

Guidelines towards a European Standard for Quality Assurance of Student Placement in Enterprises

Official EUE-Net Document on Practical Placement of Students

Doru Talaba, Coordinator of EUE-European University Enterprises Network, talaba@unitbv.ro

Supposing the Practical Placement of Students are solved locally by each University either using the RCPP model or other equivalent that offers the confidence of a quality practical placement, it is still difficult to know and check **trans-national** placements in the host enterprise in the regions across a wide area such as Europe. Nevertheless, while there is always a permanent relationship and interaction between the companies and the actors at universities in the target region, like Technology Transfer Units, Career Services or directly with departments and lecturers, these contacts could form a regional network of universities and enterprises, where the partners involved are well known by each other and can be easily contacted. Consequently, all the relevant requirements for international student exchanges could be easily checked locally by a **certification body**. It would be also easy to visit the regional companies with the aim of proving the quality of the placements and supervision of the international students when necessary by the same certification body. The only need for such a principle to work is the existence of a clear *guidelines* or even *standard* for quality of practical placements of students against which the certification should be made.

In contrast with the ISO 9000, where the enterprise certification is pushed by the market and undertaken entirely by the enterprises, in case of the Quality Assurance of Student Placements (QASP), the certification should be undertaken entirely by the certification body (RCPP) which will recover its expenses from the fees perceived for organizing PPS.

The implementation of the new Erasmus-placement programme gives a good chance to establish a new and urgent motivation for solid and permanent quality control of placements, as well as for supporting higher education-industry cooperation.

To avoid multiple visits to companies for the same purpose, the regional quality Reference Centre for Practical Placements (RCPP) for students could act thus as the body responsible for such quality checks, as well as for providing adequate information for recruiting a student from abroad, promoting the mobility of students in the industry and dissemination of results.

A possible procedure is based on the principle that an enterprise signs up for taking part in the programme by accepting the requirements and standards set up for recruiting students from abroad as well as regular audits carried out by RCPP. If the RCPP issue the certification, the company will obtain a status of an Erasmus-Enterprise (see diagram) which is eligible to offer Erasmus-Placements for Erasmus-Students.

For this reason, the RCPP should have the qualification and capacity to perform a **certification** task with respect to the Enterprises. Reversely, in a later stage it could be possible that the RCPP database develop and maintain a classification of the University courses portfolio according to standards developed in cooperation with the Erasmus Enterprises.

In order to create a European Quality Reference Network a general standard for integrated practical training periods needs to be developed, even for those placements, which are not financially supported by a European programme.

Such a European Quality Reference Network (called hereinafter "Q-Planet") will be an efficient tool for the improvement of the quality of placements and the volume of student mobility. This would positively effect the reception of the Erasmus-Placement programme, improve considerably the employability of graduates and thus also support the goals of the Lisbon strategy.

In order to establish a quality assurance model to drive the Network constitution in a sustainable way for the student placements in Europe, two stages are needed:

Stage A. First a standard series need to be developed in a similar manner as for the ISO 9000 series, including thus the following components:

- Standard 1: "*Quality Assurance of Student Placements (QASP) – Fundamentals and vocabulary*" including the basics of what QASP means and also the core language of the topic. A guidance document, not used for certification purposes, but important reference document to understand terms and vocabulary related to quality of student placements in enterprises.
- Standard 2: "*QASP requirements*" is intended for use by any enterprises which want to prepare in view of hosting student placements. It provides a number of requirements which the

enterprise needs to fulfill if it is to achieve the necessary quality level of the placement. It includes a requirement for the continual (i.e. planned) improvement of the Quality System. This is the only implementation for which the auditors of third party may grant certification.

- Standard 3: “*Quality systems for management of Student Placements*” - Guidelines for performance improvements. It gives advice on what could be done to enhance a mature system. This standard is not intended as a guide to implementation but only to improvement.

These standards will be undertaken and developed thoroughly within the multi-lateral project Q-Planet.

Stage B. Definition of the standards for accreditation at European level of the RCPP and establishing of EUE-Net as an Accreditation body at European level. For this reason, the accreditation procedures need also to be established.

Thus regional Networks of certified enterprises will be established by the RCPP’s while the accreditation body will maintain the “Network of Networks” (i.e of RCPP’s). Structured online tools assembling services of these bodies will be set up and maintained in order to evaluate at European level the capacity of organising student placements across the various disciplines and facilitating their organisation as well. The federated information will be certainly useful to all actors involved into the system:

- to the Universities in order to assess realistically the possibility to organise quality student placement within the planned courses.
- To the RCPP in order to assess the need to recruit more enterprises to meet the University needs in student placement organisation
- To the enterprises in order to observe the availability for internship in various areas in case of planned developments that need recruitments.

Definitions:

Accreditation=Third-party attestation related to a conformity assessment body conveying formal demonstration of its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.

Certification=Third-party attestation related to products, processes, systems or persons.

Accreditation procedure

The candidates body will receive a visit plan, which provides a proposed timetable for the work to be assessed. Any improvement actions identified against accreditation requirements will be notified in writing during or immediately following the assessment visit. The candidate organisation is then be asked to advise how it intend to address them. Once the improvement actions have been implemented the accreditation will be granted.

Maintenance of accreditation

The accreditation will be confirmed on an annual basis by surveillance visits, with a full reassessment every fourth year. The first surveillance visit takes place 6 months after the Grant of Accreditation.

Certification procedure

The RCPP investigates the potential enterprises of interest and propose them to implement a quality framework for student placement organisation and its public certification. Upon the enterprise agreement of the terms and conditions, the certification procedure starts by submitting the enterprise a visit plan, which provides a proposed timetable for the conditions to be assessed. Any improvement actions identified against QASP requirements will be notified in writing during or immediately following the assessment visit. The candidate enterprise is then be asked to advise how it intend to address them. Once the improvement actions have been implemented the QASP certification will be granted.

Maintenance of certification

The certification will be confirmed on an annual basis by surveillance visits, with a full reassessment every third year. The first surveillance visit takes place 6 months after the Grant of Certification.