

WP3 Literature review on placements

REPORT



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Introduction

This literature review concentrates on placements from the point of view of students and SMEs. The aim is to review what kind of information is available on the topic. Several sources of information have been used for the review. These included journal databases (e.g. EBSCO, Emerald, ProQuest, Elsevier, Sage publications), Internet, and national and regional library database in Finland. The keywords used included for example the following: placement, abroad, international, practical training, internship, traineeship, SMEs, student with various combinations. The literature search was done both in English and in Finnish.

In this review there is no difference made between the terms "traineeship", "placements" and "internship", but these all are used interchangeably to refer to a practical training period in a company. The aim of the placements is to provide students with practical experience in the application of theoretical concepts, to increase their understanding of the purpose of an organisation, to support their personal development, to learn practical skills, and to improve their career prospects (Freudenberg et al., 2011). The focus of the review has been on practical aspects on placement provision so that the review would serve the development of the new content for the businessculture.org website.

Benefits of placements

For students

Nowadays many students work while studying in order to meet their living expenses and also to gain work experience (Broadbridge and Swanson 2005; Hall 2010). There are many benefits related to placements in general. These include for example improvement of employability and gaining practical skills. As there is lots of competition in the labour market placements are considered a great way to achieve the relevant employability skills and work experience that recruiters are looking for and value highly (Gault et al. 2010). In addition, placements are a great way to have a break from the studies as they offer an opportunity to test in practice whether the student would like to work in a particular position or field in the future. (Little and Harvey 2006).

It has been shown that placements develop several kinds of skills. Graduates with traineeship experience have a greater development of organisational, leadership, management, entrepreneurship skills, and the ability to work in teams (Wilton 2008). The work placement develops also skills such as communication, problem solving, and organization and interpersonal skills (Falconer and Pettigrew 1993).

The interest towards international student placement has arisen (CIMO 2012; Damast 2010). In addition to the skills mentioned above, international placements offer an opportunity to develop skills related to the new culture. They offer the student an opportunity to (International Internships 2012):

- Discover what it is like to work in a certain field and in a different culture.
- Learn about a new country, its culture and its language.
- Create connections with experts from other parts of the world.

- Improve the CV. A student can show to potential employers his/her ability to work with people from other cultures.
- Have a full time employment. Sometimes employers hire trainees for full-time employment after graduation.

A study (Garam 2005) conducted among Finnish employers confirmed that the employers consider the benefits of international experience wider than solely as an improved language skills and an ability to work with people with different cultural backgrounds. In addition to abilities related internationalisation, the employers consider that a training period abroad develops students' substance skills and influence on personal development. Personal development contains for example a better ability to cope with stress, ability to adapt to new situations, ability to have a wider perspective and improved self-confidence.

For SMEs

Hosting a trainee is a beneficial experience for a company. The company is able to work with experienced and motivated young professionals. Often the placement programmes allow companies to decide the requirements they set for a trainee. These can be for example a subject area, specialisation, level of study, technical experience, language requirements, nationality and duration. This careful selection process is used to guarantee a successful traineeship for all parties. (Experience International 2012; IASTE 2012b)

The students have learnt the latest information of a specific topic during their studies and during the placement they are able to share and exchange their knowledge and possibly bring new, innovative ideas to the company. Placements are also a way to establish new professional contacts with students, educational institutes and placement organisations. (Experience International 2012; IASTE 2012b)

International trainees will bring some extra flavours to the workplace. They are able to strengthen the intercultural competence of the company by bringing an international perspective to the business and broaden the perspectives of a staff. Obviously integrating the trainee to the workplace requires active involvement from both parties. (Experience International 2012)

Trainees typically work on small, short-term projects. They can for example search for new business opportunities overseas. Or if the company has decided to expand into international markets, international placement students can be used as a first step in the process. Good examples of this can be found from Finland where the experience of international trainees has been used to learn from new markets and to establish first contacts in the market (Kohonen 2010).

Many of the traineeship programmes operate on a reciprocal basis meaning that the number of students a country can send abroad depends entirely on how many placements it can arrange for foreign trainees. Therefore, companies offering placements are highly valued (CIMO 2011). This means also that the bureaucracy related to the recruitment process has tried to be kept in minimum for the host companies. Usually placement programmes offer their help or even take care of necessary administrative issues, such as visas and work permits. They can also help in organising accommodation as well offer some free-time activities for the trainees. (IASTE 2012b)

Placement options

Eligibility criteria for placements

There are various types of placement options available for students at vocational level and higher education. The duration, structure and focus of a placement differ by country and by educational institute. Internships are compulsory in some programs and elective in others. The duration of internships can vary for example from few weeks to a full school term. The most typical length of a traineeship is from 3 to 6 months.

Often there are no compulsory practical training included in university studies. Of course, there are field- and country-specific differences. For example practical trainings are generally part of the studies in the field of medicine and teachers studies. And often, there are training options available that can be included in the studies. In the vocational training, instead, practical training is usually compulsory. The qualification can include a certain number of credits of on-the-job learning. Doing an internship abroad is also a good option for recently graduated students.

The eligibility criteria for international internships vary between countries and programmes. Rather general eligibility criteria include:

- Being a degree student or be a graduate under 12 months;
- Be an adult (18 years);
- Ability to communicate in English;
- Be financially independent or have on his bank account proof of ownership of funds equivalent.

Some programmes require specific skills (e.g. engineering or foreign language competence), while some are more general. Relevant work experience can be desirable but it is not always necessary. (Study in Finland 2012b; University of Michigan, International Center 2012)

Organising placements

There are several ways to apply for a training placement abroad. First of all, there are various programmes offering placements for university students. These include:

- EU programmes – Erasmus (higher education) and Comenius (future school teachers)
- AIESEC (provides internship placements for higher education students internationally)
- ELSA (The European Law Students' Association)
- IAAS (International Association of Agricultural Students)
- IAESTE (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience)
- IAPS (International Association of Physics Students)
- IFMSA (International Federation of Medical Students' Association)
- ILSA (The International Law Students Association)
- IPSF (International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation)
- Nordjobb (An exchange program between the Nordic countries)

Erasmus programme is probably the most common one. All enrolled degree students at some European university are able to join the Erasmus traineeship mobility programme. Host organisations for student placements can be companies, training and research centres and other organisations. Erasmus traineeship will always be included as part of the trainee's degree studies. Finding a suitable placement is student's responsibility, so student's own activity is required. When the student has found a placement, he/she is able to apply for an Erasmus placement grant that covers some of the living costs from the home university. (European Commission 2012)

In addition to placement programmes, several student organisations also arrange training placements in their specific fields of study. Therefore, the most practical way for students to find a suitable placement is to contact a student organisation in their own field. Especially in the vocational educational international placements are organised via schools.

There are also private placement organisations offering placements abroad. It is also possible to organise the whole traineeship independently. And even though the placement is part of some public programme the students are expected to acquire the internship place for themselves if the traineeship is part of the studies. This is because acquiring the internship place is regarded as a part of the learning process. However, the schools usually support the process if necessary by using the contact network of the schools or the individual members of staff. It also seems that in some countries the companies are more actively involved with organising internship. For example in Trier University of Applied Sciences in Germany there is a systematic procedure for internships. The companies are well informed about internships and the school organises special events where students market their skills and based on the presentations companies employ students. (Kantola – Gates 2004)

The most common ways to search for a trainee or a training placement is to contact the educational institute, student organisation or programmes organising placements. However, it is also possible to take care of everything independently. Even though the company has found the trainee independently it is possible to include the trainee to a trainee programme if the trainee and the trainee placement meet the criteria set for international traineeship. This way the company is able to receive help for example in the administrative procedures from the training organisation.

Issues to consider regarding international placements

For students

There are many issues students need to take care of before their arrival to the destination country. These issues are discussed in the following. It must be remembered to reserve enough time for the travel arrangements and the necessary formalities. The training organisations, educational institutes and home and host organisations are able to help in the formalities.

Cost of living

Usually, students should be able to cover their living costs independently. The costs of living vary from country to country. The cost may vary a bit depending also on the location inside the country. For example

accommodation and other living costs may be higher in the metropolitan areas and other larger cities. There are some Internet sites available that provide information on living conditions (e.g. Numbeo).

Money and Banking

To facilitate the everyday life, it is recommended to open a bank account in the destination country after the arrival. It is advisable to check if international credit cards are accepted in the destination country and exchange some local money prior to the departure. The procedure of opening a bank account vary between countries. Usually, a person opening a bank account needs to visit the bank branch in person and have the passport with you for identification purposes.

Salary from internships

The internship can be paid or unpaid. Quite often the students receive a salary that covers the living costs from traineeships that are part of their higher education degree. This is required for example in IASTE programme. Sometimes the host company can decide whether it pays for the trainee or not. In vocational training the on-the-job-learning is typically unpaid. If the training takes place via an placement organisation students are

Accommodation

Often the associations that organise training placements can help students in finding accommodation. Sometimes it is the responsibility of the host organisation to arrange accommodation for the trainee. The trainee can search for rented flats on the open market, but this can be difficult to achieve especially before actually arriving to the destination country. Also, this may be considerably more expensive than the available student housing options.

Travelling

Usually the student needs to pay and organise their travel to the destination country.

Insurance, health and social security

The most typical insurances a student can need during his/her international traineeship are travel insurance, health and accident insurance and liability insurance. The student needs to check before his/her arrival to the destination country if he/she needs to have an insurance. If the students are EU/EEA nationals, the health and accident insurance might not be obligatory inside EU/EEA, but it is highly recommended.

The details of students eligibility for health services and social security in the destination country depends upon student's nationality and/or residence status in the country. For example, the regulations concerning EU/EEA or other nationals are different from each other.

Visas

If the student needs to apply for a visa, finding an internship and signing a contract with the host company must be completed before starting the Visa process. Citizens of all European Union member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland do not need a visa in EU countries.

Residence permits and registration

EU/EEA citizens do not usually need a residence permit in EU/EEA countries, but they should, however, register their residence if their stay in the country longer than three months. Non-EU/EEA citizens need to apply for the student residence permit before their arrival in EU/EEA countries. (Study in Finland 2012a)

For SMEs

Even though organisations offering placements may take care of majority of practicalities, a successful training period for the student requires also the host company's commitment and support (Renganathan et al., 2012).

Job description and guidance

The most important responsibility for a company is to introduce the trainee to the company and its activities and organise suitable tasks for the trainee. So the student would receive relevant work experience it is essential that the tasks are planned before the trainee's arrival. One tool that has proven to be useful for all parties is a written traineeship plan. It includes the objectives, phases and specified tasks of the traineeship. It is also a common practice to assign for the trainee a tutor/supervisor to whom he/she can turn to during and even after the traineeship. ((IASTE 2012a; Opas ulkomaisen harjoittelijan työnantajalle 2011.)

Salary

Often all international trainees in higher education must receive a trainee wage paid according to the collective agreement (Opas ulkomaisen harjoittelijan työnantajalle 2011). In IASTE programme the trainees must receive a living allowance or wage which cover food, accommodation and travel to and from work, and also contains a small amount to be used for so that the student will learn about the new culture. (IASTE 2012a)

Job contract

The host company is responsible for drawing a job contract similar to the one of with national trainees with the international trainee according to national policies. This will make clear for the trainee the rights and responsibilities. (Opas ulkomaisen harjoittelijan työnantajalle 2011.)

Insurances

The host company must insure the trainee according to the same policy than the other employees. Usually the trainee has also personal health and accident insurance. (Opas ulkomaisen harjoittelijan työnantajalle 2011.)

Practicalities

It is hoped that the host company is able to assist in arranging accommodation for the trainee and also to help the trainee in official matters related to taxation, permissions and insurances. (Opas ulkomaisen harjoittelijan työnantajalle 2011.)

Conclusions

This review has gone through the essentials related to placements. The focus has been on international placements, even though these issues are applicable also to national placements. The idea in the report has been to cover topics that can be examined by country level in the businessculture.org website. These include especially the placement options available and practicalities related to the placements. The literature review revealed that the information available is mostly targeted at students, i.e. there is not that

much information available for companies. This is the added value the training material on businessculture.org is able to offer. In addition, much of the information seems to be scattered. [Businessculture.org](http://businessculture.org) website will improve this by offering a single place for information on the topic.

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Resources:

Useful links:

Evaluating Student Industrial Placements Abroad. A practical Guide– Methodologies, Case Studies, Guidelines. http://www.cefi.org/STAGES/GUIDE_M.HTM

GoAbroad.com, Intern Abroad – A database for international work placements. <http://www.goabroad.com/intern-abroad>

Numbeo is a free Internet database containing information about cities and countries worldwide, especially living conditions. www.numbeo.com

Ratemyplacement.co.uk – Information on placements, a database to look for a placement

The European Job Mobility Portal (EURES) provides information on jobs and learning opportunities throughout Europe including also country-specific information on living and working conditions.
<http://ec.europa.eu/eures/home.jsp?lang=en>

Programmes organising placements

[AIESEC \(provides internship placements for higher education students internationally\)](#)

[ELSA \(The European Law Students' Association\)](#)

[ERASMUS Student Mobility for Placements](#)

[IAAS \(International Association of Agricultural Students\)](#)

[IAESTE \(International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience\)](#)

[IAPS \(International Association of Physics Students\)](#)

[IFMSA \(International Federation of Medical Students' Association\)](#)

[ILSA \(The International Law Students Association\)](#)

[IPSF \(International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation\)](#)

[Nordjobb \(An exchange program between the Nordic countries\)](#)