



Report on EHEA workshop series II

Promoting employability through mobility programmes for HEIs

1. Organisation

Lead experts: Ella Ritchie, Dugald Craig, Jayne Mitchell.

Quality Assurance: John Reilly

Student Expert: Rebecca Maxwell Stuart

Guest contributors:

Glasgow: Suzanne Burns, HR and Communications Director at Scottish Television; Jim Campbell, International Careers Adviser, University of Glasgow; Anne Marie Graham, Acting Assistant Director Programmes, UK Higher Education, International Unit (and Belfast and Cardiff); Rebecca Robinson, Higher Education International Policy, Scottish Government

Belfast: Eamon Byrne, BT Core Networking Training Manager (Belfast); Shane Mulholland, Head of HR and Research Management, First Derivatives Gerry O' Sullivan, Irish National Agency Erasmus+

Manchester: Catriona Hanks, Policy Researcher - Outward Mobility, UK Higher Education International Unit; Natalie Cunningham, Head of Student Mobility, Manchester Metropolitan University; Natalie Sterman, Policy Advisor - International Higher Education at Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; Jack Kennedy, EU and International Affairs Policy Officer at Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Cardiff: Lucy Shackleton, UK Higher Education International Unit Universities UK; Owain Morris, Development Officer, Tidal Lagoon, Swansea Bay; Huw Morris, Academic Registrar, Swansea University

Locations and participant details:

It was decided to run the workshops in England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland. In the latter case the workshop was planned with the Irish National Agency for ERASMUS+. While there were many similarities across the jurisdictions – employability of graduates, the skills agenda, encouraging student mobility and engaging industry with the benefits of mobility, the team was sensitive to the differing jurisdictions and national contexts and drew on local experts about the relevant agendas.

Date of Workshop	Location	No. of Participants	No. of institutions
24 November 2015	Glasgow	21	14
26 November 2015	Manchester	30	23
3 December 2015	Cardiff	22	12
8 December 2015	Belfast	18	8

2. Introduction

This series of workshops was the second of three organised by the EHEA expert team in the UK. The aim of the workshops was to promote the value of mobility to Higher Education Institutions, to students and to employers and to explore the relationship between mobility and employability. In order to do this the workshop analysed mobility in the context of wider EU and national government priorities, outlined the funding opportunities and then facilitated the sharing of good practice about mobility schemes. The second part of the workshop focussed on employability and how to recognise and articulate the value of the mobility experience to students and their advisers and to employers.

The issue of graduate employability is a key one for European policy makers and European states. The skills agenda has also become more prominent across Europe and is key to EHEA discussions in all three cycles and strongly linked to several Bologna action lines. The mobility of students has been a central tenet of the Bologna process since its inception and it is now broadly accepted as a means of widening and deepening the student experience. While there is a growing salience of employability and mobility for Governments and HEIs, these two areas are not always linked together in the minds of staff, students, employers or policy makers.

There is now a growing body of evidence that the opportunity to study or undertake work-placements internationally not only typically improves students' language ability but also strengthens soft skills and enhances inter-cultural understanding. It also develops resilience, self-reliance and 'global knowhow'. These types of skills are increasingly seen as important by employers alongside technical and knowledge based skills. The report on '*Hidden Competences*' by the Finnish Agency CIMO and Demos Helsinki (2013 & English Summary 2014) makes the case that transnational learning produces the kind of competencies that the labour market needs to face future challenges successfully. There is a small but growing body of research in the UK that demonstrates the link between a work-placement or study overseas and employability skills (*Gone International: mobile students and their outcomes*, UK Higher Education International Unit, 2015 & *Attainment in Higher Education: Erasmus and Placement Students*, HEFCE, 2009). Nevertheless, it is argued that 'the recognition of the value of these opportunities by employers, even international businesses, is disappointingly poor' (CIMO 2014). The European Students' Union (ESU) has looked at the issue of employability skills and emphasised the importance of the development of social and 'soft skills' for employability (*Employability through Students Eyes*, ESU 2014).

EHEA (European Higher Education Area)

Support to the implementation of EHEA Reforms 2014-16

April 2016

One of the aims of the EHEA workshop was to contribute to these discussions by unpacking some of the issues around the lack of 'join up' between mobility and employability. Early discussions in the EHEA expert group pointed to lacunae on both sides – with students unable to clearly articulate (and record) the employability skills that they acquired through being mobile and employers not recognising the value of the sort of skills that a student acquires. It was therefore important to get a good engagement from employers in the workshops. This proved to be challenging but the EHEA experts are grateful to both the UK National Council for Universities and Business (NCUB) and to Universities UK which both gave help in engaging employer representatives to speak in each of the four jurisdictions. Those that did attend made a very positive contribution.

3. Workshop objectives and intended outcomes

Workshop objectives

- To analyse how to enhance student employability through mobility.
- To give realistic and practical support to HEIs about the current policy environment, funding and promoting mobility for all (social inclusivity)
- To give the opportunity to share views between employers, policy-makers, experts and participants
- To identify, develop and share good practice.

Intended outcomes

- To increase awareness of current developments with key staff
- To encourage the development of institutional-wide strategies for employability and mobility
- To help students and HEIs to articulate the value of their mobility experience in terms of skills developed.
- To promote the value of skills and knowledge gained through mobility programmes to employers

4. Workshop Programme and Coverage

The first overarching session **Setting the Context** looked at current government policies on mobility, graduate skills and employability. In England both the Coalition government (2010-2015) and the current Conservative government have given strong support to student mobility and the wider student experience. The 2015 UK Green Paper '*Fulfilling our potential, social mobility and student choice*' emphasised the importance for all students to access high quality academic and technical training and wider student opportunities. Similar support exists in the devolved administrations of Scotland (*Scotland Goes Global*) and Wales and in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It was noted that producing skilled graduates with good intercultural skills was a priority of not only national governments but also regional and local authorities in order to strengthen economies and underpin social cohesiveness. A recent research project on the value of mobility for employability was presented by the International Unit of UUK (*Gone International, 2015*). The project showed the variety of mobility experiences open to UK students and explored the cohort data linking mobility to employability that shows mobile students are less likely to be unemployed and are marginally more likely to find higher level jobs. The first session also explored the need for the different student support services in HEIs (such as careers, the international office, the placement office, ERASMUS coordinators, personal tutors and the students union) to work collaboratively in order to enhance opportunities for students.

EHEA (European Higher Education Area)

Support to the implementation of EHEA Reforms 2014-16

April 2016

The second presentation **Making Use of Funding for Mobility** provided participants with an overview of the range, scale and scope of actions funded by the Erasmus+ programme that could contribute to support mobility for learners in HEIs.

The opening section of the presentation focused on headline information about the programme. Its budget of €14.7 billion for the period from 2014 to 2020 with 43% of it devoted to higher education. It was highlighted that around 80% of the programme's funding is decentralised and managed by the National Agencies in the 33 Programme countries (these were listed for participants).

The action-specific section of the presentation provided specific information on the scale of funding that had been awarded, thus far, under the two main strands of funding for the mobility of students and staff in higher education - Key Action 1 (HE), Key Action 1 (ICM). Details of the latter, also, included a breakdown of the levels of interest that UK HEIs had shown in establishing ICM projects across the range of Partner countries that are eligible to participate in the programme. The role of Key Action 1 (VET) in supporting shorter-term mobility for students following short-cycle HE programmes in colleges was highlighted and it was pointed out that universities were starting to engage with this strand of funding, too.

A further section of the presentation focused on raising awareness of other actions within the Erasmus+ programme that had the scope to support activities to encourage mobility and employability. These included the Key Action 2 sub-actions: Strategic Partnerships, Knowledge Alliances, Sector Skills Alliances and Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education. The penultimate section of the presentation identified some other EU funding streams that could support mobility and employability: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks: European Training Networks (ETN), European Industrial Doctorates (EID) and European Joint Doctorates (EJD). The final section provided details of upcoming deadlines for all of the actions mentioned and links to relevant sources of information.

Following the opening presentations delegates worked in small breakout groups with EHEA experts to identify current and pertinent issues around mobility and to share solutions and practices that had proved effective in addressing them.

Focus of the breakout groups

- **Promoting mobility** (*making the case within institutions at senior level; linking mobility with recruitment, the curriculum and research; making the case to students; making the case to academics*)
- **Managing Mobility** (*managing risks; ensuring compliance; the use of third party providers*)
- **Alternative types of mobility** (*virtual mobility; EU funding for short term mobility; volunteering*)

Rapporteurs from each of the breakout groups fed back to the plenary group and identified next steps for improving mobility. Delegates identified the resonance of mobility with the growing emphasis that is being placed in the higher education sector on employability and intercultural skills and the importance of wider learning experience. There was widespread recognition of the need to ensure high quality and productive mobility experiences.

The second part of the workshop, which included employers and graduates who had benefitted from a mobility experience, focussed on **Employability** with breakout groups on

- **Monitoring the impact of mobility on employability**
- **Articulating the value of mobility** and recording achievement using EHEA or national tools
- **Erasmus+ traineeships**: connecting and communicating with industry.

This was followed by a panel discussion on issues that had emerged from the breakout groups and discussion such as *‘what constitutes employability?, what do industry and businesses need and how does this match up with what mobile students acquire; how to engage business more closely in this agenda.’*

5. Evaluation

It is difficult to measure the impact of the workshop on processes, levels of activity and new initiatives. However many of the **Lessons Learnt** (see below) emanated from the participants so there was a high level of engagement by the participants with the issues. We can assume that they are likely to take back these ideas to their work and institutions.

Feedback at the events from the participants (delegates and guest speakers) indicated that the workshops had been very useful and worthwhile and that they opened up new information and different perspectives. Almost all respondents to the questionnaire ranked the workshops as *‘very useful’* or *‘useful’*. The format of the workshop seemed to have worked well with participants commending a good balance between information and analysis and presentations, small group work and panel discussions. Delegates genuinely welcomed the opportunities to engage with the speakers and the input from employers. They also found it very useful to discuss with colleagues from different institutions and different roles. Areas for improvement that were noted stemmed from a need for more detailed and practical information-for example,

- *‘the issue of insurance, liability and the financial impact of sending out trainers are all important and could be a session on their own’*
- *‘employability discussions could have been in much more in depth’*
- *‘partner finding for Traineeships/new practical ideas would have been helpful’*

6. Dissemination

We promoted EHEA, the workshops and associated resources at appropriate times over nine months from August 2015 until April 2016 through various British Council and UK Erasmus+ National Agency (NA) channels, including:

- The International Higher Education digest – a bi-monthly online news round-up sent to over 3,600 HE contacts;
- The Erasmus+ newsletter sent out to over 4,000 contacts;
- The British Council Erasmus+ Higher Education newsletter;
- A [blog](#) on EHEA and the workshops on the Erasmus+ website;
- Key information about the workshops on both the [Erasmus+](#) and British Council [IHE](#) websites;
- Published all the workshop presentations and associated information on the British Council [IHE](#) website;

- Promoted the workshops on the Erasmus+ NA Facebook page which has over 6,000 followers as well as via the NA Twitter account;
- This report will be sent to attendees and published on the British Council [IHE](#) website.
- Promotion of resources through the Erasmus+ HE and VET Sector Consultative Groups
- Providing a printed information sheet for the Erasmus+ Learning Networks Event (May)

Also:

- Promotion of the workshops and resources through the International Unit channels, including a printed information sheet at the Go International Conference;
- All reports and presentations will also be published on the EHEA Peer Community portal <http://eheacomunity.ning.com> which is accessible to all EHEA Project Coordinators.

7. Conclusion

Lessons Learnt / Recommendations for further action

1. The level and spread of attendance across the four jurisdictions and the volume of questions and feedback generated at the workshops suggests that there remains an appetite for workshops and peer learning on the topic of fostering employability through mobility amongst staff responsible for promoting and organising mobility in UK HEIs.
2. Feedback from the participants reinforced the picture created by current information, that is:
 - (i) There is a need to widen the demographic of the population of student mobility participants in the UK
 - (ii) The current minimum duration limits for Erasmus+ HE mobility may be acceptable for traditional full-time students in most programme countries but are not compatible with the realities of life for many students in the UK or with encouraging participation from less represented groups – for example, students with caring responsibilities, part-time students, students who are studying while working
 - (iii) Work needs to be done on developing appropriate tools for ensuring the accreditation of work-based learning and for learning outcomes achieved during internships and work placements
 - (iv) ‘Employability’ should be broken down into specific skills and competencies, and these skills and competencies mapped onto the student experience of mobility
 - (v) Students should be given more tools to identify and articulate the benefits of their mobility experience
 - (vi) The evolution of the Erasmus+ programme, particularly learner mobility, needs to anticipate the increasing permeability between VET and HE.
 - (vii) The EHEA needs to continue to promote the range of funding opportunities that exist for mobility learning. The workshop successfully explained the range of alternative funding to the participants but this needs to be scaled up for the sector as a whole.
3. The EHEA needs to strengthen the link with employers - one suggestion is to appoint some EHEA experts with business backgrounds. It is important to be able to capture the employer voice (s).
4. It would be useful to identify and map in more detail the skills that employers want from global graduates e.g. communication skills, working in an international team and resilience.

5. Work is required to set up a framework for students, staff and employers to identify what skills are developed during mobility. This 'outcomes framework' could be used by students before and after mobility and could trigger reflection on skills developed through a mobility period, enabling students to articulate the impact that mobility has had on them and to provide the evidence for that impact.
6. HEIs should recognise that the impact of mobility on employability is a '*long game*'. It requires long term measures and runs of data to evaluate since the value of a mobility experience for a graduate may not be apparent until a second or third job. This in turn benefits the students, graduates, the HEI and eventually the employer and wider society.
7. Implementing many of these proposals within institutions is not just a question of resource. A recurrent theme of the workshop was the large amount of experience and knowledge that resides in HEIs. The trick is to co-ordinate and integrate the '*knowhow*' about mobility and employability across different agencies in the institutions (such as placement offices, careers, international office, student advisers) to maximise the benefits.