



# Sharing Experiences of work with Employers in Delivering international work placements (SEED): Report and Recommendations

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A UK Erasmus+ National Agency Peer Learning Event



Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport. The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.

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## **1. The Background to SEED**

The ErasmusPro initiative within the Erasmus+ programme supports long-duration mobility for VET learners. This new action, included under Key Action 1 (learning mobility) of the programme, and extending to the end of the Erasmus+ programme, aims at facilitating and promoting work placements of 3 to 12 months for VET students and recent VET graduates.

In the context of this changing VET and mobility landscape, members of the UK ECVET Expert Team led a one-day event (Sharing Experiences of work with Employers in Delivering international work placements, or SEED) to open up discussion with those involved in delivering VET mobility programmes. The aim was to consider how we might more fully involve and prepare employers to play a role in VET mobility and how we might also respond to the European Commission's vision for delivering international work placements of a longer-duration, with the new ErasmusPro sub-action. UK VET providers, intermediary organisations and their partners in industry and education, were invited to share their experiences.

Specifically, SEED focused on international work placements for apprentices and others involved in work-based learning, to consider the benefits and possible challenges associated with the delivery of international work placements of short and long-duration; and, to consider how different VET mobility stakeholders might inform change and improvement in the longer-term.

This peer learning event, followed-up on the conclusions of the PEARL Transnational Cooperation Activity (July 2017), which looked at tools and processes able to support the recognition of learning and skills when acquired as part of an international work placement.

## **2. The UK Context**

Nicola Poultney of the UK Erasmus+ National Agency (NA), provided an overview of the UK response to the introduction of ErasmusPro, providing details on UK funding applications in 2018.

For example, it was confirmed that 21 out of the 156 applications received under KA102 (standard VET mobility applications) and KA116 (VET mobility applications by holders of the VET Mobility Charter), in 2018, included ErasmusPro activities. This proportion represents 13.5% of applications received and is slightly higher than the average across the 33 Erasmus+ Programme Countries. This represents 7% of the total number of VET learner mobilities requested in UK applications, extending to a potential 861 learners. Overall figures show that UK applicants have responded well to this new initiative and are in line response rates in other participating countries.

After assessment, 17 of these mobility projects were approved for funding, with the UK Erasmus+ NA having awarded 18% of its budget for VET Mobility to projects including ErasmusPro activity, which is within the maximum percentage recommended by the European Commission (22%).

It is positive that, while most applicants are planning for their ErasmusPro mobilities to last for the minimum three-month duration, or slightly above, five will also be implementing longer-term ErasmusPro mobilities. It is hoped that the successful completion of these mobilities will encourage applicants to continue applying for long-term mobility and to disseminate ErasmusPro results among their networks, thus potentially increasing the proportion of long-term mobilities featuring in future Call years.

## 2. Workshop Themes and Key Findings

### 2.1 Sowing the Seed (Dr Andrew McCoshan, UK ECVET Expert)

In a session entitled **Sowing the Seed**, participants considered the *additional* benefits of international work placements lasting for 3-6 months, both for employers and for learners, including apprentices.

From a learner perspective, there was no shortage of benefits being highlighted with higher-level technical, language, personal development and intercultural skills each cited alongside improved employability, access to new networks and employment opportunities, and the ability to better understand the needs of industry through spending additional time in the workplace.

Benefits for employers were considered from the perspective of those sending and receiving VET learners. For those sending, benefits included a greater return on investment through having learners gain a much broader understanding of industry requirements. For those receiving, benefits centred on the additional dividend brought forth by visiting learners in terms of new ideas, improvements to workplace practices and/or enhanced intercultural understanding among existing employees. There was also the potential, for those receiving VET learners, to identify possible future employees, especially among recent graduates participating in long-duration mobility.

### 2.2 Fertilisation (Martyn Haines, UK ECVET Expert)

Participants were invited to consider the challenges of short and long-duration mobility for different stakeholder audiences (learners, employers, VET providers, regulatory bodies). As with benefits, there was no shortage of challenges being highlighted with the usual inhibitors confirmed alongside one or two new thoughts and perspectives, as can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1: Challenges confirmed for Learners, Employers, VET Providers and Regulatory Authorities (Fertilisation)



The results of the fertilisation activity were adapted into a series of 15 questions (below), for participants to subsequently consider.

Q1	How can long-duration mobility be made affordable for learners?
Q2	How can learners be helped to cope with record-keeping and documentation, during long-duration mobility, tied to the completion of (national) vocational qualifications?
Q3	How can learners be helped to cope with, and benefit from, immersion in another language and culture during longer-duration mobility?
Q4	How can we help employers to perform their role in the delivery of long-duration mobility (training and assessment)?
Q5	How can unpredictable business workflows be accommodated when planning longer-duration mobility?
Q6	How can employers be encouraged to provide additional support to learners, including pastoral care?
Q7	How can employers help to address regulatory barriers to longer-duration mobility (employment law, health and safety)?
Q8	How can we ensure the authenticity/sufficiency/validity/reliability of assessment taking place during long-duration mobility?
Q9	How can we plan and deliver higher-level/technical language training to support long-duration mobility?
Q10	How can we ensure the relevance of learning during long-duration mobility (level/content/tasks)?
Q11	How can personal skills development for learners be recognised/recorded/validated during longer-duration mobility?
Q12	How can we promote the benefits of longer-duration mobility to different stakeholder audiences (employers/learners/staff)?
Q13	How can we ensure adequate institutional support for those involved in delivering long-duration mobility programmes (contracting/financing/safety/support)?
Q14	How can we influence course design to accommodate long-duration mobility?
Q15	How can we ensure understanding among awarding bodies and their external verifiers?

### 2.3 Growth (Iverene Bromfield, UK ECVET Expert)

Participants were asked to consider the identified challenges, working from the series of questions (above) that had been formed during the Fertilisation stage and to propose possible solutions. In almost all cases, and in relatively limited time, participants were able to identify one or more means of progression, listing key actions and providing targeted recommendations, for specific stakeholder audiences, with a view to aiding the delivery of longer-duration mobility. Among these, the following points and recommendations were particularly noteworthy:

- Consideration of specific needs and situations of participants undertaking longer-duration mobility, such as funding and provision for return trips home during the mobility period [Q1];
- the value of co-creation - involving home and host staff as well as learners - when creating systems and procedures for documenting learning [Q2];
- the need to consider (and allow for) employer participation in advance planning visits to the hosting country [Q4];
- the continuation of National Agency dialogue with key national stakeholders (for example, Federation of Awarding Bodies, sector skills councils) with a view to ensuring the exchange of knowledge and information on policies and practices [Q7, Q15];
- the need for home and host institutions to be fully aware/informed of their capacities/responsibilities for assessment, aligning this with the rules/expectations of the awarding body [Q8];

- the benefits of partnerships in delivering language training (for example, hosting language assistants or collaborating with local Universities) [Q9];
- the potential for developing a free-standing module on international work experience, specifically encompassing soft/transversal skills [Q11];
- the importance of multi-level activities (VET providers, intermediary organisations, sector skills councils, professional bodies, Erasmus+ National Agency, ECVET Experts, past mobility participants) in promoting longer-duration mobility [Q12];
- the need for VET providers to normalise international work placements within existing course/programme provision [Q14].

## **2.4 Harvesting (Paul Guest, UK ECVET Expert)**

The final session, **Harvesting**, brought together all that had been discussed and suggested, prior to closing proceedings. Having been financed as a part of the annual workplan for the UK ECVET Expert Team, a commitment was made to continue promotion of the results of this peer learning workshop, addressing both UK and wider stakeholder audiences involved in the development and delivery of VET mobility programmes.

Participant feedback subsequently confirmed the value and importance of this peer learning event, providing an opportunity to consider the benefits and challenges associated with longer-duration mobility and planting the *seed* for change through confirming potential solutions as well as those actors expected to take the lead in delivering improvement and enhancement in existing policies and practices.

## **3. Conclusions and Recommendations**

UK project promoters are in line with other Erasmus+ Programme Countries, in terms of their level of interest in ErasmusPro and longer-duration mobilities. Mobilities for apprentices and other types of work-based learners offer opportunities to achieve longer and more meaningful work experiences abroad, with clear additional benefits to learners, employers and VET training providers.

Although these activities present various challenges, the benefits are such that many organisations are committed to meeting these challenges and finding workable solutions. Employers, regulatory authorities, the Erasmus+ National Agency, ECVET Experts, VET providers and intermediary organisations all have a role to play individually and working together.

The recommendations from this event will be presented to the UK team of ECVET Experts for further consideration and resources will be allocated to progress some of these as part of their 2019 Workplan.