
3. INTERNATIONAL WORKPLACE TRAINING

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3.1. CONCEPT

Vocational training needs to be approached as a mean of providing students with the theoretical and practical knowledge required to give a flexible and satisfactory response to labour market needs.

Based on this, training given in IVET schools has to dovetail with what goes on in companies, and it should be planned taking into consideration the knowledge students need to acquire in terms of theoretical and conceptual foundations and also about equipment and technology.

It is against this backdrop that workplace training becomes an important part of the education of students doing workplace training programmes as a non-work training activity.

A person on placement should never occupy a vacant post

Placements in companies also seek to bring students into contact with the working world and thus enable them to round off their personal and professional education by doing workplace training in a real production environment.

It should be borne in mind that for many students these placements in companies are their first contact with the working world. Consequently good planning and coordination between heads at the IVET school and in the company concerned are crucial.

The company is outside the IVET school and hence it has a key role to play, in that it enables students to use the knowledge they have gained on the modules they have done at the school in a workplace and thus not only operate in a real professional environment but also gain greater in-depth knowledge of professional practice. While doing placements in companies students will get hands-on experience of technical equipment, carry out professional tasks in a real workplace with its normal determining factors, and learn cross-cutting competences (equipment, organization of work, working with others, etc.) which they will find hard to pick up anywhere else apart from by doing a placement in a real workplace.

There are two main goals for workplace training to achieve:

- To round off the acquisition of professional competences learnt in the IVET school (professional qualification).
- To help the student get a job (occupational integration).

It should be stressed that workplace training is a very important part of the training of students. It is therefore necessary to implement a system of quality local placements in companies and also if possible extend it to international ones as these bring added value to the training process.

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3.2. OBJECTIVES

Workplace training is the essential accompaniment to ensure comprehensive training for students doing vocational training courses.

Workplaces training must entail:

- Upgrading and enhancing theoretical knowledge learnt in IVET Schools.
- Students getting hands-on experience of real production equipment.
- Providing students with the chance to experience a work environment and its system of social and labour relations.
- Enabling companies to find out about the skills and attitudes of a potential future employee.
- Helping vocational training students to achieve professional qualifications and find work.
- Putting in place strategies to bring academic education closer to the world of employment.

For companies workplace training involves:

- Partnering the practical training of students.
- Finding out in the working environment about people who could be potential future qualified employees once their placement training period is over.
- Offering young people their first jobs.
- Maintaining contacts with IVET schools.
- Establishing the post of company tutor, who will mentor the student while they are doing their placement.

Doing workplace training in local companies is very important for companies and students alike, but when the placement takes place abroad, other goals can be achieved in addition to the ones outlined above:

- Bringing an international approach to the company.
- Bringing new ideas, knowledge and methods to the company.
- Expanding cultural competency.
- Finding out about other ways of working.
- Finding out about other cultures.
- Improving general foreign language skills and learning professional jargon in another language.
- Improving personal CVs.
- Seeing mobility as a real possibility for personal development.
- Adapting to a wider job market.
- Driving the concept of belonging to the European Union.
- Development outside the habitual family and social environment; personal growth.

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3.3. DEFINITION OF QUALITY

Although all mobility players have similar concepts of what quality in mobility must be, there is not a common European definition of quality that can be shared by all players involved.

Therefore, there is a strong concern about finding a common definition of quality for mobility, a concern that is shared both by mobility stakeholders and the European Commission.

The Commission has developed several materials designed to enhance quality of mobility:

- Quality commitment: a document signed by the participant and the sending and host organizations which includes the commitments assumed by each of these three participants. http://ec.europa.eu/education/leonardo-da-vinci/doc/quality_en.pdf
- Quality Charter for mobility which in its points 13 and 15 insists on the need for quality, careful planning and suitable evaluation during, before and after the mobility period. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0450en01.pdf
- Erasmus students' charter, which clearly defines what is expected from the students and what the students expect when participating in Erasmus programme. http://ec.europa.eu/education/archive/million/charter_en.pdf

In this handbook we will provide a definition of what quality is with reference to mobility, and in particular to international workplace training.

According to ISO 9000 definition, quality is the degree to which a set of characteristics meet all requirements.

The quality of something depends on a set of inherent characteristics and a set of requirements and how well the former complies with the latter. If those inherent characteristics meet all requirements, high or excellent quality is achieved. Thus quality can be poor, good or excellent. The quality of something can be determined by comparing a set of inherent characteristics with a set of requirements specified in advance.

So quality is a relative concept. Quality is always relative to a set of requirements that are specified in advance, which are needs or expectations to be met.

Quality in mobility is achieved when the mobility experience meets the needs and expectations of the mobility beneficiaries by accomplishing the mobility requirements.

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In all types of mobility experiences there are a number of players involved acting before, during and after the mobility period. Only some of these players are at the same time beneficiaries. Beneficiaries means the people or organizations that benefit from something.

Mobility requirements will be set in order to match the needs and expectations of mobility beneficiaries.

- Mobility which involves only students and IVET schools. The students are the only beneficiaries.
- Mobility which involves students, IVET schools and host companies. The beneficiaries from the mobility are the IVET students and the host companies.

In the first type of mobility only three players are involved and all of them come from the educational world, IVET schools, which make the mobility measure easier to manage.

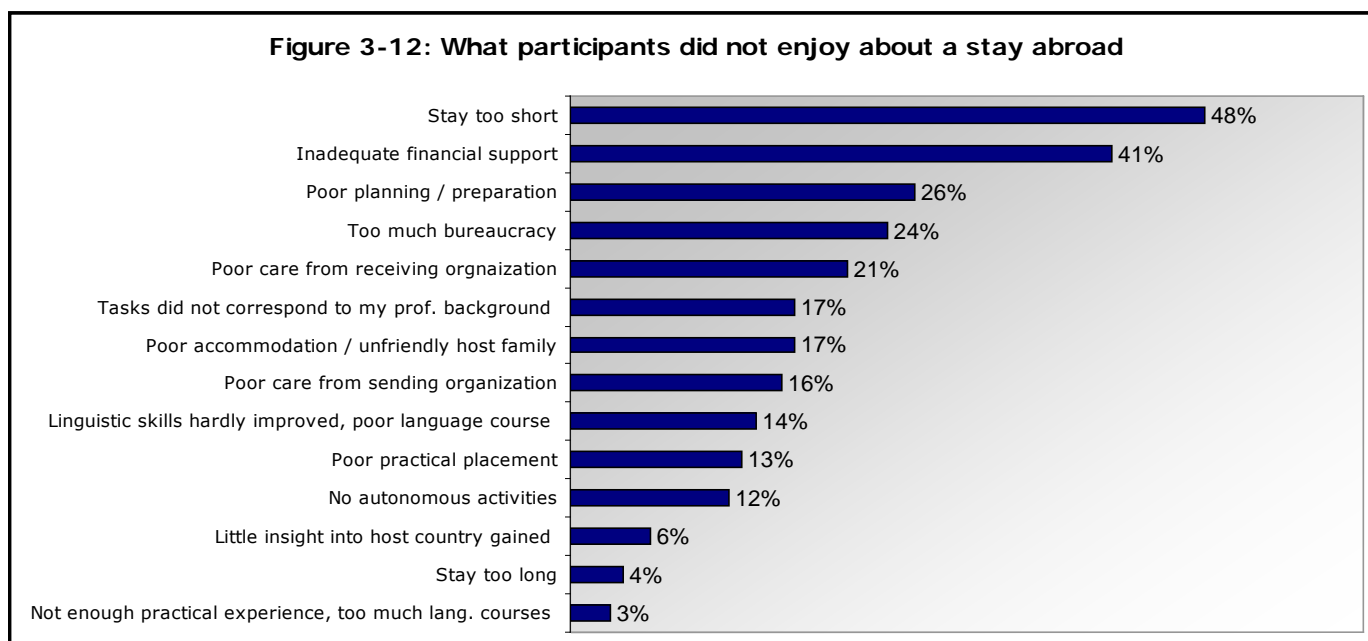
In the second type of mobility the number of players is multiplied to a minimum of five players, some of them from the educational world and some of them from the business world. This kind of mobility involving a company increases the complexity of mobility management, and also quality assurance procedures. Thus the quality of the mobility experience can be affected by mismatching between the host company and IVET student.

A varied number of possible causes for mismatching between the student and the host company can arise due to:

- Lack of close contact between the IVET school and the host company.
- Geographical distance.
- Difficulties when bridging the business and IVET worlds.
- Difficulties due to the specific company sector, etc.

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The Leonardo da Vinci survey 2007 shows very clearly the main variables causing dissatisfaction in mobility for mobility participants (IVET students) when a placement in a company takes place abroad.²³



Source: WSF LdV Survey 2007

Stay too short (48%) and inadequate financial support (41%) are the worst rated, together with poor planning/preparation (26%) and too much bureaucracy.

But there are variables that give us highly valuable information on what is a low quality placement from the workplace learning point of view:

- Tasks did not correspond to my professional background (17%).
- Poor practical placement (13%).
- No autonomous activities (12%).
- Not enough practical experience, too much language course (3%).

It is remarkable that 17% of students answered that their tasks did not correspond to their professional background. This percentage is too high when pursuing quality placements.

²³ Analysis of the Effects of LEONARDO DA VINCI Mobility Measures on Young Trainees, Employees and the Influence of Socio-economic Factors”, research on behalf of the European Commission Education and Culture Directorate-General, http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc218_en.pdf

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Every mobility player must have their requirements met to ensure quality, that is to say, to fulfil the needs and meet the expectations of all beneficiaries. All players involved in the mobility measure must ensure that through their actions they succeed in fulfilling the beneficiaries' needs and expectations.

When a low degree of quality is achieved this is because the characteristics of the mobility action have not met these requirements; in other words, when the mobility action does not meet the beneficiaries' needs and expectations.

Need: a lack of something requisite, desirable or useful.

Expectations: something expected. To expect: to consider reasonable, due or necessary.

Satisfaction: fulfilment of a need or want.

Customer satisfaction: a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass customer expectation.

Quality is achieved when, through the mobility experience, the beneficiaries achieve satisfaction by fulfilling their needs and meeting their expectations.

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3.4. QUALITY REQUIREMENTS: BENEFICIARIES' NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

Quality assurance measures will be taken to ensure that the mobility measure fulfils the beneficiary's needs and meets his/her expectations.

Quality assurance is a set of activities intended to establish confidence that quality requirements will be met.

The expectations of the beneficiaries must be aligned with what a mobility experience can provide to them. A different inherent definition of needs and expectations of the beneficiaries can lead to dissatisfaction and poses a threat to the quality assurance of all the mobility action.

Satisfaction = Mobility result \geq Needs + Expectations

When the expectations are different or higher of those that the mobility action can provide, there is dissatisfaction as a result.

To define very clearly what each mobility player can expect and what is expected from them is key for aligning expectations between all mobility players. This will be further explained in point 5 of this handbook.

For instance, on occasion the expectations of the tasks that a student will perform in a host company are not well defined, so he/she expects a different experience at the host company. In this case mobility results might cause dissatisfaction.

Equally sometimes, the expectations of the skills that a student has are higher than what he/she has really achieved. The company tutor expects a different contribution of the student to the host company. Here too mobility results might cause dissatisfaction.

Causes of dysfunction between expectations and mobility results can be diverse and must be taken into account in order to design all procedures that prevent beneficiaries' dissatisfaction. Quality assurance procedures will be further detailed in point 5 of this handbook.

A high degree of mobility quality is achieved when the needs of the beneficiaries are fulfilled and their expectations are met.

The beneficiaries' satisfaction will result in long-lasting relationships between the mobility players that can facilitate future mobilities. Otherwise, these mobilities will become occasional and only operate in the short term.

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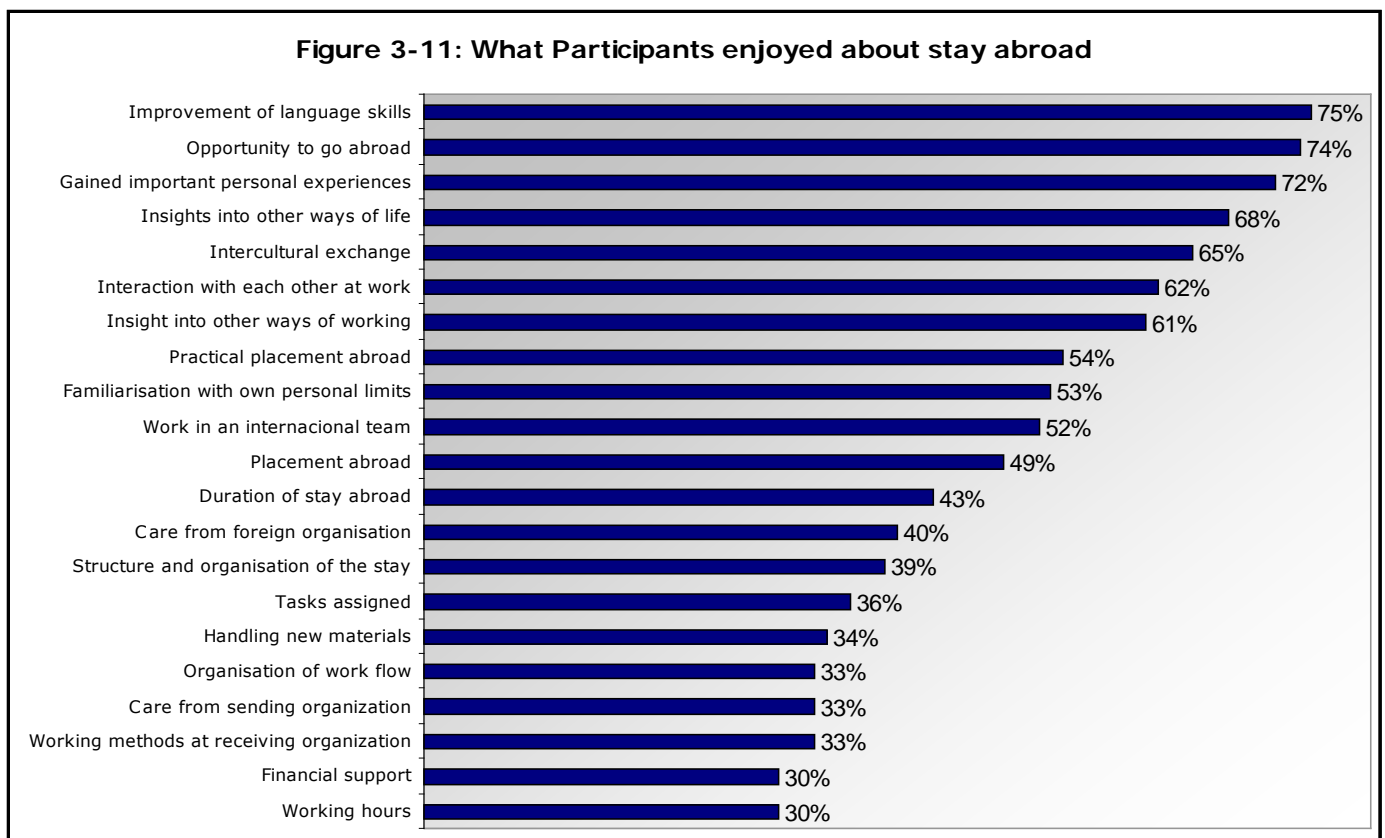
Satisfaction for students taking part in international workplace training:

There is usually satisfaction for young people going abroad and learning about a new culture, language and country. But what is more difficult to achieve in international workplace training is that there is also professional learning, matching their professional background and enhancing their skills after the placement.

Sometimes this professional component has not been fully achieved through the mobility experience. More and more beneficiaries wish to develop not only personal and international skills but also professional skills.

As can be seen in the Leonardo da Vinci Survey 2007, some variables related to the skills and competences acquired through international workplace training are not rated very highly in terms of providing satisfaction to the beneficiary:

- Practical placement abroad, with only a 54% satisfaction rating.
- Work in an international team, with only 52%.
- Tasks assigned, with only 36%.
- Working methods at receiving organization, only 33%.
- Working hours, only 30 %.²⁴



Source: WSF LdV Survey 2007

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There is satisfaction for the student through the mobility experience if the student has fulfilled all the following learning needs:

- New ways of working, acquired professional skills and experience matching his/her professional background.
- Foreign language improvement.
- Living experience: experience of living alone, learning foreign culture, meeting new people, etc.

Satisfaction for the host company:

There is not much written material concerning host companies' satisfaction, which can sometimes be given secondary importance when talking of mobility. But only through achieving host company satisfaction will we succeed in achieving long-lasting cooperation with host companies, who will then be willing to repeat the hosting experience.

There is satisfaction for the host company through the mobility experience if the company has achieved the following goals:

- The student has provided a professional contribution to the company. An added value has been obtained from the student while working at the company. That is to say, that the training efforts are less than the results obtained from the trainee's work.
- The staff of the company has acquired experience in working in multi-cultural, multi-lingual environment.

Satisfaction for the IVET school to which the student belongs:

There is satisfaction for the IVET school through the mobility experience if the student has fulfilled their learning needs:

- New ways of working, acquired professional skills and experience matching his/her professional background.
- Foreign language improvement.
- Living experience: experience of living alone, learning foreign culture, meeting new people, etc.

In other words, the satisfaction for the IVET school is the achievement of the student's satisfaction through his/her knowledge acquirement. This is an added value that IVET schools can provide to their students taking part in mobility measures.

In some cases, the mobility experience can be very satisfactory for the student, even when the professional skills that they have acquired are not very good. Even if the student's expectations are very low and there is satisfaction in general, the mobility experience could be rated as poor quality mobility by the IVET school as there are not enough acquired competences and skills. This is why it is crucial to get a good evaluation of the achievements and competences acquired by the IVET student after participating in international workplace training.

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Satisfaction for the organization giving support to the mobility experience:

In most cases, there is an organization promoting and/or funding mobility actions. This organization will be satisfied if there is satisfaction for the beneficiaries and if the funding supplied is properly used to accomplish the objectives of the funding programme.

The organization promoting the mobility and/or giving financial support will require some forms that the beneficiaries will have to fill in in order to carry out their evaluation of quality.

There is satisfaction for the organization giving support if the forms are properly filled in indicating a high level of satisfaction about the results at the same time:

- Ensuring the good use of the funding received for the mobility experience.
- Satisfaction of the beneficiaries is achieved.

What is most likely to generate dissatisfaction for the student, the IVET school and the company involved, is a “part-training, part-professional” international workplace training experience. To ensure the quality of this experience a series of preventive checks, procedures, and evaluation systems must be designed in order to prevent poor quality international workplace training.

The Q-Placements approach intends to provide a handbook with all the procedures, requirements and guidelines for the quality assurance of international workplace training.