
1. WHY THIS HANDBOOK?

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In a job market that demands more flexibility and adaptability to change, international mobility is becoming increasingly necessary. One of the European Union's immediate goals is open educational systems and training for a wider world to ensure qualified workers who in addition to their professional competences have the ability to work and communicate with people abroad. This is one way in which Europe can adapt to the challenges of a globalised economy and ensure that its education and training systems are competitive.

The European Commission is currently developing a European system (ECVET) that will allow greater transparency in qualifications between countries. This has contributed to mobility which is today seen as an essential element for a complete training of the individual, committed to carrying out life long learning in different countries and in a wider variety of contexts (formal, non formal and informal).

One of the main obstacles detected that reduces the motivation for international mobility as part of initial vocational, labour market and lifelong learning training is to identify, recognize and validate the competences acquired during a placement in a foreign country.

The future of international workplace training is to develop and implement common European tools specifically designed for initial vocational education and training, based on the principles of a common framework, which promotes a culture of quality improvement.

The involvement of all players in mobility - IVET providers, host companies, IVET students and coordinating organizations (sending and host country) - is an essential condition for achieving this objective.

As stated in European survey " *Move it: Overcoming Obstacles to Mobility for Apprentices and Other Young People in Vocational Education and Training*" published in April 2007 by European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 400 obstacles to mobility were found:

"Top 10' of the most relevant and pressing obstacles for IVET mobility (not in order of priority):

- *Lack of quality placements.*
- *Lack of knowledge on the benefits of mobility.*
- *Lack of pedagogical know-how on learning in placements.*
- *Lack of sustainable internationalisation strategies.*
- *Lack of research on mobility.*
- *Lack of communities of practice for placement organisers.*
- *Legal and administrative barriers.*
- *Lack of interest among young people.*
- *Lack of linguistic and cultural background knowledge.*
- *Lack of recognition.*"¹

¹ Study on the obstacles to transnational mobility faced apprentices and other young people in initial vocational training and on ways of overcoming them' also referred to as the MoVE-iT project. April 2007: http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/moveitsum_en.pdf

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In addition to the European research and surveys, the Q-Placements project worked together with local work groups in each participant country from north, south, west and east Europe to achieve a cross-European perspective (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain)

Each local work group consisted of:

- IVET students.
- IVET teachers.
- Businesspeople.
- Trade union representatives.
- Representatives from government departments (education and/or employment) as deemed appropriate and which operate in the territory.
- Representatives from business organizations.

Through the discussions held in the framework of these local working groups some conclusions were drawn in each country. Moreover, there have been some common drawbacks in all participant countries which are detailed below.

Drawbacks of mobility detected by all local working groups:

- Language barriers, specially related to host companies.
- Placement's work plan doesn't match student's capabilities, knowledge and skills.
- Lack of knowledge of the students on "business behaviour".
- Lack of time or commitment of company tutor.
- Lack of legal coverage (need for a placement agreement, insurance, safety protection, etc).
- Lack of long lasting partnerships (need for a formal commitment).
- The host companies are not suitable for hosting students (either permanent or temporary).
- The student does not have a basic maturity level. The student has not achieved the required technical level.
- Difficulties in high-level techniques and country-bounded ways of conduct. In this case the companies are not willing to host foreign students.
- Difficult for the companies to see their return on investment when hosting foreign students. Lack of motivation of potential host companies.
- Difficult to find new placements depending on the company sector, especially abroad.
- Teachers spend their own free time for coordinating and placements follow-up, apart from their academic tasks.
- Some weeks are needed for the student to adapt to host country.
- Lack of intercultural knowledge of the student.
- Lack of monitoring of the placement.
- Big companies are more acquainted to placements with foreign students than SMEs.
- Financial resources or grants for the students that really cover travel and accommodation expenses.
- Credits transfer of workplace training done in foreign host companies is not always possible.

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Although several publications are available in Europe to help enhance the quality of international workplace training, there is still a need for a quality assurance handbook that can assist end-users to prepare and follow up placements in an easy way.

The Q-Placements handbook aims at providing guidance to all players involved in the mobility to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of projects and international workplace training activities at the international level.