



European Graduate Placement Scheme: An Education Partnership Developing Global Translation Graduates

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Abstract

The European Graduate Placement Scheme (EGPS) is funded by the Erasmus strand of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. The scheme started on 1 October 2012 and will end in March 2015. It sets out to establish a European framework for work placements for postgraduate students in translation companies, facilitating exchanges between universities and companies in a range of European member states.

It aims to:

- *To enhance European cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprise*
- *To stimulate mobility of students and staff in higher education*
- *To increase the employability of graduates and postgraduates studying translation*
- *To build on existing collaborations between employers, HEIs and related translator training projects e.g. Optimale.*

The scheme sets out to develop more partnerships between higher education & employers, providing Masters students with experience of a commercial translation environment and real-life professional situations in another EU member state and increasing their mobility prospects.

Partners from different European countries share good practice in work placements to create a model for European work placements. Our European partnership also aims to develop a form of accreditation for work placements linked to a core set of standards benchmarking translator competence. The Standards are supported by employers, introducing an innovative element of employer engagement in the curriculum. At the end of the project, there will be a range of curriculum models available that will enable European universities to embed practical work placements within a translation course, enabling postgraduate students of translation to gain real life experience of the profession before completing their studies.

It benefits students by providing them with access to a much wider range of placement opportunities across Europe, eligible for Erasmus funding. It will give them experience of an actual translation-related environment, where they might be asked to perform or support a range of translation- or business-related tasks. Institutions will be able to offer their students a wider range of placement opportunities across Europe. Employers can benefit from the scheme by accessing Masters level translation students with a range of native language competence and language pairs,

The scheme will provide a range of tailored guidance and support materials for employers, students and higher education institutions who are participating in or wish to participate in placements.

The project partners are:

- *Skills CfA, the UK standard setting body for languages, translation, interpreting and intercultural skills*
- *University of Salford, UK*
- *Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland*
- *Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain*
- *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany*

This presentation describes the cooperative model which the partners have used to create a European framework for graduate placements, how the model is being tested and how the model may be used on a wider scale by translation training institutions working with employers. It reviews the importance of work experience in undergraduate and postgraduate education in the current international labour market. It also provides information on how to get involved with the scheme and get in contact with the project partners to explore cooperation opportunities.



1. Rationale for the European Graduate Placement Scheme (EGPS)

Although some European universities incorporate work placements into their courses, this practice is not uniform. Reasons for this vary, including curriculum constraints, a lack of companies with the capacity to offer placements or the lack of a placement coordinator. Placements are not always convalidated, a further disincentive for many students. The majority of placements take place in the country of study, which impacts labour mobility. For instance, the UK has the lowest Erasmus participation rate in Europe and has experienced the greatest decline in take-up of placements over a recent survey period [1]. The report provides evidence that overseas study brings benefits (for language competence, intercultural skills, flexibility of students' employment outlook) and concluded that 'graduates with foreign experience bring greater human capital to the knowledge economy'. Other UK research [2] reports that a third of graduate vacancies will be filled by individuals who have had work experience with that employer.

From 2006-2008, a pilot Graduate Placement Scheme for postgraduate translation students was run in England, funded by the UK Department for Education and supported by the Association of Translation Companies, a member of the European Association of Translation Companies (EUATC). The scheme was established in response to feedback from UK translation employers, who reported that the work readiness of those graduating from translation programmes differs, in part because the syllabus of one course can vary dramatically from another but also because not all courses include applied or practical translation content. The pilot partnered universities across England [3] with local translation companies to offer students work placements. During their placement, students completed a portfolio or learning journal, mapped to the National Occupational Standards in Translation. These standards were developed in consultation with the UK language service industry to reflect the needs of the labour market and are unique in the EU [4].

Working with EUATC members, it became clear that there are similar needs for exchange and mobility within the profession across Europe. The EGPS aims to develop this successful pilot further by working with European partners to test a system of transnational work placements in four EU countries and develop a set of Occupational Standards for Translation which could be applied across the EU. This model trials a structured framework for placements rather than an ad hoc approach. The inclusion of Occupational Standards as a basis for convalidation is innovative and provides a unique opportunity for sharing best practice across European translation education. This project will provide resources and standards that will be applicable to all other EU countries and that therefore can be adopted widely. This new project will continue to work with the European Association of Translation Companies to offer placements in all partner countries.

2. Benefits of the project

The EGPS aims to improve the employability of translation students by establishing partnerships between employers and universities across Europe and developing a consistent system of convalidation for work placements. It will enhance the links between employers and education. It will support the needs of employers whilst improving the professional skills of students. The project will develop curriculum models that will enable the work placements to be assessed and incorporated into the HE programmes of study. By establishing a set of European Occupational Standards, the project will build the needs of employers into programmes of study and enable employers to assess and address their own needs. The project will follow the structure of the English Graduate Placement Scheme (GPS) [5], linking universities and companies for the arrangement of work placements for translation students but on a transnational level. Each university will establish links with local, regional and national translation employers to host Erasmus students from their partners, giving the students greater international work experience. The localised placement handbook will have an embedded monitoring system, in which each placement student will complete a reflective journal mapped to the proposed European Occupational Standards. Placements are expected to last approximately 3 months, depending on the structure of their host course and the requirements of Erasmus funding. Embedding a practical work placement within each course enables the student to gain real life experience of the profession. It will also give them experience of a commercial environment in another European nation, improving their mobility. Organisations and companies will benefit by obtaining native speakers for a period of time to help their business and will be able to use the placement as an extended interview. The universities involved will benefit by improving the performance of their



students and by offering a curriculum which incorporates practical work experience, enhancing their students' prospects in the international job market.

3. Project consortium

The consortium consists of five partners from four different countries. It includes four universities offering postgraduate translation courses, with a work placement structure already in place. The work placement structures vary across partners, ensuring transnational learning and discussion.

The partners have been carefully selected because of their experience, the University curricula they offer and their links to employers. The nature of the consortium will enable the project to incorporate diverse cultural needs.

The managing partner, Skills CfA, is the UK's standards setting body for translation [6] with expertise in National Occupational Standards development and employer engagement.

The University of Salford (UK) was a partner in the original English scheme. It leads the National Network of Translation in England, comprising Salford and the universities of Bath, Aston, Heriot Watt, Portsmouth and Westminster. It is a member of the European Master's in Translation network.

The Pedagogical University of Cracow (Poland) has significant experience in facilitating student exchanges across Europe in a range of subjects. It offers a range of translation programmes in all the partner languages.

The Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain) is the country's top-ranked translator education centre. It offers a range of postgraduate translation courses in various domains and is also a member of the European Masters in Translation network.

Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz (Germany) has the largest training centre for translators and interpreters worldwide, offering 12 languages to 2200 students.

All partners offer translation study in at least one relevant partner language and can facilitate the interchange required in the work placement scheme. They all have experience of working with employers and in developing new curriculum models including those related to employability.

4. Aims and objectives

The project aim is to further cooperation between higher education institutions (HEIs) and enterprise, while stimulating mobility in higher education.

Its objectives are:

- To develop more partnerships between HE institutions and employers
- To embed a practical work placement within each translation course, enabling the student to gain real life experience of the profession.
- To pilot a curriculum that incorporates the option for practical work experience, enhancing students' prospects in the international job market.
- To give students experience of a commercial environment in another country, giving them overseas work experience and increasing their mobility prospects.
- To benefit companies by providing a range of native speakers to help their business.
- To improve the performance and employability of the students
- To increase the level of mobility of students and staff engaged in translation courses
- To establish a set of EU Occupational Standards for translation
- To develop a form of convalidation for work placements linked to the Occupational Standards
- To develop a localised handbook with guidance for universities, employers, employer mentors and students. It will contain a reflective journal for the student to complete during the work placement.

The overall outcome will be a consistent, approved and tested model of good practice that can be adopted by other HEIs and enterprises in order to embed a practical work placement into translation courses. It will propose a curriculum model for HEIs to use in relation to work placements. It will increase the employability of students following translation courses. It is supported by the European professional associations, including the EU Association of Translation Companies.

5. Model

The project partners will establish a database of companies in their home country who will host work placements for translation students. Links between HEIs and companies will not be limited to the local area but will be open to national and international partnerships. This will enable greater flexibility for



cooperation and allow more organisations to offer placements to students from other countries, enhancing mobility. The Consortium will examine the current UK Occupational Standards for Translation and develop a European model, which will then be tested through the companies involved in the placements. The consortium will localise a Work Placement Handbook to reflect practice specific to each nation. The universities will recruit students to apply for the work placements. Each candidate will have to prepare a CV and application as per a formal job vacancy and undergo an interview. Students may apply for an Erasmus mobility grant. The placement will be in a different European partner country. This will provide the student with greater international work experience and improve their mobility.

A curriculum model is being devised and piloted to embed work placements into higher education translation courses and to show how the portfolio can be credited as part of the course. Beginning with an emergent view of translator competence, the model depicts the translator education process in terms of the initially differentiated and gradually merging development of the type of translator sub-competences outlined by the European Masters in Translation consortium. Within the university setting, students can be seen to progress from dependency to autonomy and from the acquisition of basic skills to complex problem-solving abilities through the implementation of pedagogical intervention moving systematically from individual and cooperative instruction to authentic, collaborative project work. At this point, students can be expected to be prepared to move beyond the carefully controlled and structured university environment and to begin the essential transition to professional life : through participation in a work placement within a company or other institution. In this model, the placement is not merely seen as a desirable supplement to the educational process but instead as an essential and integral component of the curriculum. Nor is it seen simply as an opportunity to practice the skills acquired at university per se, but also as an environment for developing generic professional skills that can complement and establish synergies between the various individual sub-competences.

6. Involvement in the project

The target groups for the project are universities offering postgraduate translator education, applied translation tutors, employers and students as well as professional bodies representing the translation profession and promoting best practice in training and education. The universities are establishing national partnerships with translation companies, either with companies with which they have an existing relationship or new companies that have not been previously involved with the university. The project is targeting a minimum of 40 students. HEIs will promote the scheme via the university careers departments or employability officers, where they exist, and in any other relevant promotional literature or national schemes. It will utilise the findings and results of the *Optimale* project [7] for translator education. The dissemination strategy will target all institutions offering undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes in the host countries and extend to other HEIs in the rest of the EU-27. The structure is flexible enough to ensure that additional demand can be accommodated as the project develops.

References

- [1] November 2010. *International Student Mobility Literature Review*. HEFCE, British Council
- [2] January 2012. *The Graduate Market in 2012*. High Fliers Research Limited, UK
- [3] University of Salford, Aston University, Imperial College London, University of Leeds, London Metropolitan University, University of Westminster
- [4] <http://www.skillsca.org/standards-qualifications/language-intercultural.html>
- [5] <https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/translation/graduateplacementsch.html>
- [6] Skills CfA manage and maintain National Occupational Standards in Languages, Intercultural Working, Interpreting, Translation, Lipspeaking and Speech to Text Reporting on behalf of UK government.
- [7] The Optimale project has mapped and monitored translator training across Europe. For more information, visit <http://www.translator-training.eu/>