

Quality Framework for Traineeships, Public Consultation, July 2012

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) welcomes opening the discussion on a quality framework for traineeships. ESN believes that such a framework is particularly needed in its sphere of expertise (cross-border placements, traineeships and internships), but is equally important for creating a fair and sustainable legal framework enabling Europe's young generation to gain essential skills that increase employability and lead to higher economic growth. ESN firmly believes that traineeships can be highly beneficial for the individual intern if they facilitate the transition between studies and work. From a macroeconomic perspective, traineeships also help increase the skills for young professionals and give the young people of Europe much-needed preparations for the labour market.

However, there are considerable challenges with the functioning of traineeships in practice. ESN is worried about traineeships are often being used for replacing permanent employment, leading to a situation where young people are to a certain extent expected to work for free after or during their studies. This expectation places a disproportional burden on the shoulders of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Only about 25 % of all traineeships receive sufficient pay to fully cover living expenses¹ and people from less affluent backgrounds are thus less likely to be able to support themselves during the internship. For this reason, ESN fully supports the European Quality Charter of Internships and Apprenticeships², together with numerous other organisations representing young people in Europe.

Building upon the necessity for a more general legal framework for traineeships, the following part of this paper explains ESN's position about specific necessities for cross-border traineeships. Results from the ESNSurvey 2011³ show that the traineeship experience abroad enhances many skills crucial for graduates' employability. Survey respondents who have done a traineeship abroad rate in particular foreign language skills, working in intercultural teams, communication skills and networking skills significantly higher than individuals who have not had a study or traineeship experience abroad. In addition, the willingness to move abroad for work increases for mobile trainees compared to their peers without such experience. Those findings further illustrate the beneficial effect of cross-border traineeships for employability and future labour mobility.

¹European Youth Forum (2011) *Interns Revealed – A survey on internship quality in Europe*. See http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/yfj_internsrevealed_web

² Towards quality internships & apprenticeships. See <http://qualityinternships.eu/>

³ Cf.: Alfranseder, E. (2012) *Quality Issues of Erasmus Placements and Internships Abroad*, Erasmus Student Network AISBL, Brussels. See

<http://esn.org/sites/default/files/Quality%20Issues%20of%20Erasmus%20Placements%20and%20Internships%20Abroad%20FINAL.pdf>

Thus ESN recommends policy-makers and stakeholders to focus in particular on the following aspects to further increase both quantity and quality of cross-border internships:

1. **Proper recognition of skills to:**
 1. Encourage procedures for a structured recognition of skills gained and experience acquired in the cross-border context during the traineeship and, consequently, develop a plan to have an official certification of skills (both in formal and non-formal education terms).
 2. Guarantee an enriching educational experience for cross-border vocational trainings.

2. **The Visa and traineeship preparation process should:**
 1. Support the trainee in applying for obtaining the required documentation for the Visa.
 2. Be facilitated by a direct link between embassies for mobility issues related to traineeships and internships.

3. **The financial conditions for all cross-border traineeships must be substantially improved by:**
 1. Offering sufficiently high financial support to cross-border trainees.
 2. Adjusting the level of the EU-funded grants (such as those of Erasmus placements) to a level which reflects the living costs of the host countries.

By taking the aforementioned points into consideration, the situation for mobile trainees, companies/institutions hosting trainees and the European economy as a whole can be substantially improved.

