

# Erasmus+ Blended Programme Guide



**Landstede College, Netherlands**  
**Carlow International English Language School, Ireland**  
**Sataedu, Finland**  
**21<sup>st</sup> June 2016**



# **Erasmus+ Blended Programme Guide: A manual on implementation of short-term vocational education and training periods across international borders within the European Union.**

**Landstede College, Netherlands  
Carlow International English Language School, Ireland  
Sataedu, Finland**

## **Summary**

The purpose of this document is to provide a manual for Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions providing vocational education and for organisations where VET learners train and acquire their work place skills, as part of cross border cooperation within the European Union, where VET learners travel to a country, other than their home country, as part of their vocational education and training. Together, these were the concrete goals of the Blended Programme (BP):

1. To allow VET learners to follow classes at VET institutions in their host country.
2. To complete core tasks, as part of their examinations, while completing an internship in a host country work place.

In addition, achievement of the following ‘soft skills’ as goals were stated:

1. To learn about the customs and culture of their host country.
2. To become more aware of their home country culture and to share this with other EU members in the host country.
3. To develop their skills when using the English language for authentic communication.

The Blended Programme (BP) Guide aims to provide information on the key aspects of implementing BP with a constant focus on facilitating quality educational experiences for VET learners. The guide comprises of sections and sub sections with *Case Studies* and *Key Points* providing concrete examples based on the experience of the partners that developed the programme as part of BP, and also during piloting of aspects of BP in preparation for its implementation.

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## Introduction

The Blended Programme (BP) was piloted and developed over many years. While students have travelled cross border within the European Union (EU) for the purpose of training and education separately for many years, BP aims to provide young adult VET learners with the opportunity to combine both education and training without having to recoup time when they return to their home country. Educational institutes from the Netherlands (Landstede: <http://www.landstede.nl>), Finland (Sataedu: <https://sataedu.fi/en>) and Ireland (Carlow International English Language School: [www.ciels.ie](http://www.ciels.ie)) created a partnership, supported by Erasmus+ ([http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en)), [http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-\(key-action-2\)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs](http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-(key-action-2)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs) to realise that goal for VET learners. This guide provides the information and key points on how such a programme can be implemented.

BP is innovative and can be differentiated from other internship programmes in the following ways:

- A thorough Pre-departure Programme preparing VET learners for the culture shock of living, learning and working in a country other than their home country. The pre-departure programme also provides participants with the experience of making arrangements for travelling to and studying or working in a country other than their home country.
- The provision of assessors in the host country to allow parts of the VET learner's examinations to be completed on-site and recognised by the sending school, thereby eliminating delays on return to their home country.
- Vocational modules relevant to the VET learner's course of study being selected by the home school and delivered by the host partner in the host country. Recognition of these modules in advance by the home school also eliminates delays on the VET learner's return to their home country.
- A Cultural Programme designed to inform VET learners on EU, the culture of their host country and also to raise awareness of and inform people about their own culture.

While existing internship programmes offer VET learners the opportunity to live and train abroad, BP aims to combine the above innovations with these existing factors, but also aims to provide enhanced support services and accommodation to VET learners. This is to allow participants to focus solely on their VET studies and training, to enjoy cultural integration and to successfully adapt to their new environment, thereby developing what are referred to as '21st Century Skills' (<http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework>).

Many people from many organisations have assisted in piloting, implementing and developing BP. Special thanks is given to the following:

- The partners of BP: Landstede College, Carlow International English Language School and Sataedu College.
- Individual coordinators who implemented and developed the programme.
- Erasmus+. / NAs of all three partnercountries
- Participant VET learners.
- Parents and family of participant VET learners.

- Work places that accepted and trained VET learners and provided feedback and support to BP partners to enhance the programme.
- Work place assessors who participated in special training to become assessors and also mentored BP participants in a holistic sense, advising them on cultural and discourse aspects of their new environment.
- VET tutors that provided vocational modules to participants.
- Language tutors who provided teaching and tutoring to participants.
- Accommodation managers that provided and improved tailored accommodation for VET learners.
- Independent experts and professionals who provided regulatory information and guidance to allow successful implementation of BP.

## Introductie

Blended Programme (BP) is uitgevoerd en verder ontwikkeld in de afgelopen paar jaar. Tijdens dat studenten individueel over grenzen binnen de EU reisden voor hun stage of studie, streefde BP om MBO studenten de kans te geven om studie en stage in het buitenland te combineren zonder dat men na terugkomst extra tijd moet investeren om de verloren studietijd in te halen en hun studie op tijd af te ronden.

Onderwijsinstellingen van Nederland (Landstede: <http://www.landstede.nl>), Finland (Sataedu: <https://sataedu.fi/en>) en Ireland (Carlow International English Language School: [www.ciels.ie](http://www.ciels.ie)) vormden een partnerschap, ondersteund door Erasmusplus ([http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en)), [http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-\(key-action-2\)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs](http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-(key-action-2)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs). Deze gids voorziet de lezer van informatie en de belangrijkste punten om een soortgelijk programma uit te voeren.

BP is innovatief en kan vanuit andere stagemogelijkheden gedifferentieerd worden op de volgende manieren:

- Een goed onderbouwd Pre-departure Programme waarin MBO-studenten voorbereid worden op de cultuurschok van leven, leren en werken in een ander land. Dit voor-vertrek programma biedt studenten ook de ervaring van het organiseren en regelen van reizen naar- en studeren of werken in een vreemd land.
- Het aanbod van assessoren in het gastland om in onderdelen van de eigen thuisstudie geëxamineerd te worden en deze af te sluiten tijdens een buitenlandse stage en het erkennen hiervan door de thuishschool, hiermee vertraging van studie voorkomend.
- De selectie van beroepsgerelateerde modules aan de thuisstudie van de MBO student door de eigen school en aangeboden door de partner in het gastland. Erkenning van deze modules vooraf door de thuishschool voorkomt vertraging van de studie van de MBO student na thuiskomst.
- Een Cultureel Programma opgezet om MBO studenten te informeren over de cultuur van hun gastland en de EU. Dit ter verhoging van de eigen Europese identiteit en om anderen te kunnen informeren over hun thuisland en cultuur.

Hoewel reeds bestaande stageprogramma's MBO studenten kansen aanbieden om te leven en te werken in het buitenland doelt BP op het combineren van alle hierboven genoemde innovaties, inclusief deze bestaande factoren. BP spant zich in om een uitgebreide ondersteunende service en huisvesting te verstrekken. Op deze manier kan de deelnemer zich geheel richten op hun studie en training, genieten van culturele integratie en succesvol aanpassen aan de nieuwe leefomgeving. Tegelijkertijd maken ze zich de '21<sup>ste</sup> eeuwse vaardigheden' eigen (<http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework>).

Veel mensen van veel organisaties hebben deelgenomen en ondersteuning aangeboden in het proberen, implementeren en ontwikkelen van BP. Speciale dank wordt gegeven aan :

- De partners van BP: Landstede College, Carlow International English Language School en Sataedu College.
- Individuele coördinatoren die het programma hebben ontwikkeld en geïmplementeerd.
- Erasmus+/Nationale Agentschappen van de 3 partnerlanden
- deelnemers MBO studenten
- ouders en familie van deelnemers MBO studenten
- Bedrijven en organisaties die MBO studenten hebben aangenomen en geschoold en die BP partners feedback en ondersteuning hebben gegeven ter verdere verbetering van het BP project
- Examinatoren van de verschillende organisaties die hebben deelgenomen aan een speciale assessoren training en die BP deelnemers hebben alomvattend hebben geleid, hen adviserend op culturele en handelwijze van hun nieuwe omgeving.
- MBO tutoren die de beroepsgerelateerde modules aan BP deelnemers aanboden.
- Taaltrainers die en les en assistentie aan deelnemers aanboden.
- Accommodatieleiders die huisvesting aanboden en deze zoveel mogelijk aanpasten voor MBO deelnemers.
- Onafhankelijke experts en professionelen die regelmatig informatie, visie en begeleiding gaven ter succesvolle implementatie van BP.

## Johdanto

Blended Programme-ohjelmaa testattiin ja kehitettiin monta vuotta. Opiskelijat ovat vuosikautia matkustaneet toiseen EU-maahan varta vasten harjoittelun ja koulutuksen perässä, mutta monimuoto-ohjelmalla pyritään antamaan ammatillisessa koulutuksessa oleville nuorille aikuisille mahdollisuus yhdistää koulutus ja harjoittelu tarvitsematta korvata tähän käytettyä aikaa palatessaan kotimaahansa. Alankomaissa (Landstede: <http://www.landstede.nl>), Suomessa (Sataedu: <https://sataedu.fi/en>) ja Irlannissa (Carlow International English Language School: <http://www.ciels.ie>) toimivat oppilaitokset perustivat Erasmus+:n ([http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en)), [http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-\(key-action-2\)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs](http://www.erasmusplus.nl/strategische-partnerschappen-(key-action-2)/middelbaar-beroepsonderwijs), tuella kumppanuushankkeen tehdäkseen tästä tavoitteesta totta ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoille. Tässä oppaassa annetaan tietoa ja esitetään keskeiset seikat siitä, kuinka tällainen ohjelma voidaan panna täytäntöön.

Blended Programme on innovatiivinen, ja se voidaan erottaa muista harjoitteluohjelmista seuraavasti:

- Ennen ulkomaille lähtöä järjestettävä perinpohjainen orientaatio-ohjelma, jolla ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoita valmennetaan kulttuurisokkiin, jonka ulkomailta asuminen, opiskeleminen ja työskenteleminen aiheuttavat. Orientaatio-ohjelman aikana osanottajat myös kuulevat kokemuksia järjestelyistä, joita ulkomaille matkustaminen ja ulkomailta opiskelu tai työskentely edellyttävät.
- Arvioijien nimeäminen vastaanottavassa maassa, minkä ansiosta ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijat voivat suorittaa ulkomaisessa oppilaitoksessa tenttien osia, jotka luetaan hyväksi lähettävässä oppilaitoksessa. Tämä estää opintojen viivästymisen opiskelijan palattua kotimaahansa.
- Opiskelijan opintojen kannalta merkitykselliset ammatilliset opiskelumoduulit, jotka lähettävä oppilaitos valitsee ja vastaanottava ulkomainen oppilaitos toteuttaa. Se, että lähettävä oppilaitos tunnustaa nämä moduulit, estää myös opintojen viivästymisen opiskelijan palattua kotimaahansa.
- Kulttuuriohjelma, joka on suunniteltu antamaan EU:n ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoille tietoa vastaanottavan maan kulttuurista ja myös valmiudet antaa muille tietoa omasta kulttuuristaan.

Nykyiset harjoitteluohjelmat tarjoavat ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoille mahdollisuuden ulkomailta asumiseen ja harjoitteluun, mutta Blended Programme:n tavoitteena on yhdistää edellä mainitut uutuudet nykyisten ohjelmien ominaisuuksiin sekä lisäksi tarjota ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoille parannettuja tukipalveluja ja majoitus. Tämän tarkoituksena on antaa osanottajille mahdollisuus keskittyä yksinomaan ammatillisiin opintoihinsa ja harjoitteluun, nauttia kulttuurisesta sopeuttamisesta ja sopeutua onnistuneesti uuteen ympäristöön ja siten kehittää omia ”2000-luvun taitojaan” (<http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework>).

Useat henkilöt eri organisaatioista ovat auttaneet Blended Programme:n testaamisessa, täytäntöönpanossa ja kehittämisessä. Erityiskiitokset avusta kuuluvat seuraaville tahoille:

- Blended Programme-kumppanit: Landstede, Carlow International English Language School ja Sataedu.
- Yksittäiset koordinaattorit, jotka ovat panneet ohjelman täytäntöön ja kehittäneet sitä.
- Erasmus+, NA:t kaikista kolmesta kumppanimaasta.
- Ohjelmaan osallistuneet ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijat.
- Ohjelmaan osallistuneiden opiskelijoiden vanhemmat ja perheenjäsenet.
- Työpaikat, jotka ovat ottaneet ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoita työharjoitteluun sekä antaneet palautetta ja tukea Blended Programme kumppaneille ohjelman parantamiseksi.
- Työpaikoilla toimivat arvioijat, jotka ovat osallistuneet erityiseen arvioijakoulutukseen ja toimineet mentoreina ohjelman osanottajille antaen heille tietoja uuden ympäristön kulttuuriin ja diskurssiin liittyvistä näkökohdista.
- Ammatillisten oppilaitosten opettajat, jotka ovat järjestäneet ammatilliset opiskelumoduulit osanottajille.
- Kieltenopettajat, jotka ovat antaneet opetusta ja ohjausta osanottajille.
- Majoitusta tarjoavat tahot, jotka ovat tarjonneet ammatillisten oppilaitosten opiskelijoille majoitusta ja myös räätälöineet majoitusta opiskelijoiden tarpeisiin.
- Riippumattomat asiantuntijat ja ammattilaiset, jotka ovat antaneet sääntelyä koskevaa tietoa ja ohjausta mahdollistaakseen monimuoto-ohjelman onnistuneen täytäntöönpanon.

## Participant Student Profile

It is critical that VET learners selected for BP possess the correct mindset to participate successfully in the programme. While VET learners do not enrol in the BP programme already possessing the desired learning outcomes, they must possess the tools to achieve these outcomes: high levels of motivation, desire to succeed, good work ethic, positivity, ability to learn and adapt, open-mindedness and tolerance.

## Personality

VET learners who wish to participate in BP must be dedicated and hardworking as it is a challenging programme.

*Case Study: VET learners participating in internships piloting BP came unprepared for the challenge awaiting them in terms of workload. In the initial weeks they attended classes, participated in work place training and enjoyed their new social environment, which they should do, but neglected their reports and assignments. As a result, at the midway point of their programme they found that their workload had increased and they were late with their*



*submissions. This created much stress for the individual learner that naturally spread to their housemates and colleagues. **Therefore, it is critical that learners are informed of the workload involved during the pre-departure programme and also monitored by the Vocational Education Coordinator (See: Coordinator Roles) throughout their programme to ensure they remain compliant with submission deadlines.***

## **Tolerance**

Learners must be flexible and tolerant to succeed on BP and they must be able to deal with unexpected incidents that occur while on the programme. A core element of BP is integration with cultures other than the learner's home culture, therefore tolerance and respect are critical to achieving this integration.

*Case Study: On the first full BP programme comprised of Dutch and Finnish learners a small issue generated a divide within their accommodation: Finnish learners stuck together and Dutch learners stuck together speaking their respective native languages. The issue arose over the Finnish culture of taking shoes off when entering a home, which the Dutch learners found acceptable except for when the large quantity of shoes created an obstacle at the main entrance to their accommodation. While this issue seems minor and easily resolved by taking each individual's shoes to their respective bedrooms, these were young adults, many of whom had not lived away from their parents before nor lived with other nationalities. **Therefore, it is critical that learners participating on the programme are tolerant, understanding and willing to accept other cultures and personal traits (personality, habits and behaviour) while having their own culture respected at the same time. One common language must be used in common areas at all times out of respect for all fellow students.***

## **Adaptability**

Learners must be able to adapt to their new culture while they are away. They must respect and engage in the host country's culture in order to work well with their colleagues, teachers and tutors.

*Case Study: Dutch nursing students who completed their programmes with a very high level of success reflected very positively on their work place experiences. Many commented that initially they found differences in staffing numbers and also that duties are more general than specialised in Ireland. For example, while Irish nurses perform wound dressing duties regularly, in the Netherlands a specialist dressing nurse visits institutions to perform these duties. On completion of their work placement, the Dutch learners commented that they still*

*preferred the Dutch system but that they realise there are many ways to perform tasks and they had acquired the ability to be flexible in their approach to nursing.*

## **Independence, Maturity, Personal Growth & Development**

Participants must be independent and mature. While they are supported fully throughout the experience, they must be able to deal with situations independently as they arise, as there is no direct parental support in the host country and part of BP is students' personal development.

Participants will experience personal development and growth and they will become more independent and mature as they progress through the programme.

*Key Point: Coordinators should be prepared for learners arriving slightly immature and expecting some 'hand-holding'. However, coordinators should not complete household, educational or work place tasks for the students but simply provide guidance and support. This results in students completing the programme as much more independent and capable people in general terms: taking responsibility for their accommodation, general health and fitness, education and work place matters.*

## **Conditions and Disabilities**

The host organisation must be made aware of any special conditions or disabilities that potential participants in BP have in case of emergencies during the programme.

*Case Study: Some students participating in BP have conditions such as mild autism. One learner's Home Coordinator informed the Overall Coordinator of this, who in turn informed necessary staff: work place supervisor, vocational teacher, language tutor and teacher. This resulted in all necessary staff being aware of any 'unusual' behaviour and being better prepared to deal with such. For example, comments by colleagues that the student did not engage in casual conversations. Conversely, students with mild autism arrived without any coordinators being aware of their condition. This resulted in the student having difficulty accepting instruction that they did not see as logical, and the teachers and tutors simply classifying the student as 'difficult'. It is also a good idea to encourage the individual learner to explain, without divulging their condition, to their housemates that they need time alone each day or any other necessary coping skills. **Therefore, it is critical that coordinators are made aware of any conditions so they can ensure a successful programme for the student by making adequate allowances for these conditions where necessary.***

## Coordinators

The role of all coordinators involved in BP is to facilitate and provide a positive learning environment conducive to learners achieving their goals successfully. This learning environment consists of many aspects, each of which requires a coordinator to take responsibility for. One coordinator may assume multiple roles, however, it is critical that coordinators consult and inform one another on their area of responsibility.

## Coordinator Roles

Coordinators can assume multiple roles or individual roles:

- Home Coordinator: makes all necessary arrangements to ensure the Pre-Departure Programme runs smoothly and that VET learners are adequately prepared for their time abroad and its associated challenges. They also liaise with parents and guardians in exceptional circumstances, such as bereavement or illness.
- Overall Host Coordinator: ensures all aspects of the programme are being delivered appropriately (Accommodation, Vocational Modules, Language Tuition, Work Placement and Support Services).
- Accommodation Coordinator: ensures that housing is comfortable, fully equipped and well maintained (*See: Accommodation*); is a point of contact for participants to approach with any housing related issues; reports directly to Overall Host Coordinator.
- Vocational Training Coordinator: monitors work placement and ensures that core tasks (*See: Vocational Training Placement*) are being completed; assesses or provides assessments if required by the sending organisation; liaises with work place organisation; reports directly to Overall Host Coordinator.
- Vocational Education and Language Tuition Coordinator: ensures that all vocational training modules and language tuition are delivered; is responsible for liaising with the sending organisation regarding suitable curriculum; reports directly to Overall Host Coordinator.

## Duty of Care

The programme co-ordinators in the host country are on hand at all times (24/7 for emergencies; standard office hours for general queries) to ensure that the VET students are being cared for and all their needs met. They support them throughout the entire programme and assist with any official documentation or matters that may be unfamiliar to the visiting VET learner. The host organisation has a duty of care to provide the following for the participants:

1. Accommodation (*See: Accommodation*).
2. Vocational Education (*See: Vocational Education*).
3. Work Place sourcing and monitoring (*See: Vocational Training Placement*).

## Pastoral Care/Mentoring

Teachers, supervisors and programme co-ordinators should be available during host country office hours to attend to any student needs, worries or concerns. In exceptional circumstances, such as a family bereavement, the host organisation should be contactable 24/7 to provide support.

*Key Point: While VET learners must be young adults to participate in the programme, for many it is their first time living independently or abroad and thus, they tend to feel like fully mature adults when this may not be the case. In the initial stages of this new found 'freedom' participants can sometimes feel more capable than they actually are but still require much guidance and support, particularly when unusual incidents occur. **Therefore, it is critical that coordinators understand that the holistic development of participants is a key factor of BP and provide appropriate channels of support above what is normal to allow for this.***

## Instruction

Instruction is provided by fully qualified and vetted teachers and coordinators for the participants' benefit. Participants should understand that this instruction is to benefit and assist them as they transition into a new culture, work and learning environment. It should be explained to the participants that their teachers and supervisors are more familiar with the systems involved in the host country and VET learners should accept and utilise the knowledge of the teachers and coordinators. However, teachers and coordinators should be aware of participant conditions when dealing with scenarios in this area (*See: Conditions*).

*Key Point: Teacher-Learner dynamics vary from country to country, some being more instructive and others being more inclusive. However, some learners think they should be treated as their teacher's equal in every way: speaking out of turn; when to follow instruction or not; deciding on the best course of action when ill. **Therefore, while respect is equal, learners should be reminded that their teachers and tutors are more qualified and experienced and their role is to assist the learner. In order to assist the learner, the learner must follow instruction.***

## Qualifications

All teachers and coordinators should be suitably qualified for their role in BP (e.g., teachers should hold adequate qualifications in addition to police clearance). As there are variations in required qualifications between participating countries, it is advisable that the qualifications of the host country are adhered to with the consent of the sending organisation.

*Case Study: Police Clearance requirements vary from country to country. In the Netherlands a 'Certificate of Good Conduct' specific to the role of the candidate is provided; in Finland a full 'Criminal Record' or lack thereof is provided; in Ireland a list of previous accommodation and list of criminal charges is required.*

## **Support**

VET learners should be supported throughout BP and should never feel isolated on their journey. Support is offered by the programme co-ordinators, teachers, supervisors as well as other VET learners on the programme.

## **Pre-departure**

Living, learning, travelling and socializing in a new country pose massive challenges for people of all ages, particularly young adults who might be living independently for the first time. Therefore, it is essential to prepare VET learners for participation in BP. While preparation can never fully prepare a learner due to individual personalities and myriad varying situations that are encountered across numerous participating countries, pre-departure preparation provides them with the skills to better meet and overcome these challenges more successfully.

## **Enrolment Form**

When VET learners are accepted to BP they must complete an enrolment form in which they outline their educational history and work experience to date. This form enables the programme co-ordinators to successfully place the participants at a suitable work place for their internship. The form also allows VET learners the opportunity to disclose any medical, health or legal issues they may have. Again, this is critical as work place cultures, even within the EU, have varying requirements.

*Case Study: The Irish and Finnish human resource requirements have vast differences in some areas. For example, a Finnish participant studying in Ireland mentioned to a work place colleague that she had a severe reaction to a specific bee sting when she was younger. The work place human resource department learned of this and the VET learner was unable to continue her placement due to a lack of medical records available for the work place and no action plan to be enacted in case a similar incident occurred while there.*

*In Finland it is the individual's responsibility to prepare an action plan, whereas in Ireland the work place is responsible for the individual. It is the host country regulations that must be adhered to in these situations. **Therefore, it is critical that participants of adult age make adequate provisions for any emergency medical treatments they might require due to known health conditions (e.g., asthma and inhalers).***

## **Language Preparation**

Before departing for the host country participants should have specialised English as all work places on BP communicate through English. It is recommended that they prepare English for their work place training and the native language for social interaction.

*Case Study: Many Dutch VET learners that participate in BP have excellent spoken English skills but do not realise their communication skills are so good due to a lack of confidence. Preparatory classes from trained language teachers provide the support and confidence to enable participants to arrive in their host country and interact confidently with native speakers. This confidence is critical to ensure that learners can begin to integrate with their new community in their first weeks of the programme. These first weeks can decide the success of the programme for an individual VET learner.*

*Case Study: As part of BP, Dutch VET learners participated in full BP programmes in Finland. As Finnish is the native language in Finland and many native people do not speak English, a challenge was posed for the Dutch participants, who generally speak Dutch and English. To meet this challenge, the Finnish coordinators developed 'Happy Finnish'. This is a course for General language, designed to allow participants to engage in everyday functional language situations successfully. For example, while monitored, participants had to make transactions at shop counters. This made the Dutch participants far more comfortable in their new environment as they were confident at shopping and other day to day tasks.*

## **Cultural Preparation and Culture Shock**

Participants should have specialised classes to teach them about the culture of the host country before they depart in order to make the transition as smooth as possible when they arrive in their host country. Participants should also learn about the culture of any VET learners from other countries with whom they will share accommodation and study.

It is very important that participants understand that they are embarking on a challenging programme having to operate in a new language, new working environment, new accommodation with new housemates, new food and new social culture. This can be challenging for even the most seasoned traveller and participants should be made aware of

this before they depart as this will somewhat prepare them for possible episodes of homesickness.

*Case Study: Many visitors to Ireland find it strange when Irish people say hello by using the phrase 'how are you?' as a greeting without waiting to hear the answer. If unaware of this curiosity, visitors can perceive it as rude or strange and long for familiar interaction patterns from home. Once aware of it, they can deal with the greeting as they normally would. **Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of local dialects with VET learners prior to arrival in their host country (See: Language Preparation).** This also prepares participants to embrace different cultures within the EU, while being one community, providing them with the experience to transfer their work skills across borders seamlessly.*

## Transport

Flights are booked by the programme coordinator or participants themselves in the home country as they know the travel facilities in their country best. The group then travels together to the host country. Greeting at arrivals at the airport in the host country and private transport are recommended in order to make arrival stress free.

*Key Point: Travelling by multiple modes and across international boundaries that are unfamiliar causes stress for even seasoned adult travellers. **Therefore, it is critical to minimise this stress for young VET learners who are less likely to be experienced travellers. Minimising stress is critical towards a successful first week, and thus a successful programme.***

## Medical Insurance

The VET learners' home country insurance (*European Health Insurance Card: <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/EHIC/>*) covers participants while they are on BP. In addition, the host school might have their own insurance if required. It is critical that the sending organisation and participant investigate and ensure, as part of the Pre Departure Programme, that the VET learner is covered adequately according to regulations in the participant's home country.

## Accommodation

As with life in their home country, a happy home assists in developing a happy learner. Therefore, it is critical that Home and Host Coordinators (*See: Coordinator Roles*) liaise to ensure that student accommodation provides all essential facilities and is a happy environment. This in turn allows VET learners to focus on their studies and training while on BP.

## Standards

The accommodation provided for BP is of an extremely high standard. The accommodation provided must be clean, well-furnished and in close proximity to local amenities. All accommodation should have high speed Wi-Fi and all modern conveniences. Participants must keep their accommodation clean and tidy out of respect for their landlord and their housemates.

*Case Study: While developing BP, private accommodation was used to house students. While waiting on fixed line broadband to be installed in this accommodation students became frustrated at not being able to contact home as regularly as they required and also at not being able to stream programmes from their favourite sites. This resulted in students being distracted from their studies and training. **Therefore, it is critical to have all utilities provided and in-situ prior to student arrival where possible to allow students to focus on their studies and training.***

## Self-catering

Accommodation is self-catering, in either in a house or apartment where a group of interns or VET learners live together. They are responsible for all their grocery shopping and cooking. Learners must adjust to living with other participants and it is a process in which they mature hugely. Each learner should have a lockable drawer or press for their personal belongings.

*Case Study: Host coordinators should expect 'speed bumps' in the first two to three weeks of participants living together. Initially participants seem to get along extremely well due to the stimulation and excitement of living with new friends and housemates. When the novelty diminishes, they regularly begin to focus on the negative aspects of their new housemates' habits and behaviour. This must be monitored and managed by the host coordinators and usually after three to four weeks participants learn to accept and tolerate differences in living habits and behaviours. By the time the programme ends, participants have become very familiar with the concept of living with varying cultures and personalities.*



In countries where English is the first language, host families are common: in Ireland and England the English language learning sector has provided a network of host families where learners stay full-board with a local family. This is a viable option but should only be considered where self-catering accommodation is unavailable.

## Utilities

Accommodation must have a full range of utilities provided including electricity, laundry facilities (washing and drying), cooker etc. Essential utilities will vary according to the host country.

*Case Study: While piloting BP in Ireland, which has an extremely wet and damp climate, it became apparent that it was essential to provide clothes drying facilities as participants resorted to drying clothes by hanging them on clothes horses and radiators in their bedrooms. This created mould that led to health conditions (chest infections, colds and coughs) and damage to the building (damaged plaster board and window frames). For hotter climates, such as the Mediterranean, air conditioning might be essential, whereas it is unnecessary in Ireland or the Netherlands.*

## Location

Accommodation should be situated close to both the host school and all training work places involved in the programme so VET learners only have a short commute to both school and work. In cases where learners must commute via train or bus, accommodation should be located near the respective stations involved. Provision of bicycles is a good idea but the host organisation should ensure that participants sign a waiver for the use of the bicycles.

*Case Study: In order to locate suitable work places for nursing students in Ireland, many participants had to travel to towns within an hour commute of their home. This involved multiple modes of transport for one journey: bicycle, train, and bus. The host organisation must investigate and source feasible commuting routes to the work place and provide written instructions on the route for each individual learner.*

## Housemates

During BP VET learners live with other BP participants and other learners and part of their development process is learning to live independently but together in one house or

apartment. Learners should clean up immediately after all meals and keep their rooms and common areas clean and tidy, in addition to using one common language. This is very important to maintain a healthy relationship. It is essential to create and adhere to a roster for household chores. It is also very important that participants do not allow tension to develop and they should discuss any issues as they arise with their housemates. If the issues cannot be resolved, participants should approach a coordinator for mediation (*See: Host Coordinators*).

*Case Study: Regardless of nationality, many VET learners have differing lifestyles and attitudes towards tidiness and cleanliness. However, if a home is not left clean it can result in: pest infestations requiring health checks and pest control services being sought; a sense of unfairness that some participants are constantly cleaning while others rarely do so, leading to disputes and negative atmospheres in the accommodation. A roster avoids these issues as it provides fairness through equally shared household chores and ensures that critical chores are completed resulting in a clean and tidy home environment. Respect is a concept that crosses all national, racial and religious boundaries and should be shown to fellow housemates at all times.*

## **Vocational Education**

A core aspect of BP is harmonising and spreading knowledge and skills across participant countries. Currently many differences exist in this area. Therefore, much consultation between sending and host schools must occur to ensure that all involved are satisfied that selected modules, awards and recognition are relevant and adequate to ensure that each VET learner receives formal educational value from participation in BP.

## **Module Selection**

Sending and host organisations should consult on what modules are suitable and transferrable across international boundaries for the VET students concerned.

*Case Study: During piloting of BP in Ireland, two Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) modules that are relevant in the home countries were studied: 'Human Growth and Development' and 'Work Placement'. These modules were selected as they are relevant to cross sections of the broad 'Health and Social Care' field. For other broad fields of study, such as 'Business', modules should be chosen that are relevant to all participants. For Example, 'Customer Service' is relevant to both 'Marketing' and 'Retail' students.*

## Award Recognition

Sending and host organisations should consult and establish what awards are available and what associated credits are recognised in the home country of the students. It is also critical to establish what the equivalent levels are between the home and host country in order to provide VET learners with the correct level of education and training. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a translation tool that assists comparison between qualification systems in Europe:

[https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f%5B0%5D=im\\_field\\_entity\\_type%3A97](https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f%5B0%5D=im_field_entity_type%3A97)

*Case Study: In Ireland, upon successful completion of a module, students receive their QQI certificate showing they have successfully passed the module. To discover what level was appropriate for Dutch and Finnish VET learners training in Ireland, the QQI website provided excellent links: <http://www.nfq-qqi.com/qualifications-frameworks.html> . Therefore, it is critical for host and sending coordinators to establish, through EQF or their national VET bodies, what the equivalent levels between their countries are.*

## Assessment

Assessment criteria in the host country should be adhered to. This criteria must be available for the sending school to review.

## Teaching Methodologies

Teaching is learner-centred; the teacher facilitates successful learning by whatever means necessary and is on hand to assist the VET learner at all times during designated class hours. A range of methodologies are employed to ensure all participants are learning.

## Facilities

State of the art class facilities are used for BP, including high speed Wi-Fi, modern classrooms, projectors and sound systems, as well as many on campus amenities.

*Case Study: During the beginning of BP, the VET centre in Ireland was in the process of constructing a brand new building as the old building was outdated. Consequently, investment in the old building was at a minimum resulting in certain facilities that were lacking, such as ICT: suitable wifi connection; printing facilities; access to desktop PCs. This can distract students from their learning and training. To alleviate the short-term issue, vocational classes were relocated to a modern building with all required facilities until the new building was ready.*

## **VET Location**

The VET modules are delivered close to the VET learners' accommodation and work places, or within acceptable distances to public transport routes.

*Case Study: While piloting BP in Ireland, the intern house and VET building were both located in Carlow Town, which is quite small. However, both buildings were on opposite sides of town with no local transport available. This resulted in VET learners having to walk for thirty minutes each way, each day, resulting in complaints about one hour 'lost' per day. In order to alleviate the issue, bicycles were provided for the learners, for which a waiver had to be signed. Depending on the geographical layout, local transport facilities and private transport options, the host organisation must decide on a feasible mode of travel for the participants.*

## **Vocational Training Placement**

As with Vocational Education, many differences currently exist between participating countries across many sectors. Thus, it is critical for sending and host schools to consult on what core tasks can feasibly be achieved by students while on BP. A core focus of BP is learning and exchanging knowledge and skills. Therefore, it is essential that sending schools accept differences to a certain extent and see this as a positive learning experience for the students involved.

## **Work Places for Training**

The work places chosen by BP are of the highest standard and they are all excellent organisations that take time to ensure VET learners are learning and gaining the most from their internship. Supervisors as well as other staff are available to support the learners if they need any help or assistance. It is critical that host organisations meet with the work place staff to discuss core tasks prior to arrival. While a plan should be made and implemented between the host organisation and sending organisation, allowance must be made for flexibility during the first placements. It is also very important for VET learners to understand and accept that the work place culture might be different from what they have experienced during internships in their home country.

*Case Study: On-the-job learning in Ireland tends to be less structured than in other EU countries: work place supervisors tend to provide VET learners with tasks and as challenges arise support, guidance, instruction and practice are provided for the learner during the course of their daily duties; Regular meetings are held to ensure that core tasks*

*agreed are being achieved. In other countries core tasks are discussed in advance followed by scheduled times for guidance and support to work on these tasks. Both approaches are effective and it should be the host organisation work place culture that should be adhered to while ensuring that core tasks are achieved.*

## **Insurance**

Student's home organisation insurance covers them while they are working in their internship, but they also have extra host country insurance if it is required. It is critical to check the host country's insurance requirements for each particular sector prior to commencing training.

*Case Study: During BP, which was based on social and healthcare studies and training, the Irish 'Health Service Executive' stipulated an indemnity of €6.5 million was required. This contrasted with the general indemnity of €5 million accepted generally across mainland Europe. Insurance had to be increased prior to work placement commencing. **Therefore, it is critical to clarify all insurance issues with partner work places prior to placement of students in those work places.***

## **Police Clearance**

All students involved with vulnerable people (unrestricted supervision of minors, the elderly or people with disabilities) who participate in BP must receive police clearance from their home country to ensure they have no criminal offences. This is also known as a certificate of good conduct or criminal record. This might not be necessary for all sectors, but the regulations of the host work place must be adhered to and respected (*See: Student Profile*).

## **Accreditation**

Dutch students embarking on BP all work in organisations that are accredited by the Dutch training company S-BB which ensures the organisations meet the criteria for the Dutch home school. Organisations where Finnish and Irish students work do not need to be accredited by S-BB. As accreditation requirements vary from country to country, the sending organisation should inform and assist the host organisation in achieving accreditation for the work places.

## Core Tasks

Core Tasks achievable (*See also: On-site Assessments and Assessors*) is one of the key areas BP seeks to resolve: by completing relevant core tasks and having them assessed by trained assessors, VET learners should not have ‘delays’ on return to their home country and have to complete these core tasks again. While all VET learners must complete core tasks there are some differences in what they are permitted to do in different countries. For practical reasons it is not possible to achieve all core tasks on work placement in various countries due to differences in national regulations. It is advisable for sending organisation and host organisation to agree on what core tasks are to be completed during the VET learners’ work placement. For countries who require work places to be registered for training purposes, stating achievable core tasks might also be a requirement. For example, the Dutch training company S-BB (<https://www.s-bb.nl/en/companies/certification/requesting-certification>) requires companies to register with them prior to commencement of the placement; this is a legal requirement related to insurance and funding for Dutch students.

*Case Study: In Ireland and Finland nursing students at Irish QQI level 5 (VET level) are not allowed to give intravenous drips. However, in consultation with their work place supervisor they might complete additional core tasks that were not originally planned for.*

## On-site Assessments and Assessors

As with Core Tasks (*See also: Core Tasks*), training of assessors in the host country is a key aspect of BP. Students are assessed by on-site assessors in the host organisation while they are on work placement. These assessments are reviewed and cleared by their home school to ensure that they meet the criteria for their course in their home country. It is critical to have this arrangement in place in order for VET students to avoid ‘delays’ and having to complete tasks again on return to their home country.

*Case Study: The assessors who assess the Dutch students in Ireland are all qualified ‘Prove2Move’ (<http://www.prove2move.nl>) assessors as this is a requirement in the Netherlands. Finnish and Irish students can be assessed by their supervisors based on the host country’s assessment criteria. Therefore, it is critical to establish whether or not host country criteria is accepted by the sending school. If it is not, training for assessors must be established and provided, such as Prove2Move.*

## Acceptance of Visiting Coordinators/Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges

As BP aims to achieve previously unachieved goals in relation to VET learners completing internships abroad, it is critical that the host organisations where the student conducts their internship, agree to visits of coordinators from the home country. These visits must be limited to a reasonable number and time as work place supervisors are working in a real work place and have genuine duties to complete. The purpose of these visits are:

- To establish what organisations are suitable for relevant courses.
- To establish what level students can be accepted by the host organisation.
- To establish what core tasks can and cannot be achieved by students.
- To assist a successful accreditation process where relevant (*See: Accreditation*).
- To provide on-site mentors and assessors with the knowledge to interact with and supervise VET students on a daily basis, independently of the host and home school.
- To transfer and share skills and knowledge.
- To inform the host organisation of exam related requirements in the home country.

*Case Study: While piloting BP, Dutch coordinators requested Nursing students to be placed in Irish nursing homes for the elderly as Nurses. Due to differences between Irish regulations and Dutch regulations, it was only possible to place students as Care Assistants in the Irish nursing homes. It required a visit by Dutch coordinators to the Irish nursing homes to discuss regulations and core tasks to resolve this issue. Therefore, it is critical that face-to-face meetings are agreed in order to develop a good working relationship between work places and coordinators for the benefit of VET students placed there, primarily to provide a suitable placement with relevant core tasks.*

## Independent Development of VET Learners' Professionalism

While on work placement in their home country, VET students are used to having teacher support readily available with site visits and face-to-face meetings easily arranged. This is not the case with international work placements due to travel and communication costs and logistics. This should be exploited as an opportunity to allow the VET student's independent professionalism to develop, by interacting independently with their work place supervisor.

*Case Study: During BP, many learners initial reaction when encountered with unfamiliar situations, is to seek the assistance of their Host Coordinator or Home Coordinator, via social media or e-mail, to address the issue. This does not teach the student to open channels of communication and resolve issues by themselves. Therefore, it is critical to foster independent professional development by encouraging students to first try to discuss difficulties or unusual circumstances with their work place supervisor. It is critical that the Work place Training Coordinator follows up to ensure that the issue has been resolved for the VET student; this provides the VET student with the reassurance that coordinators will provide assistance when absolutely necessary.*

## Awareness of EU Labour Mobility

A key goal of BP is to raise awareness of EU labour mobility among the following target audiences within the EU:

- Work places.
- VET learners.
- Employees.
- Managers.
- Citizens of EU member states.

While many challenges still exist in relocating from one country to another within the EU, there are many facilities available to assist this transition, such as the employment services of the European Jobs Network, EURES ( <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/language-selection> ). It is critical to raise awareness of these facilities among VET learners in particular, to broaden their horizons beyond employment opportunities within their home countries national boundaries.

## Language Tuition and Teaching

Language is communication. Communication is critical for interaction. Interaction is critical for successful VET learning. Therefore, language tuition and teaching are essential factors in making BP a success for each VET learner, both before and during participation.

### Teaching & Tutoring

VET learners receive two hours of language classes per week, during which they study the native language of the host country. This is critical to assist learners in transitioning comfortably to their new environment.

*Key Point: It is critical that the language tuition coordinator makes a clear distinction between language tuition and language teaching:*

- *Language tuition: mentoring and guidance on a one-to-one basis assisting VET learners with completing assignments for VET modules and core tasks documentation related to VET work placement.*
- *Language teaching: teaching the four key skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and systems (grammar and discourse) for either general use or specific purpose.*



## Language for Specific Purpose

When VET learners arrive in the host country they have a full day of language for specific purposes, for example ‘English for Nurses’ in Ireland. This is a full day language course specific to their exact course of study that learners complete before they commence training in their work placements.

## Task Based Learning

While VET learners study language as part of their pre-departure programme, this must be complemented by authentic language use in a real life context: Task Based Learning. Acquisition of any specific language item occurs when the learner successfully completes a communicative task through their second language.

*Case Study: Dutch VET learners participating in BP in Finland participated in Finnish for general use classes known as ‘Happy Finnish’. These classes were aimed at successfully completing everyday tasks, such as completing transactions at shop counters or admissions counters in a museum. Once completed successfully, learners felt more confident when making transactions and this increased their overall confidence, making them feel more comfortable in everyday life in their host country, enabling integration and contributing to the success of their programme as a whole.*

## Level

All the work places in BP must have at least one member of staff that can communicate effectively through English (CEFR Global Scale B1) regardless of the native language of the host country. Likewise, participants must possess a suitable level of English (CEFR Global Scale B1) to perform adequately and effectively during their training. It is also desirable that participants possess a basic level of the native language for the country (CEFR Global Scale A2) if it is not English, for example, Finnish or Dutch.

*Case Study: During piloting of BP, some Dutch participants arrived for internships without adequate language preparation. As a result, they were unable to communicate effectively with their work place supervisors creating stress and anxiety for the learner and frustration for the work place supervisor. Adequate preparation to bring VET learners to CEFR Global Scale B1 is critical to provide them with the confidence and ability to communicate effectively with their work place colleagues and to display their vocational skills and abilities.*

In certain regions where commonly used languages cross national borders, such as Germany and the Netherlands or Finland and Sweden, one common language is acceptable (German or Swedish).

## Conclusion

For successful implementation of BP, each of the sections and sub-sections described above must be afforded adequate attention prior to implementation and monitored on an ongoing basis during the programme. As there are many areas to implement and monitor, it is advisable to delegate responsibilities to coordinators and to hold regular meetings to inform all coordinators of developments outside of their direct responsibility.

It is critical that all coordinators provide an environment and facilities conducive to participating VET learners learning and acquiring vocational skills, while developing and growing personally. Once coordinators have created this environment, VET learners must play a very active part also, both pre-departure and during the programme. There should be no ‘hand-holding’ on BP.

While all sections and sub-sections contained in this guide are important to implement and adhere to, the core ‘innovative’ aspects discussed in the introduction should be given special attention by the relevant coordinators, namely:

- Implementing and ensuring that VET learners participate in a thorough pre-departure programme to prepare them for the challenges of a different language, VET culture, work place culture and general environment.
- In-depth and collaborative communication with work place organisations to ensure that relevant core tasks are achievable and can be assessed by qualified personnel.
- Selection of VET modules relevant to the VET learner’s course of study in the home country, establishing validity and recognition of awards in the home country.

While piloting and developing BP, many challenges were encountered. Challenges should be viewed as opportunities to enhance the programme for the subsequent intake of participants on BP rather than lost opportunities.