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Design of future Mobility Programs

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Introduction

Over the last few years, the European Commission created several initiatives and programs, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, among others, that helped thousands of individuals to acquire better qualifications, experiences and skills that are truly appreciated and recognized all over the world.

Considering the importance of those initiatives, and being aware about the existence of some gaps in the existing mobility programs, one of the tasks defined in the Uni-Key project was to prepare a document with some recommendations for the design of future mobility programs promoted by the European Commission, in order to facilitate the development of entrepreneurial skills among European students/graduates.

The background work developed by all partners in this project (including the two pilot courses developed) along with the experience in disseminating and monitoring several national and international mobility programs enables Uni-key partners to collect and compile information that can serve as a basis to help EC in the definition of new mobility programs.

Background Work

Along with the partners' experience in disseminating and monitoring mobility programs, the Uni-key partners carried on different activities during the project that allowed us to collect information to support this document. In this document we do not display all the events/activities in which we were involved (as participants or organizers), but the main ones and its conclusions are presented below¹:

- *Uni-Key Pilot Courses*

During the Uni-key project two pilot courses were promoted, targeted to mobility students. This courses presented different modules that aimed to support students before, during and after mobility programs. The feedback from the participants (that can be found in the Uni-Key reports) was used to further develop the modules and approach of the project. As a result, the project team can outline and help mobility coordinators to implement preparatory and accompanying on-line trainings, which support the development of intercultural and entrepreneurial skills of mobile students.

¹ See Uni-Key report and website for a full list of conferences and events the project team took part

- *“ERACON/CareerCon/Inenter” Conferences*

In April 2012 and May 2013, interim results of the Uni-key project were presented and discussed with Erasmus coordinators in the conferences that took place in Rumania and Poland. Participants of the Uni-Key sessions discussed the fact that intercultural issues are more important than “just learning the foreign language” and it was mentioned that entrepreneurial skills should also be considered in the preparation and support of students for placements abroad – as the stay abroad is the ideal place to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and that entrepreneurial competences are more and more crucial in the European labor markets of today.

- *Quality framework for traineeships*

In July 2012, Uni-key partners took part in a public consultation developed by the European Commission concerning the quality of traineeships. In this document some recommendations were presented namely in what concerns the acquisition of horizontal competencies, the evaluation of programs, among others. (You can find the final version attached).

- *“We Mean Business Launch Event”*

In April 17th 2012 took place, in Brussels, a conference entitled “We Mean Business”. This conference aimed to present the benefits of hosting trainees. In this event, attended by mobility organizations, national and international agencies as well as European companies, it was questioned how contacts to companies should be collected and established, and participants suggested that direct contacts with companies and/or the establishment of an intermediary organization in each country, acting as an interface between placement opportunities and potential trainees, could help stakeholders. The lack of preparation of the trainees was also mentioned.

- *“How SMEs can benefit from EU mobility Programmes”*

In the Framework of the “We mean Business campaign”, the Belgian - Italian Chamber of Commerce (CCBI) organized on June 20th the event “How SMEs can benefit from EU Mobility Programs”. In this event different programs were presented and the EC members recognized the importance of sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices in order to promote the entrepreneurial culture among the youngest generations. In the end of the event (roundtable) participants had the chance to discuss how quality issues can be implemented in the future generation of mobility programs and legal frameworks for placement mobility.

- *“Tutors and organizations involved in international mobility programs”*

In 19th March 2013 took place the conference “Training program for tutors and students participating in international mobility programs” in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, organized by the Instituto Tecnológico de Canarias (ITC) with the participation of Uni-Key partners. The event was addressed to both tutors from companies receiving foreign students and intermediary organizations managing mobility programs. The conference included a presentation of Uni-Key project and first pilot results, an introduction of the mentors’ module and the interim study on placements in young and micro/small enterprises. The attendants were encouraged to participate in the second pilot, as well as give feedback about their expectations and experiences in the area of international student placements and training of entrepreneurial skills. Participants stressed the importance of quality. Companies were interested in getting support to find good trainees, and a meeting point for students and companies, with forums to comment and rate their experiences. Identifying “good quality” trainers is also a must for the company, for instance, giving a quality label from the mobility program. Intermediary organizations stressed the lack of resources in their facilitator role.

- *Final Event*

On September 30th 2013 Uni-Key partners organized an event under the theme: European placements – a learning environment of entrepreneurial skills. This event included a roundtable with the presence of representatives from the European Commission, the Erasmus Student Network, the European Young Innovators Forum, the Eindhoven University of Technology and the University of Applied Sciences of Fulda who discussed the subject “How can International placements programs support the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and skills?”

During the event some conclusions were presented. It was mentioned the need of EC to disseminate results and include, in the learning activities, soft skills along with business skills. It was also mentioned the need to decrease the cultural barriers as well as the processes’ bureaucracy. Jonathan Jelves, from the Erasmus Student Network, stressed the approach of “help to self-help” as a dominant factor in the design of the new mobility programme. Larry Moffeet, from European Young Innovators Forum mentioned the lack of entrepreneurial mindset and awareness of importance of entrepreneurial skills (this includes the attitude towards risks) in Europe, e.g. compared to the US and he also supported the entrepreneurial perspective in new generation of mobility programmes. Marjo van der Valk, from Eindhoven University of Technology underlined the lack of awareness that sometimes occurs among sending organizations and the need and availability of preparatory tools, trainings, e.g. resulting from European projects.

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- *Consultation of ESNSurvey 2013 "Exchange: Creating Ideas, Opportunities and Identity"*

Besides the feedback from the events in which we participated, we also considered the information contained in the ESN reports. In 2013, and regarding entrepreneurship, some conclusions reinforce our recommendations. According to the report, 60% of respondents who have been on exchange or lived abroad can imagine starting their own business. However, the discouraging factor to create a company is related to the fear of failing and this issue could be shaped in future mobility programs.

Recommendations

The recommendations will be presented in different topics, taking into account the knowledge and experience of partners and feedback from the background work:

1. Quality of traineeships

In the past few years several organizations – including EU institutions and youth organizations – have voiced increasingly concerns about the quality of traineeships, many of which may not provide the expected learning and working experience needed to prepare young people for their working life and help them enter more stable employment relationships.

We truly believe that there is a need for a European level action regarding the quality of traineeships. However it is a special task to assure the quality of traineeships abroad within Europe that are not covered by EU programs like Leonardo and Erasmus. They should at least fulfill a minimum standard of quality based on substantiated quality criteria (which need to be defined and implemented).

The regional perspective should also be taken into account - some regions are confronted with high youth unemployment, others with lack of qualified applicants for open posts, i.e. the role of traineeships will differ. At the same time, it is important to assure that traineeships covered by the EU programs play a pioneering role. The quality of those traineeships should go beyond the necessary minimum and should realize the full learning potential of a work placement abroad, thus providing an example of best practice. Quality labels for successful traineeships can be used as a marketing strategy with benefits for the organizations involved in mobility programs.

2. *Skills and competences*

The preparation of a student that intends to go abroad is very important and should not be neglected. We consider that future Mobility Programs should provide a framework that allows the acquisition of skills and horizontal competencies like the following:

- Linguistic skills;
- Intercultural competences (e.g. ability to understand one's own and foreign cultures and to use intercultural communication in an effective and efficient way);
- Entrepreneurial competences (e.g. ability to manage challenges and recognize one's own strengths, weaknesses, chances while using them for the own advancement);
- European competences (e.g. ability to act as an ambassador for the European Union and the values and concepts European integration is based on, thus trainees can be turned from beneficiaries of EU-funding into promoters of the European idea). Ideally, the acquisition of linguistic skills and horizontal competences should be gained in a combined way (e.g. using "Content integrated language learning").

Although we think student/trainee should perform some homework before traveling, we believe it is important to provide them some information about the country, possibilities for accommodation and transportation, as well as awareness of possible risks / hazards.

3. *European Commission involvement and approach*

Uni-Key partners consider that European Commission could be more supportive in what concerns the dissemination of project results. The follow-up of the mobility programs should be provided to the extent that there are several projects of interest that may motivate other students and organizations in the future. This action could also help to enhance the efforts of EC by developing these programs.

European Commission should also provide instruments to organize and evaluate traineeships that could be used by universities, students and enterprises and also by the coordinators of mobility programs. Those instruments should also allow beneficiaries of the previous internships to interact, sharing their experiences, difficulties and suggestions. In general, those instruments should aim at highlighting and awarding good practice and good examples – thus demonstrating that successful traineeships can turn into a great marketing tool for an employer – turning the student into an "ambassador" of the company, of the brand or even of the sector the company is working in.

This requires a more efficient, effective and synergetic use of public investments and support mechanisms and the focusing of scarce human and financial resources in a competitive technological

areas and goods, in order to strengthen Europe's innovation capacity and thus boost economic growth and prosperity.

We also recommend the establishment of a platform for students (web site, mobile application), where they could evaluate their traineeships. The model could be similar to the recently launched European Innovation Partnerships – EIPs (http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=eip), which are a new approach to EU research and innovation. EIPs are challenge-driven, focusing on societal benefits and a rapid modernization of the associated sectors and markets. EIPs act across the whole research and innovation chain, bringing together all relevant actors at EU, national and regional levels in order to:

- (i) Step up research and development efforts;
- (ii) Coordinate investments in demonstration and pilots;
- (iii) Anticipate and fast-track any necessary regulation and standards;
- (iv) Mobilize 'demand' particularly through better coordinated public procurement to ensure that any breakthroughs are quickly brought to market. Rather than taking the above steps independently, as it is currently the case, the aim of the EIPs is to design and implement them in parallel to cut lead times.

EIPs streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives and complement them with new actions when necessary. This should make it easier for partners to co-operate and achieve better and faster results compared to what already exists. Therefore, they build upon relevant existing tools and actions and, when applicable, integrate them into a single coherent policy framework. Flexibility is important; there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' framework. Given this, we can foresee a **Traineeship EIP**; this will allow giving voice to students, making them feel involved in the process (rating about fulfillment of quality commitment). It will allow also to create an EU-level quality award or label for the participants and organizations. So far, Program labels such as the Erasmus Quality Seal (DAAD – German National Agency, Erasmus/LLP), are only awarded in a few member states. Such labels should awards educational and intermediary organizations for excellence in mobility program management on a European level. Another award or label could highlight best practice of the involved companies, i.e. employers of (international) trainees. The company itself can be also awarded for successful traineeships, using the quality label as marketing strategy, which is especially interesting for SMEs. (As an example, the Erasmus for young entrepreneurs program provides three quality labels to the Host Entrepreneur: green, silver or gold, depending on the number of successful relationships). Intermediary organizations/ educational organizations could act as a labeling institution. European Programs including the structural funds should foresee a program which provides the means for institutions to evaluate candidates for such awards, and it should

encourage a strong network among institutions to prevent a fragmentation and multitude of labels and award criteria.

4. Intermediary Organizations involvement

Apart the European Commission involvement we also consider that Intermediary and sending organizations should also be more involved in these programs. IO should have an important role, not only during training, but also in creating awareness of students regarding cultural differences, logistics issues and specific cares. In the same way, we consider enterprises should also have an IO to help them in the process, clarifying how to host a student/trainee/entrepreneur. The system of host and sending intermediary organisations of the Erasmus for young entrepreneurs programme could serve as a good practice example for Erasmus+.

5. Financial and technical aspects

As the acquisition of skills and horizontal competences does not happen automatically, appropriate funding needs to be provided for the preparatory and monitoring actions preceding and accompanying the traineeship abroad. The design of those funding conditions has a great influence on the sustainability of results of projects such as Uni-Key. We strongly recommend that the new generation of Erasmus placements contains a specific budget (overhead for each grant) for training of intercultural and entrepreneurial key skills similar to the “linguistic and intercultural preparation budget”, which is part of the Leonardo da Vinci PLM programme in the Lifelong Learning Programme.

Following the definition of a good traineeship identified by our trainees, the most prominent problems are linked to the lack of remuneration/compensation and a low learning content. Main components of a good quality experience, those criteria are strongly affected by the reality of the Labor Market and the companies'/organizations' attitude towards trainees/future trainees.

A European level approach could contribute to minimize the Remuneration/compensation and learning content, as well to stimulate the transnational traineeships which is seen as a positive aspect of traineeship at an European level. Some ideas were discussed within our project to improve the quality of traineeships, namely:

- Regular payments and more harmonization of the remuneration at European level;
- Create mechanisms for social protection and health insurance managed at European level and not at national level;
- European Database of qualified trainers, in order to ensure the quality of traineeships;
- Stimulate the use of online platforms to support the trainee;

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- Create a network of National Contact Points for that could support the trainees and ensure a smooth transition from educational to the labor market.

Conclusions

We recognize and support the contribution of EU-traineeships to European integration, through:

- Transnational knowledge transfer;
- Transnational university-enterprise cooperation (link education and work);
- Transnational entrepreneurship (especially when traineeships are performed in young and owner driven enterprises);

Compared to the “European Quality Charter for Mobility” some aspects are missing, which are relevant for traineeships abroad in the framework of European programs (like Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci programs). Traineeships within European programs should fulfill a quality standard beyond the minimum, which is why the following aspects are still important (based on “European Quality Charter for Mobility”):

- Information and guidance should be provided for the trainee, concerning international mobility and the conditions in which it can be taken up, the role and tasks of the sending and hosting organization and the various education and training systems.
- General preparation of the trainees should include linguistic, pedagogical, administrative, legal, personal and cultural aspects, and information on financial aspects, as necessary.
- Logistical support should be provided to trainees if necessary (e.g. concerning travel arrangements, insurance, residence or work permits social security). This support should be balanced, since entrepreneurial spirit should be maintained.
- Reintegration and evaluation: trainees should be given guidance on how to make use of competences and skills acquired during the traineeship. Where necessary, help with reintegration into the social, educational or professional environment of the home country should be made available. Additionally, training of tutors at host organizations (especially for small or medium enterprises) should be foreseen, providing guidelines and allow the evaluation of tutors/host organizations. Intermediary organizations/ educational organizations can only meet the requirements of the quality criteria provided that they receive appropriate funding. The increase of quantity must not be on the expense of quality

– the contrary is true: if quantity in European programs is promoted on the expense of quality the whole system of quality assurance of traineeships will be undermined.

In order to exploit this potential of European traineeships, we must raise more awareness of it among all stakeholders: educational organizations, enterprises, policy makers and the student themselves. We need to make sure that students are not regarded as beneficiaries of Eu-funding, only when they participate in EU mobility programs, but that they are ambassadors - for their home university and region, when they go abroad - for their host organization and region, when they return home - for the European Union and the “European idea”.

We also consider an evaluation and follow-up of the participant students to be important (which needs to be organized and coordinated on a European level), so that the impact of the traineeship on their success on the labor market and their contribution to transnational cooperation, as described above, can be assessed. At this level, it’s important to create an instrument with appropriate methods and tools for the recognition of mobility periods as a recognized part of education and training (curriculum approach/ added value).