



# Findings of the TCA on the Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships on Higher Education

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# TCA “Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships on Higher Education”

## Conference Findings on the Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships

Erasmus+ traineeships have been an extremely valuable part of the Erasmus+ programme, and the interest among students has increased constantly. More recently, the Commission has included references to Erasmus+ traineeships in the new European Strategy for Universities, including a benchmark of 100,000 traineeships per year. The programme 2014-2020 proved that Erasmus traineeships require dedicated support measures to ensure the best experience possible for all participants.

Evidently, the TCA on the Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships has yielded significant outcomes with a focus on enhancing the relevance of traineeships through comprehensive adherence to quality measures:

- **Pre-Departure Information:** The discussions highlighted the crucial need for a comprehensive pre-departure information package. This package should intricately cover quality standards including insurance, accommodation, student life, mentoring, recognition, and skills improvement. Additionally, it stressed the importance of maintaining transparent communication among all involved parties to ensure mutual understanding of each other's expectations.
- **Ambassadorship & Network Establishment:** One effective suggestion involves leveraging existing alumni and ESN sections as ambassadors. Additionally, creating an Erasmus+ Traineeships Network would significantly boost the program's reach and influence. The concept of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) consortium for arranging placements was discussed. In Flanders, all HEIs participate in such a consortium for organizing postgraduate traineeships, coordinated by an umbrella organization representing the HEIs.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** The TCA emphasized the vital importance of embracing diversity, not solely among students but also within the workplace, stressing the significance of authentic inclusivity. Additionally, it advocated leveraging existing tools to further these goals.
- **Impact Evaluation:** Recognizing the importance of evaluating the impact of traineeships, the TCA emphasized the necessity to identify tools capable of assessing impact numerically, qualitatively, and with a forward-looking perspective.

The conference on the Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships explored various aspects of this European program, including satisfaction levels, equality and inclusion competencies, personal development, digital competences, employability opportunities, and recognition. Participants also discussed strategies to enhance the traineeship experience, the development of students' skills, and employability.

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**What follows is a summary of the main findings of the sessions and workshops:**

### *Mapping Experiences on Erasmus+ Traineeships:*

This session was designed to gather insights and reflections from participants about their experiences with Erasmus+ Traineeships and to collectively discuss the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement. Here's an outline of the outcomes based on the provided questions and prompts:

**What Works Well in Erasmus+ Traineeships?** Participants shared positive experiences and successful outcomes from their Erasmus+ Traineeships including:

*Personal Development:* Stories of personal growth, cultural understanding, language proficiency, and enhanced soft skills.

*Skills Acquisition:* Acquired technical skills, leadership abilities, and practical knowledge relevant to their field.

*Organizational Benefits:* Discussions about how the program positively impacts participating organizations, such as bringing in diverse perspectives or fostering international collaborations.

**Areas Needing Further Improvement:** Participants have highlighted areas where the Erasmus+ Traineeships could be enhanced, which include:

*Administrative Processes:* Streamlining paperwork, improving application processes, and simplifying bureaucratic aspects such as payments.

*Support Systems:* Discussions about the need for better support structures for participants, especially concerning accommodation, integration, and mental health support.

*Alignment with Industry Needs:* Suggestions on how to make the program more attuned to the evolving needs of various industries.

*Defining and Measuring Impact:* Participants offered diverse perspectives on what "impact" means to them. This encompasses personal growth, professional advancement, societal contributions, and organizational development.

*Measuring Impact:* Key indicators and metrics have been proposed, such as

- Surveys and Feedback (Assessing participant satisfaction and learning outcomes).
- Employment or Career Advancement: Tracking participants' career paths post-Erasmus+.
- Cultural Understanding: Measuring the impact on intercultural competence and global awareness.
- Assessing personal and professional development via qualitative and quantitative methods (Self-Assessment-Reflections and self-reported improvements by participants).
- Skills Evaluation (Assessing skill acquisition and development against predefined criteria).

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Overall, the session encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences, share insights, and collectively explore ways to enhance the impact and effectiveness of Erasmus+ Traineeships.

### *1. Increased quality throughout the traineeship experience of Erasmus+ trainees Findings of the Erasmus+ Review ESN International*

The ESN session yielded significant findings and recommendations for improving the promotion and effectiveness of mobility programs like Erasmus+ Traineeships:

- **Targeting Motivation:** Emphasizing the importance of targeting students' motivation to go abroad, especially focusing on those who are considering international experiences before or at the start of their studies. This demographic should be the primary target for promotional efforts.
- **Revamping Promotion Strategies:** Acknowledging the shift in social media preferences among young people, highlighting the need to pivot from Facebook to platforms like Instagram and TikTok for outreach. Utilizing student ambassadors or international students for promotion is seen as effective.
- **Environmentally Conscious Promotion:** Recognizing the value the new generation places on environmental consciousness, suggesting a move towards eco-friendly promotional methods. NFC tags or QR codes are considered more popular than traditional posters or flyers.
- **Successful Practices:** Highlighting successful practices, such as Romania's approach of setting up booths at universities for extended periods to promote various mobility opportunities. Similar initiatives like Mobility Fairs and Erasmus Days booths are effective in other countries as well.
- **Clear Framework for Students:** Identifying the need for a comprehensive framework or checklist to guide students in understanding crucial aspects of their host institutions before confirming their traineeships. This would not only benefit students but also reduce the workload of International Relations Offices (IROs).
- **Inclusion Challenges:** Noting a disparity between the experiences of Erasmus+ Studies and Traineeships concerning inclusion in local communities. Identifying a lack of mechanisms to connect trainees with local communities and proposing the recommendation of ESN (Erasmus Student Network) by HEIs to bridge this gap.
- **Financial Burden on Students:** Addressing the financial burden on students covering life expenses abroad, often through family support, personal savings, or loans. Recognizing this as counterproductive to the program's inclusion priority but lacking concrete proposals for immediate solutions.

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These findings underscore the necessity for targeted and innovative promotional strategies, environmentally conscious approaches, and structural support frameworks to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of Erasmus+ Traineeships. Additionally, the need for addressing financial burdens on students emerged as a crucial concern that requires further exploration for feasible solutions.

### *2. The Quality Framework for Traineeships- catering for high-quality traineeships*

The Quality Framework for Traineeships primarily targeted national regulators and focused on "free market traineeships," encompassing voluntary or graduate traineeships. Key outcomes and recommendations from the session are as follows:

- **Erasmus+ Integration:** Erasmus+ rules, including learning agreements, charters, and accreditation of consortia, incorporate recommendations from the Quality Framework.
- **Upcoming Update:** Evaluation by the EC and European Parliament will lead to an update of the framework within the current year.
- **Consideration for Cross-Border Traineeships:** While the framework covers cross-border traineeships, it is primarily drafted concerning national traineeships. There's a need to address the unique aspects of international traineeships to prevent unexpected complications, such as issues related to minimum wage or regulatory differences in duration.
- **Financial Support and Awareness:** The evaluation highlighted the necessity for adequate financial support to cover extra costs associated with cross-border traineeships. It also revealed a lack of interest or awareness among a significant portion of the target group regarding these opportunities.

### **Outcomes from Group Worktables:**

#### *Table 1: Actions for Sending Organizations/Consortia:*

- Verification and monitoring of traineeship receiving organizations.
- Collection of mandatory feedback reports.
- Promotion of organizations with positive experiences.
- Inclusion of a "letter of motivation" in E+ grant applications.
- Implementation of homecoming reorientation for alumni's communication skill development.

#### *Table 2: Expectations from Host Organizations:*

- Rejection of fees for trainees.
- Clearly defined traineeship programs.

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- Proper mentor-trainee matching and integration within the organization. Making sure the mentor has the necessary coaching skills too.
- Ensuring adequate working conditions, equipment, and insurance provisions.
- Support in finding accommodation in the host city.
- Providing clear feedback and qualified certificates at the end of the traineeship.
- Avoid free labour and give a monthly allowance to trainees if possible.

*Table 3: Expectations from European Commission and National Erasmus+ Agencies:*

- Increased grants for traineeships.
- Enhanced promotion of traineeships, like Erasmus study programs.
- Ensuring equal rights for incoming trainees in terms of university enrolment and access to facilities.
- Promotion of E+ traineeships to the labour market, potentially in collaboration with EURES.
- Consideration of different E+ grants for paid and unpaid trainees.
- Clarity on insurance responsibilities in case of incidents during the traineeship.
- Help to create a platform with organizations which offered successful placements in the past (after meeting quality criteria and trainee satisfaction)

*Comment by NA of Cyprus:*

- Caution about suggestions that might increase program complexity, emphasizing the need for consensus among 27 member states for changes and the time it takes for approval in European institutions.
- Encouragement to utilize the flexibility of the current program at the national level.

These outcomes aim to guide policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders involved in traineeship programs, emphasizing the need for collaboration, clear guidelines, and support mechanisms for effective implementation.

### *3.Improving the Quality Framework for Traineeships -what must be adapted?*

This session delved into recognizing essential gaps and areas necessitating improvement within the existing Quality Framework, especially considering the evolving landscape of international education. Key highlights and outcomes are as follows:

- **Strategies for Framework Adaptation:** The workshop shared valuable strategies and practical insights aimed at empowering institutions and stakeholders to adapt and customize the Quality Framework. These insights address contemporary challenges, ensuring relevance and effectiveness in the current educational milieu.

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- **Active Participant Engagement:** Participants enthusiastically engaged in discussions, sharing diverse perspectives, and real-life experiences pertaining to the Quality Framework. The session fostered an environment conducive to sharing ideas, concerns, and potential solutions.
- **Ensuring Relevance and Effectiveness:** The primary aim was to ensure that the Quality Framework remains a dynamic and robust tool in promoting high-quality traineeships. Its adaptability seeks to benefit both students and institutions by addressing evolving needs and challenges.
- **Key Stakeholder Insights:**

*Preparation Importance:* All stakeholders, including trainees, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and host organizations, collectively emphasized the significance of thorough preparation before undertaking mobility in the international education landscape.

- *Managing Expectations:* Stakeholders highlighted the crucial role of understanding and managing each other's expectations. Clear communication and alignment of goals were identified as pivotal factors in successful collaborations.
- *Continuous Communication:* Throughout all stages of a traineeship, stakeholders underscored the importance of continuous communication among the three parties involved (trainees, HEIs, and host organizations). This ongoing dialogue ensures smoother transitions, proactive issue resolution, and an overall enriched experience for all involved.

The insights gleaned from this session underscore the imperative need for adaptability, collaboration, and clear communication within the Quality Framework. They pave the way for its continued relevance and effectiveness in fostering high-quality international education experiences.

### 4. How to enhance internship mobility for students and graduates with special needs? Time for action!"

The session on inclusive mobility yielded several important outcomes that can be incorporated into the Conference Proceedings:

- **SIHO's Toolbox on Inclusive Mobility:** Introduced a comprehensive toolbox, featuring an internship program as a key component, aimed at fostering inclusive mobility.
- **Addressing Diverse Support Needs:** Emphasized the importance of creating conducive conditions for learning, working, or volunteering abroad for individuals with fewer opportunities by focusing on their diverse support needs. This approach is need-based.
- **Broadening Underrepresentation and Disadvantage:** Stressed the necessity of addressing underrepresentation and disadvantage comprehensively when devising inclusive mobility strategies.

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- **Defining Fewer Opportunities:** Highlighted the complexity of defining 'fewer opportunities' and the ongoing process of identifying such groups. Expanded the concept beyond students with disabilities to include low-income students, working students, students from rural areas, and even young families.
- **Tools Developed for Inclusive Mobility:** Introduced various tools including a framework, self-assessment tool, and e-learning resources to aid in reflecting, assessing, and working with inclusive mobility strategies.
- **Audience Engagement:** Asked the audience how to promote internship mobility among disadvantaged and underrepresented students, suggesting avenues like student services, additional funding, and personalized sessions with sign language or Braille.
- **Main Themes Identified:** Outlined six main themes crucial for inclusive mobility strategies, covering inclusion, information dissemination, funding, support services, student life, and collaboration.
- **Role of Needs Assessment:** Emphasized the centrality of conducting a needs assessment in supporting individuals through the mobility process.
- **Challenges in Reaching Students:** Acknowledged the difficulty in reaching and informing students with fewer opportunities about internship mobility. Tips and resources were recommended on the [Inclusivemobility.eu](http://Inclusivemobility.eu) website.
- **Utilizing Inspiring Practices:** Encouraged the use of testimonials and student ambassadors as inspiring practices to motivate and guide others.
- **Emphasis on Student Involvement:** Concluded by advocating for a sustainable policy rooted in inclusive tools and highlighted the significance of involving students themselves at every stage, recognizing them as experts in realizing inclusive education.

These outcomes collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of inclusive mobility strategies and stress the importance of addressing diverse needs while involving students as key contributors to their own inclusive education journey.

### *5.Improving participation in KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships. Perspectives and Best Practices*

- **Current State Analysis of KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships:** A comprehensive examination highlighted the existing landscape of KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships. This included insights into participant demographics, geographical distribution, and institutional involvement. Notable aspects covered were application rates, acceptance ratios, and the variety of fields students engage in.
- **Review of Past KA107 Erasmus+ Traineeships:** A detailed retrospective of the previous KA107 Erasmus+ Traineeships was conducted. Key statistics and trends were examined to draw parallels, identify shifts, and discern evolving patterns in participation, destinations, and duration of traineeships.



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- **Identification of Challenges and Barriers:** Common obstacles encountered by institutions, students, and staff in participating in the program were highlighted. Challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, linguistic barriers, financial constraints, visa procedures and cultural differences were identified as significant barriers to full engagement.
- **Best Practices and Recommendations:** The workshop presented a comprehensive collection of best practices, strategies, and recommendations aimed at optimizing participation in KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships. These encompassed innovative approaches to overcoming challenges, enhancing application procedures, fostering intercultural communication, and streamlining administrative processes. The example of Flanders was also raised, that consists in organizing recent graduates traineeships within a consortia.
- **Sharing of Good Practices:** Participants actively shared their successful experiences and strategies during the session. These encompassed diverse tactics employed by institutions, students, and staff to maximize the benefits of KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships. Examples included mentorship programs, language support initiatives, enhanced networking opportunities, and effective utilization of resources.

The session emphasized the relatively new inclusion of this activity in KA107 (since 2018) and the hurdles encountered amidst the Covid pandemic and global political tensions. Just as the initial challenge emerged with student mobility in 2015 within KA107, a significant obstacle lies ahead.

In essence, the session offered a comprehensive perspective on the present situation, obstacles, and possibilities for enhancing participation in KA171 Erasmus+ Traineeships. The shared insights, successful strategies, and collective experiences aim to elevate the program's effectiveness and influence for all stakeholders engaged.

### *6. Recognition in the framework of Erasmus+ Traineeships*

The session focused on the critical aspects of recognition within Erasmus+ Traineeships, exploring its significance, types, processes, tools, challenges, and potential solutions. Participants engaged in discussions and group activities, sharing insights and experiences from their respective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

#### **Key Agenda Points:**

- **Erasmus+ Traineeships Significance:** Explored the importance of these traineeships in enhancing student experiences and international mobility.
- **Importance of Recognition:** Emphasized the value of recognizing traineeships for both academic and professional development.
- **Types of Recognition:** Discussed various forms of recognition, including transcript of work, Learning Agreement (After Mobility), Diploma Supplement, and Certification for recent graduates.

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- **Recognition Process and Tools:** Explored the procedures and tools employed in the recognition process.
- **Challenges and Solutions:** Identified challenges related to traineeships and proposed viable solutions:
  - *Challenges:* Highlighted challenges such as relevance of mobility, company reputation, and lack of awareness among departmental coordinators regarding recognition processes and tools.
  - *Solutions Proposed:* Suggestions included the introduction of adjusted certificates with evaluation sheets and providing letters of recommendation for trainees after mobility to address these challenges.
- **Group Discussions:** Participants engaged in group discussions focusing on three key questions:
  - *Q1. Recognition Tools:* Shared their HEI's recognition tools, including transcripts, Learning Agreements, Diploma Supplements, and Certifications for recent graduates.
  - *Q2. Recognition Challenges:* Discussed challenges such as mobility relevance, company reputation, and lack of departmental coordinator awareness.
  - *Q3. Proposed Solutions:* Brainstormed potential solutions, suggesting adjusted certificates and recommendation letters for trainees after mobility.

The session concluded with a wealth of shared experiences, insights, and actionable solutions to enhance recognition practices within Erasmus+ Traineeships across different HEIs.

### 7. Impact of SMP on competencies, studies & employability in Flanders (BE)

The session on the "Impact of SMP on competencies, studies & employability in Flanders (BE)" highlighted several key outcomes:

- **Student Empowerment:** The session emphasized how placements or traineeships foster self-reliance among students. Through these experiences, individuals develop confidence in their competencies and become more assertive in making life choices, particularly in their academic and career paths.
- **Role of International Coordinators:** The session recognized the significant influence that international coordinators have on students' lives during these experiences. It aimed to raise awareness of their impact and identify areas where improvements can be made, possibly in supporting students better or enhancing the quality of the experience.
- **Invitation for Knowledge Sharing:** Participants were encouraged to share best practices and successes in facilitating placements or traineeships. Additionally, the session

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welcomed inquiries and discussions, offering support and guidance to those seeking assistance or further information.

- **Focus on Employability:** Petra Gilis emphasized the substantial impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships on employability. The session highlighted how these experiences contribute to skills development and networking opportunities that significantly enhance individuals' chances in the job market.

These outcomes collectively underscore the transformative potential of placements on students' personal development, the role of support structures, and the significance of these experiences in enhancing employability. They also emphasize the need for continuous improvement and collaboration in maximizing the benefits for students participating in these programs.

### *8. The development of skills, competences, and employability of the individual student*

The outcomes of the session on "The Development of Skills, Competences, and Employability of the Individual Student" for the Conference Proceedings are as follows:

- **Postgraduate Focus vs. Skill Development:** It was observed that many new graduates prioritize continuing with postgraduate programs over developing their skills, competences, and employability.
- **University Role in Skill Enhancement:** Universities were suggested to adopt a consistent strategy to enhance students' skill levels and align them with the demands of various job markets. This alignment is crucial for better employability.
- **Encouraging Self-Initiated Internship Searches:** Participants highlighted the importance of encouraging students to actively search for organizations offering internships independently. This proactive approach is anticipated to facilitate the acquisition of diverse and valuable skills.
- **Promotion of Subsidized or Paid Internships:** Universities were urged to promote subsidized or paid internships to support students facing financial difficulties. This support would alleviate concerns about daily expenses, allowing students to focus more on gaining work experience.
- **Addressing Career Goals and Stereotypes:** The session noted that career goals can be influenced by confidence levels and stereotypes. Female students might face challenges finding role models in certain countries, impacting their career aspirations.
- **Preparation for Workplace Challenges:** Most students displayed reluctance in negotiating or discussing pay when offered a job post-internship. It was suggested that seminars or workshops are more effective in preparing students to navigate workplace dynamics, including negotiations and professional conduct.

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These insights shed light on the crucial areas where universities and students alike can focus their efforts to enhance skills, bridge the gap between academia and job market demands, and create a more conducive environment for career development and employability.

### *9. Competence Pass – a compass for development of future skills during an Erasmus traineeship abroad?*

The session highlighted the need to make students aware of the “future skills” they can gain during a traineeship abroad allowing them to pitch the added value of their Erasmus+ traineeship e.g., when applying for a job.

The Competence Pass presented is an example of such a tool; it offers guidance to self- reflection as such and guiding questions for five competence areas:

- **Foreign language proficiency**
- **Intercultural Communication**
- **Creativity and Problem Solving**
- **Global Citizenship**
- **(free) Competence Area of personal relevance**

The Competence Pass presented is integrated in an online course, which is provided during the E+ traineeship period; pooling resources as an E+ traineeship consortium allows to offer such a course, which might be very difficult for individual organizations.

### **Results of group work:**

- Students undertaking a traineeship abroad are best ambassadors for activities and opportunities related to the traineeship, they can report their experiences and tips in webinars.
- Motivating students to do extra tasks such as personal development plans and reflection exercises is challenging and there are pros and cons of obligatory and voluntary tasks – one way might be to present it in small pieces of information, which are easy to digest.
- Depending on study course the need for self-reflection might vary.
- One university offers a MS Teams group for all outgoing trainees with subgroups for each target country, as students like to see who else is going to the same country, those Groups are also used to disseminate information and self-reflection tools could be integrated there.

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### Conclusion:

The TCA on the Impact of Erasmus+ Traineeships provided valuable insights into the program's strengths and areas for improvement. Emphasizing the crucial necessity for dedicated support measures, recommendations were laid out encompassing pre-departure information, establishing ambassadorship networks, fostering diversity and inclusion initiatives, and the imperative need for impact evaluation. Across different perspectives, experiences, and reviews, several common themes emerged. There was a clear recognition of the positive aspects of Erasmus+ Traineeships, such as personal development, skill acquisition, and organizational benefits. Simultaneously, areas demanding improvement, like administrative processes, support systems, and alignment with industry needs, were identified. Various reviews and frameworks outlined actions and revisions needed in the program, highlighting aspects ranging from environmental consciousness to financial burdens on students. Sessions also addressed the need for an updated quality framework, considerations for students with special needs, strategies to enhance participation, and discussions on recognition processes and challenges. These discussions didn't just cover the program's impact but also delved into its promotional strategies, structural support, and challenges faced by students with diverse needs. Overall, the comprehensive insights from these sessions underscored the multifaceted nature of Erasmus+ Traineeships, their significance in student development, and their potential to enhance employability. Additionally, the event emphasized the need for continuous communication, shared best practices, and increased promotion of traineeship opportunities. These discussions will contribute to the ongoing enhancement of the Erasmus+ Traineeships program both within the current program period as well as for the future one.