



Quality assurance in mobility - mentoring and learning outcomes (Q-Mentor)

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Work package 6 „Testing“: Evaluation Report

Introduction

Mentors in hosting and sending companies play a key strategic role in the process of organizing, carrying out and evaluating successful learning outcomes during the individual beneficiary mobility. The Q-Mentor project aims to train mentors and make them familiar with instruments used for transparency and recognition of the learners' competences in geographical mobility. In particular for mobility experiences qualified mentoring and evaluating learning outcomes are keys to quality assurance. Official statistics indicate that the most Companies mentors don't have heard about the instruments to provide high quality traineeships, which is one of the most important points to complain a successful traineeship or apprenticeships. Foyle (UK), MEMO (MT) and ALFMED (FR) – the project partners on the practical side - experienced also this situation on a daily basis as they deal with student's placements and helping companies for mentoring European students. Therefore it is important to inform and train mentors about organizing all phases of a mobility project like implementation, evaluation, review, the importance of quality management and assurance in all steps. Q-MENTOR Pilot workshop have been organized so to validate what "content" and "context" was the most efficient to train the mentors.

For this objective we intend to make mentors familiar in particular with:

- Transparency & trust in different national VET systems
- Competent use of European transparency instruments (EQF, ECVET)
- Implementation of valid learning outcomes in the mobility

Therefore we set up a workshop setting with a certain curriculum, a handbook to use as training and information material and a supportive e-learning environment. In a pilot phase at the beginning of 2014 these products were tested and reviewed in a more informal context. The project partners invited a group of host company representatives to talk through the developed material. They collected the mentors' feedback and used it to review the products. For collecting feedback of the host companies a questionnaire was used, that covered all relevant aspects. A second table was used to have the partners report on their impressions and suggestions about the workshops. In the following sections we report on those findings of the project partners.



Workshop with host company mentors conducted in Perpignan (France), 29-11-2013

Implementation

The project partners from the United Kingdom, France and Malta conducted a survey among a sample of our host companies – about 10 each. We have used the results and our extensive experience of organizing mobility programmes to provide a training set, a handbook and an e-learning portfolio with useful information to host companies regarding quality mentoring.

As regards organizing the workshops all partners said, the host companies were all willing to take part at least for one day, the only difficulties were to bring them all together at a convenient day and time. So in general host companies were interested in the topic “Qualified mentoring” which set a good basis for further commitment. The participants of the workshops all considered the format very suitable to deliver all relevant information. They agreed that qualifying is important since it ensures that every mentor is aware of his role and responsibility. The participants also used the chance to exchange experiences, to discuss the realities of hosting participants and also the benefits of hosting an intern.

During the pilot training the impressions from the Q-Mentor workshop were rather positive. The mentors were very interested in the project and happy attending the workshop as it was for them a real opportunity to know the process of European mobilities. They expressed that they were favorable to the idea of a training program and that it helps them to understand better the intern and also to give a better and more structured and fruitful internship to the intern. The only negative remark came from Foyle International regretting the workshop turned into a complaining session for the host companies. Otherwise the atmosphere in the workshops was quite informal and convivial with animated discussions and a real exchange between the mentors.

Concerning the curriculum MEMO regrets the short period of time from the receipt of the curricula to the start of the internship because there is no time to prepare a proper program for him. Moreover, they suggest the lack of ability for the student to communicate due to the limited English language skills. In Foyle's opinion there was a lot of information to cover and it would have been fine to carry it out over a two day period, which was not possible. Nevertheless, the content was well received and the feedback was extremely positive with a very interesting and relevant learning material which allowed for interaction, discussion and reflection.

The French but also Maltese and British partner collected also feedback about the handbook in particular. In general it was well-received. Positive facts were: “very useful and concise” and “easy to read with an attractive layout”. Mentors said the handbook raises awareness and increases the understanding of companies hosting a trainee. It can be a good support in hosting trainees. Negative feedback was, that there was sometimes too much text, which can discourage mentors, as they do not have much time to read. Being such a complex issue, it needs to be as clear as possible. Simple and quick answers to questions were favored. According to the mentors' opinion a common core about the evaluation of trainees missing. In the curriculum with included certain attachments such as the learning agreement, europass example etc., which should make it easier for the mentors to agree on certain learning outcomes beforehand and evaluate those after the mobility experience. In France and the UK the mentors interviewed were all very interested in the e-book version of the Q-Mentor Handbook and a simple online application of the curricula. They thought that the Q-Mentor e-toolbox is a good initiative.



Workshop with host company mentors conducted in Derry (UK), 01-05-2014

Conclusion

We found a lot of consensus among the testing groups in the different host countries. Most of them considered the workshops as an enriching chance to exchange experiences and get a better understanding of the processes and key players involved in the mobility process. They also found it interesting to know how transparency can be ensured with the help of certain instruments like the learning agreement, the europass etc. The project partners who organized the workshops intend to establish the workshops in the future among their network of host companies. Only the Maltese partner (Memo) was in favor of one to one meetings next to group based workshops because he found those to more suitable to respond to individual needs.

The British partner (Foyle) would also like to have the Q-Mentor curriculum approved as a qualification with a local awarding body as he feels it would add more credibility to the training. This is something that Foyle will look into in the future, considering also costs and time to register host companies on the course and to award certificates on successful completion.

The testing workshops acted as focus group where new ideas were generated and we can see how to make improvements with learning content as well as time allocated per activity for future workshops. Overall, the host companies were very positive about their experiences of work placements and the possibility of improving how they will mentor any future participants.

These were main points to keep in mind for the next implementation steps in order to work on the project sustainability. We aim to set up the Q-Mentor as mandatory part of the Memorandum of Understanding within the partnership, organizing future ECVET mobility experiences. The partners intent to qualify most of the in-company trainers in their host company network with the Q-Mentor products step by step to assure a proper quality. That is how the Q-Mentor concept will spread further, ensuring the sustainability of the project. The developed products will secure the partners a competitive advantage also, because they can communicate the added value of their quality mobility programs, working in the framework of ECVET. With the Q-Mentor as evidence for quality traineeships we will build trust in the host companies.




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01/10/2012 - 30/09/2014

Q-MENTOR-WORKSHOP
** List of Participants **

Place: Malta Date: 27th March 2014

Name	Company / Position	Sign
Ray Jones	Heritage Malta - Senior Executive	
Sara Baldwin	MIEMA - Project Manager	
Diane Cassar	Fondazzjoni Terzi Zammit - Project Manager	
Anna Cardona	Prehena Hotel - HR Executive	
Judith Valletta	Wignacourt Museum - Senior Administrator	
Roberta Mifsud	Plant Health Directorate - HR Manager	
Miriam Farrugia	Demajo Group - Manager	

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Workshop with host company mentors conducted in Malta, 27-03-2014