for disadvantaged students as well.

- Increase the events of disseminating and presenting the European opportunities to your students, offering in this way the necessary tools to students in order to decide for their future: in 4 out of 6 countries the majority of students didn't have any previous experience in European VET study/internship mobilities. Only in Belgium 50% of the students were engaged in summer activities, 16,7% in training experiences and 8,3% in volunteering. The majority of students (more than 88%) studying in Spain, Italy, Czech Republic and Portugal declared in the questionnaires that they don't have a previous experience in VET mobilities abroad.
- Introduce the mobility abroad as integrated part of the curricula of the students, giving more prestige to your institution. From the learners' point of view, work-based learning can make their programmes of study more interesting and connect them more directly to the world of work. It can improve their job prospects by giving them more relevant work skills and by connecting them to employers who may offer them jobs after finishing studies.
- Offer VET mobilities in order to help young people make smoother transitions from school to employment.
- Organize class - language course and include them in the preparatory phase of the mobility. From the answers given by the teachers, language



preparation is one of the most important concern when it comes to the planning and preparation period.

- Organize a reunion with parents and students in which deal topics such as travel matters and work abroad, topics concerning parents
- Organize a structured training for teachers on mobility topics, especially on the project part, how to contact with the hosting companies, tutoring during the mobility and evaluation session. From the questionnaires administrated in the 6 countries more than 80% of teachers interviewed in each country (with peak of 100% in Portugal and Czech Republic) declare that they would like to receive a training on the matters listed above.
- Create a solid and trustful network in which can be establish and sign commitment agreements in improving the quality of the VET mobilities. A necessity showed by the teachers in almost all the 6 countries was a request of more support of the teachers in the students' destination. So there is a generalized feeling of little satisfaction from the teachers when it comes to the during mobility phase.



Recommendations for policy makers on how to promote quality WBL experiences

Ease the access to WBL experiences!

- Appropriate and national orientated youth policies focused on improving and increasing the possibilities of youngster in finding a job after finishing studies

Most of the students that intend to go for a WBL experience abroad declared that they do that mainly to increase their chances in finding a (better) job afterwards. This is the case of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Czech Republic, Belgium students seemed less concerned about this aspect is the least concerned. Students from Belgium, unlike the other countries, seen the WBL abroad as an opportunity to live an experience abroad.

This data is also supported by another results in which all students from the six countries are unanimous declaring that a mobility abroad improves the CV.

- Foreseen a (better) remuneration for teachers accompanying the students abroad for mobility, recognizing in this way their important role and responsibility in the mobility project. From the questionnaires collected in the 6 countries, in Portugal and Spain teachers declare not receiving any extra remuneration for their extra work connected with the students' mobility. This situation discourages teachers in getting involved in the project or tutoring phase or even in recommending the experience to the students, as not feeling rewarded correspondently. The students need and feel safer when a tutor teacher accompanying them in their mobility, so it is essential to have motivated and satisfied teachers in their daily work.
- Support and ease the access to mobility project funds. Support the Erasmus+ mobility project and mobility projects in general, as an important way of building the European identity. More than 80% of the students in countries such as Portugal, Spain and Belgium declare that a similar experience helps increasing the European identity and feeling of being a



European citizen. These mobility programmes have a high return-on-investment ratio in terms of cultural and social inclusion and the integration of young Europeans

- Introduce more policies of modernizing vocational education and training, make it more attractive
- Guarantee a better transparency and recognition of qualifications
- Sustain companies by developing internationalization strategies, while also helping business find the right skills they need to increase their competitiveness
- Clear and revealing information on Vocational Training is needed to increase the number of young people who use vocational training as a career path
- A cooperation with schools and teachers is needed in order to improve the certification of the work done by the teachers related to mobilities as a tool of recognition of their important support part in the mobility
- Raise awareness, marketing and communication campaigns in which employer, organizations, trade unions and governments should all be involved. Marketing work-based learning programmes to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who are the least likely to know about them, is particularly important.



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Conclusions

All the actors of the VET mobility programmes have an important role in improving the quality and attractiveness of VET programmes, creating strong connections between formal and non formal education.

There is no doubt that these experiences are representing a more flexible way of learning to adapt better to the labour market needs, providing a better match between education and employers necessities.

As explained above the WBL experience abroad is an opportunity to create the first contact with the labour market. In order for the experience to be recognized and valued by the companies a continuously processes of improving the recognition and validation of competences gained during learning periods abroad is requested.

Teachers demand a bigger involvement in European programmes as main beneficiary or as part of a student's mobility. In the first case the aim is to improved qualifications of teaching and training staff, in order to acquire the necessary skills for a more innovative way of operating towards their students.

Another important aspect that the impact study shows is the total or partial recognition lack of teacher's work, so it is necessary a uniformized recognition system accepted and recognized in all the partner countries

Except from the actors mentioned until now, at European level a lot is being doing in order to improve the quality of VET studies and mobilities. Continuously European initiatives and studies are organized in order to understand the opinion and perceptions of European citizens regarding VET programmes, as well as the benefits impacts: the study 'Attitudes towards vocational education and training' by the European Commission Eurobarometer from 2011 or the Cedefop initiative "European public opinion survey on vocational education and training" from 2016. As explained also by the CEDEFOP in the 2015 report "Work-based learning in continuing vocational education and training": policies and practices in Europe continuing vocational education and training (CVET), particularly its work-based forms, are important in the current European economic and social context.

A WBL experience abroad benefits all the actors included because:



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- produces higher-quality skills that are more relevant to real work situations than does learning that occurs entirely in the classroom;
- it produces skills that are likely to be more up to date with current practices in the workplace;
- helps to strengthen cooperation between education and business, and to create strong links, both for individual students and for the system as a whole, between vocational education and the real demands of the labour market;
- increases the link between learners and the labour market and so improves their chances of getting a job after they complete their training;
- involves employers in designing and managing VET, thus increasing their confidence in the system;

Structured work-based learning programmes have a number of distinctive features that policy makers and employer and employee organisations need to take into account. One of the most important is that no single organisation on its own can implement them. They are not like company internal training programmes or school and college courses, which can be conducted by firms, schools or colleges alone. Ensuring that such programmes are successful requires every key partner to work together. In practice this usually means more than one organization. Moreover, things need to be done at more than one level: nationally, regionally and locally. Coordination and cooperation are at the heart of successful structured work-based learning programmes.

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