

ASEM Work Placement Programme: Proposal for a pilot scheme

1. Introduction

1.1 General

Work placements/internships in companies/organisations play a key role in enhancing student and graduate employability. Practical experience alongside a degree from a higher education institution is seen as 'fundamental' in bridging the gap between higher education and the world of work. An increasing number of graduate recruiters consider practical experience as an indicator of an applicant's suitability.

More and more companies /organisations operate globally and thus value in particular practical experience gained in an international work environment. It is desirable to educate and train an increasing number of students who seek work-based experience and want to be part of deepened interregional collaboration between higher education institutions and the world of work across the ASEM region.

The ASEM Work Placement Programme shall thus enable highly-motivated and qualified Master students to gain valuable work experience and build cross-cultural skills and competencies through interregional work experience in the ASEM region.

1.2 Recommendations from ASEMME3

On the occasion of the 3rd Asia-Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME3) in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2011, ASEM Education Ministers felt that a work placement programme would provide students with the opportunity to discover the world of work in a different regional and cultural setting and gain some experience. The Ministers "(B 8) *Considered the establishment of an ASEM placement programme in terms of setting up a pilot scheme for higher education-business mobility of qualified students between Asia and Europe (partly funded by public resources and industry);*".

1.3 Background

In several ASEM seminars but in particular during the last two Asia-Europe Business Fora which have taken place in Germany (2011) and Malaysia (2012), the need to set up such a pilot scheme was underlined. For this reason, the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) has taken the initiative to work out a first draft outline.¹

2. Benefits for the key players in the process

The ASEM work placement programme seeks to create benefits for all actors involved – higher education institutions, companies and organisations, which will act in this programme as host organisations, and students.

2.1 Benefits to higher education institutions

Higher education institutions should endeavour to make the transition to the global world of work as smooth as possible for their future graduates by supporting them to develop know-how and skills for their careers:

¹ This pilot scheme was worked out together with Prof. Dr. Alexandra Angress, University of Applied Sciences in Aschaffenburg (Germany) and Edmund Zirra, University of Applied Sciences Karlsruhe (Germany).

- Higher education institutions can seek to provide high quality education and training by providing students with opportunities to gain work experience in another cultural setting that supports them in their professional and personal growth;
- the ASEM Work Placement Programme could help establish international links with a wider range of employers and build international contacts and networks that enable transfer of know-how as well as feedback on the academic curriculum, course content and teaching methodology.

2.2 Benefits to companies / organisations

By welcoming a young student from an ASEM country as a trainee, host organisations will benefit in numerous ways:

- the integration of bright, young people from an education environment and with another cultural background into an organisation can provide refreshing ideas and stimulating viewpoints;
- an ASEM trainee can help to enhance a company's/organisation's competitiveness through transfer of academic know-how;
- hosting a student can be a valuable contribution to an organisation, enabling its staff to develop their skills in supervisory, support and training roles in a cross-cultural setting;
- by raising the skill level of young people, companies/organisations contribute to students' current education and help improve their future global employability;
- the ASEM Work Placement Programme is an excellent source and platform that enables to recruit young talents from the ASEM region as potential future employees;
- students can serve as 'goodwill ambassadors' for companies/organisations in the ASEM region and help build international contacts and networks;
- offering work experience opportunities to students enhances a mutually important interregional relationship between the company/organisation and higher education institutions in the ASEM region;
- The work placement programme can also help raise the profile of a company/organisation within the local community and as caring employer.

2.3 Benefits to students

Students are provided with a unique opportunity to gain work experience and contact outside the academic sector and in a global and intercultural environment.

Further benefits to participating students include:

- an opportunity to apply recently acquired knowledge and skills to real-life, in intercultural settings;
- an orientation to the industrial/commercial environment, operations and procedures in an international environment;
- an experience that will assist to build cross-cultural skills and competencies;
- an opportunity to refine communication skills in a professional and global environment;
- assistance with personal development in the areas of self-confidence, responsibility, greater understanding of (international) career opportunities, and a realistic appraisal of strengths and weaknesses relative to their career choice.

3. Target group and modalities of the Work Placement Programme

3.1 Target group

- It is advisable to make the ASEM Work Placement Programme available to master students of all subjects enrolled in higher education institutions.

- Placements should be offered by a cooperation of at least four university-business networks, two of them acting in the Asian region and two of them acting in Europe.
- Placements should be two to six months in length and take place in the other region.

4. Support and facilitation

4.1 Partners involved

- Governments willing to take part and to identify university-business networks in their respective country to be part of the placement programme
- University-business networks from both regions willing to take part in the placement programme
- Employers offering work placements to higher education institutions and their students
- Higher Education Institutions publishing placement offers and/or where applicable screen students' applications
- Students

4.2 Structure

Suggested steps in the project are:

- Preparation phase
A preparation phase of maximum 1 year is recommended to identify relevant placements and to set up a website to collect the placements. It is advised that a training agreement should be designed including the objectives, content and modalities of the work placement and the student's rights and obligations. It will also ensure that the student receives appropriate integration, training and monitoring by the host organisation.
- Establishment phase
The establishment phase consists of a period of maximum 2 years setting up the programme and testing it for the first time. At the end, an evaluation will give an overview on strong and weak points. It should be ensured by the host organisation that the student receives adequate support to cover his/her extra expenses incurred by the international experience (this can be in kind, e.g. accommodation or in cash). Upon successful completion the student receives a work certificate/final appraisal.

4.3 Financial requirements

- Staff costs for a 0,25 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for three years in the higher education institutions
- Travel costs for academic staff for a period of 3 years
- Material resources (Website, ...)
- Grants for students (financial support can be provided either by companies/organisations in that students are paid during their work placement and/or by public resources in that costs for preparatory training, travel costs are borne).

4.4 Follow-up

Alumni activities and making use of former trainees/interns as cultural ambassadors for the programme is strongly encouraged as well as the creation and/or use of support structures and platforms.

5. How to move on

Interested countries should address to the ASEM Education Secretariat at latest by 30 March 2013.