

SHORT *VERSUS* LONG DURATION MOBILITY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Abstract

VET learner's mobility abroad is slowly getting importance to the individual employability. From 2014 until 2020 the VET mobility in Erasmus+ scope had financed almost one million mobilities. For VET institutions, companies, learners, and families the challenge is to have an efficient mobility that triggers the learner's employability, giving an added value to the CV. However, the choice relays mainly on the alternative on short duration mobility or long duration mobility. What is the best option for the several actors? What benefits and constraints may arise in both durations? We have made an extensive revision of bibliography in order to answer these questions and help learners, companies, VET institutions and society to take smart decisions.

Keywords: Vocational Education and Training, Mobility, Long Duration, Short Duration, Erasmus+

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Resumo

A mobilidade do aluno de EFP no exterior está lentamente a ganhar importância para a empregabilidade individual. De 2014 a 2020, a mobilidade do EFP no âmbito do Erasmus + financiou quase um milhão de mobilidades. Para instituições de EFP, empresas, alunos e famílias, o desafio é ter uma mobilidade eficiente que estimule a empregabilidade do aluno, conferindo um valor acrescentado ao CV. No entanto, a escolha depende principalmente da alternativa de mobilidade de curta duração ou mobilidade de longa duração. Qual a melhor opção para os diversos atores? Que benefícios e limitações podem surgir em ambas as durações? Fizemos uma extensa revisão da bibliografia para responder a essas perguntas e ajudar alunos, empresas, instituições de EFP e a sociedade a tomar decisões inteligentes.

Palavras-chave: Educação e Formação Profissional, Mobilidade, Longa Duração, Curta Duração, Erasmus +

Introduction

In European Union scope the mobility of Vocational Education and Training (VET) learners in another country has been understood, for several decades, as an effective process to both promote European integration of citizens and to boost the employability of young people.

Organised learning mobility in VET (defined as temporarily limited stays abroad organised for pedagogical purposes and/or work placements) has been an important topic in the European agenda. It has expressed itself both in terms of policy initiatives for improving framework conditions and of spending programmes which financially support mobility.

In fact, learning mobility was inscribed in the Treaty of Rome (European Communities, 1957) and the first programme (the Young Workers' Exchange Programme) became operational already in 1964. The main objective of this programme was to increase labour market mobility, i.e. enabling "young workers" to spend a period abroad after they had obtained their basic VET qualifications.

This small-scale programme lasted until 1991, when it was subsumed into the programme Petra I and then replaced by Petra II, the first initiative to promote learning mobility in a formal VET context. This was followed by the three phases of the Leonardo da Vinci programme as from 1995, until VET mobility was included in the Erasmus+ programme in 2013.

Alongside Erasmus+, there are further European programmes and initiatives providing funding and support to learning mobility in a VET-context, notably "Your First EURES job" (which also comprises apprentices) and various initiatives launched under the European Social Fund (e.g. the "Learning Network for Transnational Mobility"). Added to this, there are many programmes and initiatives supporting VET mobility, either national (e.g. PIU in Denmark) or bilateral (e.g. the Franco-German Youth Office).

In Erasmus+ framework, the short duration mobility (SDM) and long duration mobility (LDM) is understood as less than 89 days and from 90 days until 12 months, respectively.

From the consulted bibliography there is no clear picture which one is more positive for learners, for the companies, for the school and for the society.

So, we aim in this text, through the analysis of the existing literature, to identify and to sort out the benefits and constraints of short and long duration mobility in VET framework.

1. Conceptual Framework

In 2011, the European Council formulated the ambition that by 2020, at least 6% of all 18-34 year old with qualifications from initial vocational education and training (IVET) should have completed a VET related study or placement period abroad of at least two weeks' duration (Council of the European Union, 2011). Nowadays, the short duration mobility (SDM) in VET represents more than 75% of the total mobilities funded by ERASMUS+ programme (European Commission, 2017). However, in VET, long duration mobility (LDM) is still a rare phenomenon.

More recently, the European Parliament Report on VET Mobility (European Parliament, 2016), as well as many external stakeholders, have called for a strong support for LDM of apprentices. The European Parliament has sponsored two pilot projects initiated by the Member of the European Parliament - Jean Arthuis to develop a framework for LDM of apprentices.

Responding to the call of the European Parliament, in his State of the Union address to the Parliament in 2016, the President of the European Commission – Jean Claude Juncker announced an initiative to support the LDM of VET learners and in particular of apprentices. The Commission included this in the 2017 work programme in line with the December 2016 Communication on “Investing in Europe’s Youth”

, in which the Commission announced “a new dedicated long-duration (3 to 12 months) mobility activity - “ErasmusPRO”, within the existing Erasmus+ programme to support work placements abroad” (European Commission, 2016; 2020).

VET mobility has become a clear key European policy priority (CEDEFOP, 2020). In EU terms SDM is called to mobilities that last less than 3 months and LDM to mobilities to those ones that last from three to twelve months.

In face of these initiatives and frameworks, what kind of mobility should the VET providers and companies offer to their learners? Actually, the option by SDM or LDM is not clear or enough grounded.

This paper tries to have a clear picture of this duality and to achieve some conclusions in order to help VET managers and providers to decide upon.

2. Theoretical Framework

More evidence is available on mobility in general than on VET mobility in particular. Nevertheless, from the several publications consulted, we can state that one key and transversal inference is that mobility has clear and powerful benefits for society, for learners, for VET systems and for the labour market but, has, as well, some constraints.

A research conducted by King and Ruiz (2003) found that the year abroad within Erasmus programme had given higher education students/graduates a more ‘European’ identity or consciousness, and a greater insight into European issues and, additionally, that graduates would be more likely to pursue their subsequent career/migration paths in/to other countries.

Regarding the former Leonardo da Vinci programme a survey applied to former mobility learners (European Commission, 2007) found that there is a positive correlation between the duration of the stay and the personal, social and vocational skills of participants. This means

that the overall benefit of the mobility measure increases with its duration. What is pronounced, however, is the increase in the benefit to the current employer/training enterprise with the length of the stay. That is: short duration placements (less than three months) mainly help to improve individual and social skills, whilst longer duration ones also effect a considerable enhancement in vocational skills and in the benefit to the employer. Bellmann, Bender and Hornsteiner (2000) in a study over apprenticeships schemes, conclude as well that LDM is important as it is the first job experience for many learners.

In the opposite sense of King and Ruiz (2003)'s conclusions, Sigalas (2010) hit the effectiveness of cross-border mobility as a mean of raising a European identity into doubt. For this author, it is obvious that no miraculous transformations can be expected within SDM. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that shorter visits, such as business or tourist trips, will make any difference either. Longer stays abroad may be more effective.

Studying the impact of the Leonardo da Vinci programme on the quality of vocational education and training systems Friedrich, Korbel & Muller (2010) found several substantial impacts of mobility not only for learners and VET systems but also for VET professionals. The greatest positive impacts of transnational mobility of teachers, trainers and other VET professionals (de Paor, 2018) were: promotion of intercultural and language skills, creation of international and national networks, improvement of the quality of the continuing VET, improvement of the quality of IVET provision of impetus for the modernization and the innovation in systems of VET and increased motivation from the institutions, particularly school authorities and chambers of industry and commerce/of crafts, to support transnational measures. At institutional level, these authors found main evidences of progresses in: raising the attractiveness of Schools/VET centers involved in mobility abroad, pursuing a long-term internationalization strategy, institutions more firmly anchored to European networks and the introduction of new *curricula* contents in existing training. Finally at VET system level, the study concluded that the positive elements and effects of mobility were mainly: promoting intercultural and language competences of staff, establishing

transnational networks, stimulating regional networking, improving the quality of continuing vocational education and of initial vocational training and triggering quality improvement of the national VET-systems. Similar conclusions have been made by CIMO (2013) regarding projects partnerships in the Leonardo Da Vinci Programme and by Parey & Waldinger (2011) on boosting employability.

In 2011, a European Commission study shown that learning or training abroad helps young people to develop skills which employers strongly value - from language learning and greater inter-cultural awareness to leadership and adaptability. Other important finding is that Erasmus students tend to be more willing to work abroad later in life. In the same direction, Mitchell (2012) has identified three assumptions central to the civic view of the Erasmus experience: that Erasmus students engage in significant contact with other Europeans, become more interested in Europe and other Europeans as a result, and self-identify as European.

A study made by Coleman (2011) over studies and work placements abroad and employability of young people in Europe, evidenced that typically study/work abroad lead to progress across several personal domains: academic, cultural, intercultural, linguistic and professional. In terms of employability, what counts above all is the capacity to operate effectively in a different linguistic and cultural context. So, intercultural competence is an amalgam of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, skills, and behaviours, representing both cognitive and affective learning, and comprising an awareness of the relativity of cultures, including their own, and a recognition that culture is a social construct. Intercultural competence is increasingly valued in international business contexts. The greater maturity which results from work and study abroad can be presented to potential employers as independence and self-reliance, adaptability, enhanced confidence and self-awareness. It links closely to professional or employability outcomes, which can include transferable and 'self' skills, work experience, and an awareness of how work conventions vary across the world. This study goes in the same direction of the findings produced by Ryan (2001) Kumpikaite & Duoba (2013), Beine *et al* (2014), European Commission (2014), Santos (2010, 2014, 2015) Dolga *et al* (2015),

and Waibel *et al* (2017). These authors report the role of mobility to boost employability, to facilitate school-to-work transition and to stimulate, in a later stage, the labour market mobility. In addition, European Commission (2014) argues that LDM increases personal, social, foreign language and professional skills and raises the capacity to adjust to other challenges, to expand self-confidence, to promote adaptation to other cultures and raise personal soft skills. The research results from Waibel *et al* (2017) also reports a moderate positive effect of mobility on income after graduation. The learners perceive a connection between their mobility practices abroad and later job search success, but do not prove the effect on school-to-work transitions. Finally, this study indicates that individuals perceive a positive impact of mobility on career planning skills.

Egetenmeyer, Rueffin, & Blachnio (2011) produced a report, as an outcome of a European Leonardo da Vinci project that introduced mobility in the student's *curricula*. One of the conclusions relies on the time in mobility: should be integrated into a personal learning plan where possible learning outcomes should be mentioned and the possibility of reintegrating them into the whole learning pathway. In general learner's mobility raises personal, social, foreign language and professional skills and improves the learner's ability to adapt to new challenges.

In 2012 the European Commission produced a report on mobility developments that included VET. Understanding mobility as a pedagogical tool, the results shows that for SDM involving adult learners the learning objectives can be very concretely formulated (e.g. study visits). However, for LDM of young people the learning objectives are formulated in terms of "personal development", "intercultural understanding" or "employability". The LDM effects are more visible on raise personal, social, foreign language and professional skills. Anyway, this study pointed that regarding learning objectives of mobility, we should ask ourselves whether there is a minimum length for a pedagogically meaningful experience. The most questioning point of the study is that there is undoubtedly a connection between the duration of a mobility experience and the learning outcome, *ceteris paribus*. Nevertheless, the duration of mobility experience has an

influence in the learning impact, but the learning impact requires more than only time to sustain it.

Furthermore the European Commission (2013) conducted a study over the key success factors in apprenticeships schemes, where the conclusions pointed out some benefits of LDM: promotes European citizenship sense, promotes labour market mobility, is the first job experience and facilitates the school-to-work transition. Moreover CEDEFOP (2015, 2016a) as concluded these four statements, but in addition that in individual terms, mobility improves the ability to adapt to new challenges, raise self-confidence, promotes interculturality and soft skills in general.

More recently, CEDEFOP (2016b) published a mobility scoreboard for all member states. In this study the recognition of programmes and qualifications / diplomas / degrees cannot be acquired through SDM. Instead, programmes and qualifications / diplomas/ degrees can be recognized in case of long-term mobility at tertiary level (Higher VET). Other finding is related with the legal aspects of mobility, especially concerning visas for non-Schengen countries, as different solutions must be implemented for SDM and for LDM. For LDM in some countries the labour legislation implies a formal contract and some kind of payment and social protection. The use of European instruments and tools (e.g. learning agreement, memorandum of understanding, Europass Certificate Supplements) is more common in LDM than in SDM. For mobility in general, some constraints are pointed out: mobility is not part of the *curricula*, SDM is allowed only during schools holidays, financial restrictions to LDM, the age for traveling abroad (only above 18 years old), compulsory military service (e.g. in Cyprus for young males). On the other hand, the reasons collected for predominance of SDM are mainly: possibility to be carried out during school holidays periods, less administrative burden for schools/ VET center (e.g. organise the journey, the accommodation, the work placement, lower costs), it is very difficult to ensure accompanying personnel (teachers) for a longer mobility period as the teaching process in the school would be interrupted, easiness to recognize learning outcomes, parental consent is easier, more potential partners, less language barriers, less socio-cultural adaptation is required.

Marinoa, Parrottac & Pozzolid (2016) has reported on the effect of mobility to activate the internationalization of activity/production of VET institutions/companies. In the same sense, learner's mobility generates a bigger involvement of SME as sending organizations. In VET schools/Centers the mobility abroad encourages innovation and improvement of teaching methods and learning materials and triggers the development of methods for the transfer of knowledge and skills.

Petersdotter *et al* (2017) argues that mobility contributes to the recognition of the importance of international competencies and concludes by the influence of an academic abroad stay in rising students' general self-efficacy as a personal construct. In addition, these researchers confirmed the positive influence of longer stays abroad to raise general perceived self-efficacy.

However, in a study conducted by CEDEFOP (2017), over the European public opinion on VET, the findings found that the correlation of mobility prospects with the image of VET was relatively weak at country level.

2. Benefits and Constraints of Mobility

From the available bibliography and the theoretical background, we can cluster the benefits and the constraints in four groups (learners, companies, VET institutions and society) and in two durations (short and long).

2.1. Short Duration Mobility

2.1.1. Benefits

Benefits from Short Duration Mobility	
Learners	<i>Promote of European citizenship sense</i>
	<i>Contact with a foreign language</i>
	<i>Adapting to new challenges</i>
	<i>Inter-cultural awareness</i>
	<i>Communication skills</i>
	<i>Readiness for labour market mobility</i>
Companies	<i>Involvement of SME as sending/receiving organizations</i>
	<i>Internationalization of enterprise activity</i>
VET Institutions	<i>Internationalization of institutions and qualifications</i>
	<i>Raise the attractiveness of VET schools and qualifications</i>
	<i>Contributes to VET Staff/Teachers professional development</i>
Society	<i>European citizenship</i>
	<i>Free movement of citizens - learner and labour mobility</i>
	<i>Lower cost/mobility compared with long duration</i>

2.1.2. Constraints

Constraints for Short Duration Mobility	
Learners	<i>Not enough time to learn a foreign language</i>
	<i>Risk to become a "touristic tour"</i>
	<i>Legal restrictions for travel for under 18 years old learners</i>
	<i>No recognition of learning outcomes</i>
	<i>Not compliant with Qualification/Educational curricula and timings</i>
	<i>Parental Consent</i>
	<i>Despite the grants there is some additional costs involved</i>
Companies	<i>No Involvement of SME</i>
	<i>Legal aspects related with contracts and insurances</i>
	<i>No willing for receive learners for short periods</i>
VET Institutions	<i>Administrative burden for preparation and follow up</i>
	<i>Adaptation of the curricula</i>
	<i>No recognition of learning outcomes</i>
Society	<i>Costs per day are higher than long duration</i>
	<i>No proven benefit to promote European Citizenship</i>

2.2. Long Duration Mobility

2.2.1. Benefits

Benefits from Long Duration Mobility	
Learners	<i>Promote European citizenship sense</i>
	<i>Develop foreign language and professional skills</i>
	<i>Develop general soft skills,</i>
	<i>Adapting to new challenges</i>
	<i>Inter-cultural awareness</i>
	<i>Communication skills</i>
	<i>Improve Self-confidence</i>
	<i>Recognition of Learning Outcomes</i>
	<i>Facilitates school to work transition</i>
	<i>Boost Employability - First "job Experience"</i>
	<i>Readiness for labour market mobility</i>
Companies	<i>Access to foreign skills and know-how</i>
	<i>Opportunity to influence VET curricula</i>
	<i>Involvement of SME as sending/receiving organizations</i>
	<i>Internationalization of enterprise activity</i>
VET Institutions	<i>Internationalization of institutions and qualifications</i>
	<i>Trigger to innovation in teaching methods and learning materials</i>
	<i>Development of methods for transfer of knowledge and skills</i>
	<i>Recognition of learning outcomes (acquired abroad)</i>
	<i>Greater involvement with companies and VET institutes abroad</i>
	<i>Raise the attractiveness of VET schools and qualifications</i>
	<i>Contributes to VET Staff/Teachers professional development</i>
Society	<i>European citizenship</i>
	<i>Free movement of citizens - learner and labour mobility</i>
	<i>Recognition of the importance of international competencies</i>
	<i>Higher employability rates</i>
	<i>Competitiveness and innovation</i>

2.2.2. Constraints

Constraints for Long Duration Mobility	
Learners	<i>Legal restrictions for travel for under 18 years old learners</i>
	<i>Not compliant with Qualification/Educational curricula and timings</i>
	<i>Parental Consent</i>
	<i>Despite the grants there are some additional costs involved</i>
Companies	<i>Involvement of SME is harder</i>
	<i>Legal aspects related with contracts and insurances</i>
	<i>Indirect costs maybe significative</i>
VET Institutions	<i>Administrative burden for preparation and follow up</i>
	<i>Adaptation of the curricula</i>
	<i>No recognition of learning outcomes</i>
	<i>Not enough know-how to prepare and run long duration mobilities</i>
Society	<i>Globally more higher costs per learner</i>

3. Overview of VET Mobility in European Union

Under the Erasmus+ programme the European Union aims to achieve 700,000 – 1,000.000 VET mobilities in the period 2014-2020 (European Commission, 2020). The participation and forms of VET mobilities varies in the 28 member states. We have analysed the last consolidated data, published in 2018 and regarding the accumulated data until 2017:

Erasmus+ VET Participants survey								
Skills/ Duration of mobility	Less than 1 month		1 to 3 months		3 to 6 months		6 months and more	
	Responses	Level of satisfaction	Responses	Level of satisfaction	Responses	Level of satisfaction	Responses	Level of satisfaction
Employability	155.859	85,10%	43.273	88,20%	11.999	89,80%	1.327	91,00%
Better Professional skills	155.859	92,00%	43.273	91,80%	11.999	93,00%	1.327	94,50%
Language skills	123.111	94,50%	38.784	96,10%	10.793	96,90%	1.200	97,50%
Total		90,50%		92,00%		93,20%		94,30%

Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard. Data extracted on July 2017

It is possible to deduce that the individual satisfaction raises with the raising of the duration of mobility for the 3 skills analysed: employability, professional skills, and language skills.

Regarding the duration we have analysed these data:

Duration of mobility (Registered VET participants)		
Duration	No. of mobilities	%
Less than 1 month	192.816	71,50%
1 to 3 months	58.200	21,60%
3 to 6 months	16.383	6,10%
6 months and more	2.224	0,80%
Total	269.623	100,00%

Source: Erasmus+ Dashboard. Data extracted on July 2017

However, the number of participants is clearly higher in SDM.

Conclusions

The option for short or long duration mobility is in fact a multidimensional decision. In individual terms the LDM produces more positive results on the long term. However due to the high costs is not possible to disseminate it on a large scale. On the other hand, the SDM despite the less individual positive results may entail more learners. The decision is up to the VET institutions to take.

This leading conclusion is supported by the results of the questionnaire to former learners and is in line with the works of Beine et al (2014), Bellmann, Bender and Hornsteiner (2000), Dolga et al (2015), European Commission (2012, 2013, 2014), Kumpikaite & Duoba (2013), Ryan (2001) and Waibel et al (2017). According the results of the questionnaire, the individual satisfaction raises with the raising of the duration of mobility.

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