The European Commission pilot project

Digital Opportunity Scheme

Boosting digital skills on the job

#digitalskills

Workshop 22 September 2017

Summary report

Questions & Answers and Breakout Sessions

Questions & Answers

How are the trainees selected?

➢ Companies can select the right profiles, e.g. through platforms such as ErasmusIntern. The trainees apply to their universities for the Erasmus+ grant and universities select the trainees on the basis of their criteria, e.g. excellence, traineeship plan etc.

The pilot targets university students and recent graduates – what about VET students?

➢ As such, the Digital Opportunity initiative only targets the categories above, but Erasmus+ also target VET students, who can also undertake traineeships. Companies are encouraged to offer traineeships also to them.

Can the students stay regionally/in their country of residence?

➢ No, one of the objectives of the programme is to boost mobility, so the trainees have to go abroad. There are 33 programme countries participating in Erasmus+ and several partner countries. All the Associated countries to Horizon 2020 are eligible for the pilot.

What is the timing?

➢ The call for Erasmus+ will be published in October 2017. The first traineeships will start in June 2018. Companies are encouraged to start advertising their offers as of October 2017 as students are already looking for opportunities.

What are the conditions for beneficiaries?

➢ Trainees receive on average EUR 500/month but the exact amount depends on the country. Companies can top up this grant.

Who receives the money?

➢ The trainees receive the grant via the university. As a general rule, companies are not involved in the transaction.

Who pays for the trainee's insurance?

➢ This is to be agreed between the company and university, the students should not pay the insurance from the Erasmus +grant.

Is the platform to publish traineeships already operating?

➢ ErasmusIntern and Drop'pin are both already operating so companies can start publishing their offers. In the next months an ad-hoc flag for the Digital Opportunity Traineeships will be integrated in these platforms.

Is there any arrangement concerning intellectual property for the work performed during the traineeship?

➢ Erasmus+ is based on the learning agreement signed by the company and the trainee. On top of this agreement, companies can add any other agreement including confidential clauses.

If a company has subsidiaries in several Member States, is it possible for the trainee to sign the agreement in one country and then undertake the traineeship also in another one?

➢ Yes, it is possible to go to two different locations; the agreement is signed with the subsidiary where the traineeship takes place most of the time.

Looking at the statistics for Erasmus+, only 3% of the traineeships in 2015 were in the field of ICT.

➢ Erasmus+ is totally bottom up, there are not fixed quotas for educational fields. One of the purposes of the Digital Opportunity initiative is indeed to encourage students and recent graduates from disciplines other than ICT to also undertake traineeships to strengthen digital skills.

Do you foresee anything specific for cybersecurity, given the shortage of experts in this sector?

➢ The Digital Opportunity initiative can also be used for cybersecurity. The European Cybersecurity Research and Competence Centre announced in the recently issued [cybersecurity](#) package, will also be in charge of developing the curriculum for cybersecurity.

Can regional education associations and research centres also host trainees?

➢ Yes, regional education associations and research centre are eligible for such traineeships.

What is the role of chambers of commerce and business associations?

➢ They can offer traineeships and also match supply and demand and therefore become partners to universities.

Is there a list of universities holding the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education?

➢ Yes, the list is available [here](#).

Summary of breakout sessions

Breakout session 1

1a: ***What's in it for companies? Does your company already have a traineeship program? How will the Digital Opportunity scheme be integrated?***

- Several big companies (Procter and Gamble, Siemens, Cisco, etc.) already have traineeship programmes running in their companies. The comment from one SME is that they do not have a traineeship programme, as they do not have the budget to hire trainees on a regular basis. When they recruit trainees, it is often on new projects.
- The Digital Opportunity can integrate well with the existing programmes, providing additional support to students coming from other countries.
- Traineeships are considered as the best way to select new employers that could join the company afterwards.
- The Digital Opportunity has a great marketing potential, meaning that the initiative is raising awareness on the importance of on-the-job training for digital skills and it can also attract more students to start a career in ICT-related professions.
- Companies already hosting trainees within Erasmus+ find the mechanism easy and well-structured, thus not implying any additional burden for the companies.
- Some companies raised the issue of confidentiality: it would be useful to have the possibility to sign a confidentiality contract with the trainee in addition to the standard Erasmus+ contract.
- Digital Opportunity was perceived as a useful means for companies to access candidates also possessing relevant knowledge and skills (economics, management, etc.) that complement ICT skills well. This is of particular relevance given the pervasive needs for ICT skills across functions.
- The scheme's approach could be usefully applied to vocational training/apprenticeships.
- Receiving trainees from across Europe was considered appealing (variety of backgrounds…).

1b: ***What makes a good trainee (and how to get them on board)? What is the background requested to a perspective trainee for a "digital skills" traineeship? Is the list of digital competencies (for digital skills traineeships) comprehensive? Is anything missing?***
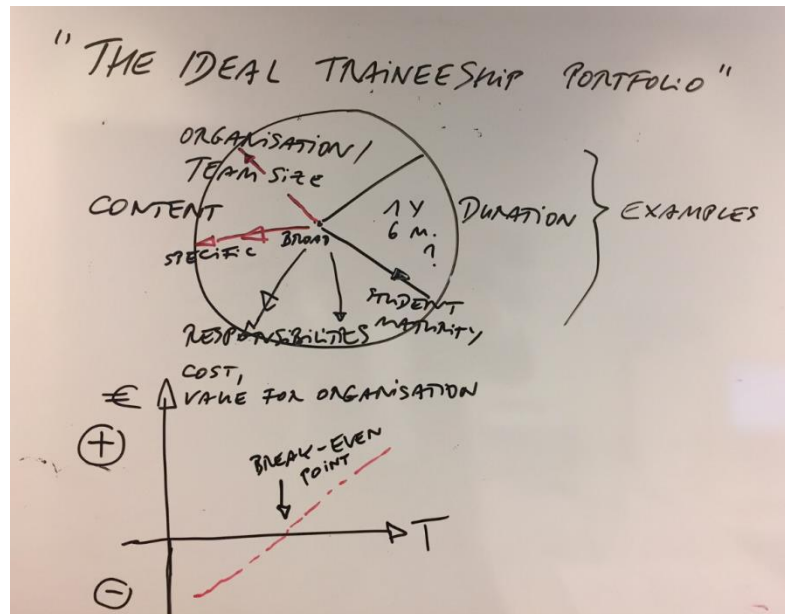
- For positions for ICT specialist skills, companies expect future trainees to have an ICT background.
- For other positions requiring digital skills, there was consensus that anyone can learn IT. Beyond the technical background, skills such as communication and willingness to learn were considered as the most important ones for a future trainee. Also, trainees are expected to have an idea of their career path and be motivated.
- However, there are some basic skills companies expect to be already acquired, such as the advanced use of the Microsoft office package. Also, some companies look at the quantitative background of future trainees, and they expect them to be able to use statistical software. The opinion for SMEs is that they need students who have more background, as it is more difficult for them to provide fundamental training to trainees.
- There were many suggestions that a course in basic digital skills could be developed and offered by universities/Erasmus+, and that there is a role for the EU in promoting the development of such capacity building tool. This should go hand in hand with awareness raising in universities, both for the course providers and for the students.

- A course in basic digital skills could be easily developed. It could focus on a first level on maths and problem solving, and on a second level on communication skills. The latter are very much needed for positions aimed at implementing ICT solutions in the company, and require understanding and ability to interact with the developers on one side and with the implementers on the other. There was also a suggestion to direct future trainees to existing online courses.
- There were two examples of programmes ran by two companies, (K2 and FacilityLive), the first providing a six-months boot camp at universities to become certified consultants (e.g. in cloud), followed by a traineeship at a company. The second is a graduate programme that foresees one month and a half of course before the work experience in the company. Erasmus+ could provide an entry training, as e.g. for second it would be better to have already knowledge of Java. Some experience in coding (PHP) was also welcome by another company (SensioLabs), although they provide trainees with free access to their training programme for coding.
- For students, the best motivation to acquire digital skills is the demand from companies (due to the shortage) and the perspective of a job. Also they should be explained the career progress and prospects, the variety of tasks they will undertake. On the job, they will also meet role models.
- On the list, there were suggestions to make it more specific and shorter, as some of the competencies required by companies concern very specific software. Also, there were suggestions to put more emphasis on coding. There was a call also to look at the sector, or at the company business, as needs and therefore requirements vary. The Horizon2020 Public Private Partnerships all have Research & Innovation agendas listing topics needed in terms of skills development. For big data, for instance, it was suggested to include in the list data management, data privacy, Artificial Intelligence and Data Visualisation.
- The list should also include soft skills and competencies, such as communication, motivation and capacity to learn.

Breakout session 2

2a: How does the 'ideal' traineeship look like for your company (e.g. in terms of length, content, remuneration, etc.)?

- The ideal traineeship should balance the investment and benefits for the company and for the trainee.

"THE IDEAL TRAINEESHIP PORTFOLIO"

ORGANISATION / TEAM SIZE
CONTENT
SPECIFIC — BROAD
1 Y 6 M. ? DURATION } EXAMPLES
RESPONSIBILITIES STUDENT MATURITY
COST, VALUE FOR ORGANISATION
€ (+)
BREAK-EVEN POINT
T
(−)

- The "ideal portfolio and "break-even point" depend on the specific setting and are different for each organisation and programme. The portfolio will depend on elements such as duration, content, maturity of students, responsibilities given, team size, etc.
- Length: participants were of the opinion that there should be a minimum duration for the traineeships. Some argued that it should be at least 6 months up to one year; shorter traineeships are useful but only for less complicated tasks; however, the length depends also on the sector and specific needs of the organisation. Alternative solutions suggested were one-month training case based but repeated a certain number of times; one day per week training while working for the rest of the week.
- Trainee: traineeship offers should not be limited to students or recent graduates but extended to others as well.
- Remuneration: what is offered within the framework of Erasmus+ is not enough especially in case of longer traineeships; remuneration could raise in time; remuneration could be adapted to the minimum wage in a given country; top-ups such as accommodation, travel expenses, equipment, vouchers etc. could be offered by the company; it could be attached to a contract to work for the company for certain time.
- Content: depends on company needs; could be project/case based or focused on certain skills.

2b: What are the main obstacles for your company to hire trainees and how can those be overcome?

Obstacles

- Overhead costs for trainees: time to coach trainees as well as ensuring the trainee has computers, security badges, etc.
- Lack of basic skills (not digital) such as common sense, problem solving etc.
- Lack of suitable language skills to do the internship in another country.
- Lack of knowledge of English
    - Potential solutions
        - Reform education systems
        - Ensure industry and education systems are working together
- Lack of precise digital skills
    - Potential solutions
        - Pre-training before the trainee starts e.g. bootcamp
        - Pre-training in the form of online training courses e.g. CodAcademy
- High living costs in certain cities and regions.
- Risks related to confidentiality (but companies supposed to do their own due diligence, take precautions): more clarity and guidance requested.
- Administrative burden and paperwork may be deterring factors, as may the amount of resources that need to be invested by companies.
- Uncertainty related to insurance arrangements: more clarity and guidance requested.
- Uncertainty about actual skills of candidates: recognition, certification and testing were put forward as potentially mitigating this problem.
- Availability of suitable candidates willing to take an internship in certain countries may be limited.

List of participant organisations[*]

Big Data Value Association (BDVA)
Cabinet of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Digital Agenda
Capgemini Consulting
CEC European Managers
CECIMO (European Association of the Machine Tool Industries)
Cross Border Talents
Digital Leadership Institute
DIGITALEUROPE
European eSkills Association (EeSA)
EIT Digital
Ericsson
European Banking Federation
European Digital Learning Network
European Digital SME Alliance
European Federation of Education Employers
European Schoolnet
FacilityLive
Fujitsu
University of Limerick
ICF Mostra
ICFO - The Institute of Photonics Science
IK4-IDEKO - RESEARCH CENTER SPECIALIST IN ADVANCED MANUFACTURING
International Network for Health Workforce Education (INHWE)
K2 Partnering Solutions
Laboratory for Manufacturing Systems (LMS)
MEDEF
Nestle
Permanent Representation Slovakia
Pour La Solidarité
Procter & Gamble
Qualcomm
Schuman Associates
Siemens Industry Software NV
Unioncamere Europa
VUB B-PHOT
YOUTHPROAKTIV

---

[*]The list does not include participants who followed the workshop online.