ERASMUS SKILLS

GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

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Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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Index

List of Tables

List of Graphs

List of Figures

1.

INTRODUCTION:
THE ERASMUS SKILLS PROJECT

Students participating in mobility experiences need to constantly adapt to new circumstances, not only during the experience itself, but also during the different stages of the international student lifecycle (see Perez-Encinas et al., 2020). They change their lifestyle, get acquainted with other cultural forms and, in some cases, they even change habits and attitudes to adapt to the new host culture. In this scenario, the different sources of support for students are of great added-value, e.g. family, friends, classmates, as well as the receiving institution – higher education institutions (HEIs) in our case. The supporting role of HEIs in the process of sending students abroad could go beyond the administrative dimension of it. A way of doing that is by offering a good provision of support services that helps them during the learning process and competences acquisition (understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes – see Boyatzis, 1982; or Council of Europe, 2018) gained during their adaptation to a new international context. In this way, HEIs could increase the impact of such mobility experiences on students' professional and personal development.

One important question that appears in this process is how to equip HEIs with the appropriate tools to support student mobility experiences – in particular when sending abroad students who are nowadays digital natives? Erasmus Skills (2018-2020) is a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union that seeks to offer universities tools that allow them to improve the learning experience of their mobility students. Thanks to how the project is designed, its results will benefit a variety of stakeholders both at institutional and individual level and, therefore, benefit the higher education community and society at large. Students have a primary role in this project, because they are among the main outcomes of universities activities.

To achieve this goal, the project proposes the following specific actions. First, the definition of a conceptual framework to approach the issues described above. This conceptual framework provides understanding about the new challenges that universities are facing today and how these institutions have modified their structures and dynamics to confront to these challenges: the change of rules brought by globalisation in the specific context of higher education; how universities nurture the European citizenship dimension of international and local students; and the definition of mobility-related

dimensions knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) acquired both at individual level (student self-assessment) and institutional level (making mobility relevant across curricula) in the international context. This revision is available in Section 2.

Second, the project has also explored the actual initiatives, activities or services carried out by universities and other institutions in order to: (i) support students in the development and acknowledgement of knowledge, skills and attitudes during their mobility experiences; (ii) assist (academic or administrative) staff in supporting students to gain some of the above-mentioned knowledge, skills and attitudes. Section 3 provides a set of practices gathered in different HEIs across European institutions. The analysis of these practices has led to the identification of gaps in the institutional support to the development of student-international competences in Europe and the production of alternatives to ensure a balanced institutional support.

Third, the Consortium has also created a self-assessment and interactive tool that helps measure the development progress of students in relation to KSAs. It consists of two checklists (questionnaires) on mobility-related KSAs included in the [Erasmus+ mobile App](#) to be fulfilled by the students themselves: one before the mobility experience and another one after. This tool also includes recommendations on sources of relevant information for students during their period abroad to help them during the adaptation process. In this way, this tool assists students in becoming aware of their KSAs' learning curve when studying abroad and supports them in making the most out of their experience. The tool is also a valuable source of information for HEIs, in order to improve management practices and offer better and tailor-made support to their mobile students. The [Erasmus+ mobile App](#) has been downloaded more than 100,000 times to this date, it offers a one-stop-shop for students (freely available on Google Play and Apple store) and it can be used in web browsers as well. A short description of the App and the questionnaires is available in section 4.

Fourth, project partners have developed webinars for outgoing students on European integration and citizenship, along with guidelines for practitioners on the organisation of workshops on this topic. As stated in the Gothenburg Social Summit for fair jobs and growth where the European pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2018a) was proclaimed, mobility serves to spread European values and citizenship across the

continent and should become a reality for all. The project partners deemed it important that future exchange students understand the political context in which the Erasmus programme was created more than 30 years ago. Therefore, these webinars focus on how Erasmus contributes to the European integration process and on better preparing students for their learning experience. section 5 includes a short description of the webinars and workshop guidelines. Also, the recorded E+ Online Training An Online Training as well as the workshop guidelines are now available in the Erasmus Skills project website.

The Erasmus Skills project also provides results that may have a positive impact into the academic curricula by helping to adjust it to the new knowledge economy and globalization challenges. There is an increasing skills mismatch, notably with graduates lacking a range of transversal skills that are deemed important in the modern world of work (problem solving, communication, etc.). In section 6, we portray a methodology that demonstrates how learning mobility outcomes are relevant to study programmes – notably in study programmes where mobility is marginal or under-evaluated. This section provides a method for higher education institutions to embed mobility in curricula, allowing non-mobile students to develop mobility-related KSAs at home. This also provides increased recognition of the competences acquired during such stays abroad and in fine contribution to the internationalisation of curricula. The full methodology is further in detail described in the Erasmus Skills website.

Erasmus skills is in line with the digital education action plan of the European Commission (2018b), which states that mobility is an important part of education and digital technology is key in improving it further. In this regard, Erasmus Skills intends to reach the broadest possible impact by guiding students through digital technological tools but also by creating contents useful for universities in supporting mobility students' development. In doing so, Erasmus Skills also covers the second priority of the education action plan of the European Commission (2018b): "*developing skills - supporting the use of digital technologies to improve pedagogies and assessment methods*".

2.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES (KSAS) IN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY EXPERIENCES

2.1 Internationalisation and mobility

The challenges that higher education systems face are different in each era. Currently, one of the main challenges is adapting to a globalised world that is becoming more and more international. Even though, universities had always had an international dimension, either with respect to the concept of universal knowledge and related research, or regarding the movement of students and scholars (De Wit et al., 2015, p. 41), they are facing a rapid and growing internationalisation phenomenon in the higher education system over the last 30 years. Universities today form citizens for a hyper-connected and globalised world: their graduates must be able to work in constantly changing, multicultural, and complex contexts. In this global reality, universities strive for competitiveness, seek differential advantages, build their brands and reputation, and compete for the first place of quality measurements and rankings (Li, 2013).

The strategies of universities to respond to these challenges are diverse. They have attempted to strengthen their reputation in society to attract students, to compete for human capital in the market of academics and researchers, to offer courses in different languages to strengthen the communication skills of their students, as well as to develop inter-university mobility plans to enhance student experiences and offer them a differentiating value on the labour market (Petzold and Bucher, 2018).

Nonetheless, the challenge of internationalisation in the higher education context has changed in many ways since the 70s and 80s. In those decades, it was an individual effort of a few higher education institutions that stood out from others, but over time, it has become one of the core activities of universities (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). In this evolution, we can identify three stages in the process of internationalisation of European universities (Haug, 2016): (i) developing mobility focused on supporting research activities; (ii) developing the internationalisation of students, and (iii) developing the so-called institutional internationalisation. Below, we further describe these three stages.

The first stage, research internationalisation, was implemented through inter-institutional relations to promote research. Following the model of a modern university,

academics are experts in particular areas of knowledge and require their peers to advance in their research. The university as an institution was responsible for establishing relationships that allowed stronger cooperation between researchers and international exchanges between highly specialised individuals were encouraged. In the first stage, student mobility was not addressed: only students collaborating on research projects could benefit from mobility periods abroad.

In the second stage, student international mobility emerged as a mechanism of developing institutional cooperation for reinforcing the educational processes. However, such opportunities were available to a selected minority of students and tied to the contractual agreements of involved institutions. It is in this stage when the Erasmus programme was implemented. It was the starting point of a highly popular and successful endeavour.

The third stage revolves around the internationalization of educational institutions, a concept known as *internationalisation at home*. This concept is defined by Beelen & Jones (2015) as the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum, thus including all students at institutions within domestic learning environments. This stage is not limited to universities interacting with other universities abroad, but extends to the creation of international environments on their own campuses, the provision of courses in foreign languages, or the improvement of language and intercultural skills at the university (Green & Olson, 2003). Building multi-cultural environments *at home* appears to expand internationalisation beyond a selected number of beneficiaries and makes international experiences available to a larger cohort of students. This last stage entails a transformation of the campus daily life on the campus and the student life as a whole (Parkhouse et al., 2016).

In the internationalisation process, the standardisation of university activities and outcomes may work as a tool to ensure quality and comparability among universities (Green & Shoenberg, 2006). More specifically, the Tuning project (Gonzales & Wagenaar, 2003) intends to standardise educational structures and make them comparable, in line with the Bologna declaration, which initiated the process of convergence of higher education systems. The Tuning project's aim is to align the curricular development around five lines of discussion: (i) generic competences; (ii) specific competences in each subject;

(iii) ECTS as a system of accumulation; (iv) learning, teaching and evaluation approaches; and (v) improvement of quality in the educational process.

On the other hand, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF – see European Union, 2018) is a common reference framework that facilitates the comparison of qualifications from different European countries. It provides a framework for describing qualifications on the basis of their expected learning outcomes. In this way, EQF makes qualifications more transparent and easier to understand and compare. EQF aims to improve the transparency, comparability and citizen mobility portability of people's qualifications. The framework serves as a translation device between different qualification systems and their educational levels. It is intended to benefit learners, workers, job-seekers, employers, trade unions, education and training providers, qualification recognition bodies, government authorities and international organizations.

The standardisation process in the European Higher Education Area is relevant to make students in Europe more mobile, as it regulates academic quality and sets the minimum knowledge and skills outcomes for all countries. In this way. European students can attend classes in different countries and still get similar learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the mobility experience offers other benefits to students, such as cultural interactions, new lifestyles, and the development of global and transversal competences.

The Erasmus programme is a key tool for universities to prepare students for present-day challenges, but it is also challenging for students to realise the benefits of mobility and leverage them in their personal and professional development. We live in an era of rapid changes, uncertainty, global competition and diverse environments, in which it becomes difficult to know and predict the future characteristics of the labour market and jobs to come. In this context, the Erasmus Skills project will provide students with different resources to help forming European citizens ready to tackle present-day and future challenges.

2.2 Competences and KSAs: the definitions used in the Erasmus Skills project

The concept of "competence" arises at the end of the Middle Ages and comes from the Latin "competens": "what goes with what is adapted to". In the last decades, the academic community has produced several definitions for this concept (Camara, 2017).

The psychologist David McClelland claimed that "the degree of intelligence of the individual does not guarantee professional success" (McClelland, 1973, p.14), because each individual counts with personal characteristics (or competences) that can lead to better performance levels in a given situation, task, or function (McClelland, 1973). According to McClelland (1973) such personal characteristics were the following: (i) "ability – natural talents of the person that can be improved; (ii) skills – demonstrations of particular talents in practice; and (iii) knowledge – what a person needs to know to perform a task" (Fleury & Fleury, 2003, p.45).

Later on, Boyatzis (1982) defined competences as behaviours or actions (outputs) that rely on values, personality traits, motivations, and other individual characteristics to emerge. Hence, the concept "competence" is more complex than only observable behaviour, as they arise from other not observable psychological and social phenomena (Boyatzis, 1982).

Table 1. Main definitions for the concept "competence" in the literature.

Publication	Definition
McClelland (1973)	Differentiating characteristics of people with high performance.
Boyatzis (1982)	Underlying characteristics of the individual causally related to an effective or superior performance in a professional activity.
Spencer & Spencer (1993)	Intrinsic characteristic of the individual that presents a causal relation with superior performance in a given activity or situation.
Hoffmann (1999)	Basic attributes of the individual + Quality standard + Behaviour.
Zarifian (1999)	Practical understanding of situations that build on acquired knowledge and transforms them as the diversity of situations increases
Le Boterf (2008)	Effective and informed mobilisation of resources in a work situation.

In the 90s, Zarifian (1999) and Le Boterf (2008) associated the concept of competence with the way of mobilising individual characteristics in a given situation: somebody is competent if they are able to accurately make use of their resources to resolve a situation. The author considers that competences are embodied in practices that will impact the desired goals. In short, a competence implies knowing how to act responsibly and how to mobilise, integrate and transfer knowledge, resources and skills in a given context.

Summarising, Table 1 synthesises the main definitions of competences in the literature.

Academics and practitioners in this field usually rely on the more operational Boyatzis (1982) definition and the individual characteristics are commonly classified in the following three dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) – see Meng et al. (2017). This is also the case of the Erasmus+ programme[1], which defines the concept of "competence" as the "ability to do something successfully or efficiently". Although "competences" and "skills" are different concepts, the information published by the Erasmus+ programme often use them interchangeably. However, two elements differentiate competences and skills and make competences something more than skills (Council of Europe, 2018): (i) competent individuals can apply what they know to carry out a specific task or solve a problem, and (ii) competent individuals are able to transfer this ability between different situations. Finally, the Erasmus + programme also follows the KSA approach. In particular, the Council of Europe (2018) defines KSAs as follows:

- Knowledge: this is the "cognitive" dimension of competence. It refers to all the topics and issues individuals know or need to know about to do their job. It is commonly associated with the "head".
- Skills: this is the "practical" or applied dimension of competence. This dimension refers to what individuals are able to do or what they need to be able to do at their job. It is commonly associated with the "hands".

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[1] The Erasmus + program is an EU program for education, training, youth and sport, that have as core objective to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, employment, social equity and inclusion, as well as to the strategic framework of education and training (Erasmus +, 2008).

- Attitudes (and values): this dimension refers to the attitudes and values that individuals must espouse in order to do their work effectively. It is commonly associated with the "heart".

The aim of the Erasmus Skills project is to support students participating in the Erasmus + programme in maximising their learning curve for mobility-related KSAs. Consequently, the Erasmus Skills project has adopted the same approach as the Erasmus+ programme.

Last but not least, competences have been also classified into hard competences and soft competences (Laker & Powell, 2011). Hard competences may be defined as specific knowledge or skills necessary to execute a task: without them it is not possible to perform specific activities (Georges, 1988). However, in this project, we focus on KSAs related to soft competences, which are the core of individuals' characteristics improving or supporting hard competences (Georges, 1988). The Erasmus Skills project, focuses on mobility-related KSAs (KSAs for which a student mobility experience provides a good opportunity to acquire/enhance), with special emphasis on the so-called intercultural or global issues.

2.3 Competences and KSAs in the specific context of student mobility experiences

Previous research on student mobility revealed significant consensus on the potential of international experiences for gaining global-mindedness, growing intellectually and developing personally (e.g. Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001; Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart, 2007; Killick, 2011; or Ripmeester & Deardorff, 2019) through the attainment of several mobility-related competences.

Shaftel, Shaftel & Ahluwalia (2007) proved that study abroad experiences lead to personal development related to open-mindedness, flexibility, cross-cultural adaptability and appreciation of diversity. Also, it increases the understanding of the relevance of communicating in foreign languages and learning about foreign cultures (European Commission, 2014). Other studies provided evidence on the emergence of a new type of citizen, the global citizen, as a result of international mobility (Killick, 2011). However, the

impact of the opportunity for international study depended on the length of the programme, with four-weeks stays resulting in a greater change in personality traits than shorter stays (Shaftel, Shaftel & Ahluwalia, 2007 for the case of US undergraduate college students).

All these effects are expected to take place in the context of student mobility in the Erasmus+ programme. According to Jacobone & Moro (2015), this programme exposes students directly to different European cultures, which helps them develop their multicultural skills and European consciousness. It is consequently an effective means for strengthening the competences of participants through acquiring foreign language skills, greater self-awareness and the possibility of gaining and maintaining employment (Jacobone & Moro, 2015). In addition, "the experience of living and studying in a different cultural, political and economic context exposes students to "best practices" in other countries and better prepares them for their future careers" (Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart, 2007, p 656).

The European Commission acknowledges the relevance of international student mobility for personal development and employability, making special emphasis on its impact on the intercultural competences of students: "it fosters respect for diversity and a capacity to deal with other cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, thus underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area" (European Commission, 2009, p. 4). In each stage of the mobility experience students encounter different challenges and opportunities for competence development that prepare them for future (personal and professional) situations as European citizens (Dvir & Yemini, 2017).

Jacobone & Moro (2015) studied the competence development of Italian students participating in credit mobility experiences. Among their findings, they highlight the perceived relevance for students of the development of linguistic competences, as a necessary condition for establishing new relationships and bridging gaps in discussions on a wide range of topics.

Finally, research and practitioners also recognise the impact of student mobility on higher education institutions, because it leads to increasing cooperation and competition among institutions and compels universities to recognise, adapt and progressively develop tools,

administrative structures and teaching techniques (European Commission, 2009). However, this project focuses on the development of mobility-related KSAs by students participating in the Erasmus+ programme. Consequently, this Guide limits to the analysis of the organisational issues related to this topic.

2.4 Intercultural competences and KSAs

In a globalised context, students (as European citizens and future job seekers) must develop a wider understanding of their culturally diverse environment and acquire the necessary skills to live and work in such multicultural settings (Jacobone & Moro, 2015) – both at home and abroad. Students are thus required to demonstrate intercultural competences (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen, 2002), whose development is supported, among other factors, by the fluent use of a foreign language and the participation on international experiences (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001).

Multiple terminologies have been employed to refer to the intercultural competence, such as, "global competences" (Hunter, 2004), "global mindset" (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002), "global citizenship" (Davies, 2006) or "intercultural sensitivity" (Bennett, 1986), to name a few. Deardorff (2006, p.255) defined it as "behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively in intercultural situations", where effectiveness is understood as the accomplishment of valued objectives and appropriateness consists in avoiding violating valued rules (Spitzberg, 1989). In this line, the idea of global competences is related to intercultural competences. Hunter (2004) defines global competences as 'having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment' (Hunter, 2004, p. 130-131). This definition establishes a link between thought and action, that it is also present in the Deardorff (2006) definition.

According to Deardorff (2006), the process of development of intercultural competences moves from the individual attitudes and personal attributes to the interpersonal interactions (outcomes) – see Figure 1. This model states that the starting point of the

intercultural competences' development process is the attitudes, which works as the affective filter that triggers the process. It has a fundamental role because it allows or hinders learning. Specifically, openness, respect of cultures, curiosity and discovery are key attitudes related to the development of intercultural competences. Hunter (2004) agreed on this issue, stating that individuals (students in our case) must have positive attitudes toward other cultures, must be aware of global diversity and cultural plurality, and should also respect and appreciate foreign cultures and recognise the benefits of learning about other cultures.

Figure 1. Process for building intercultural competences.
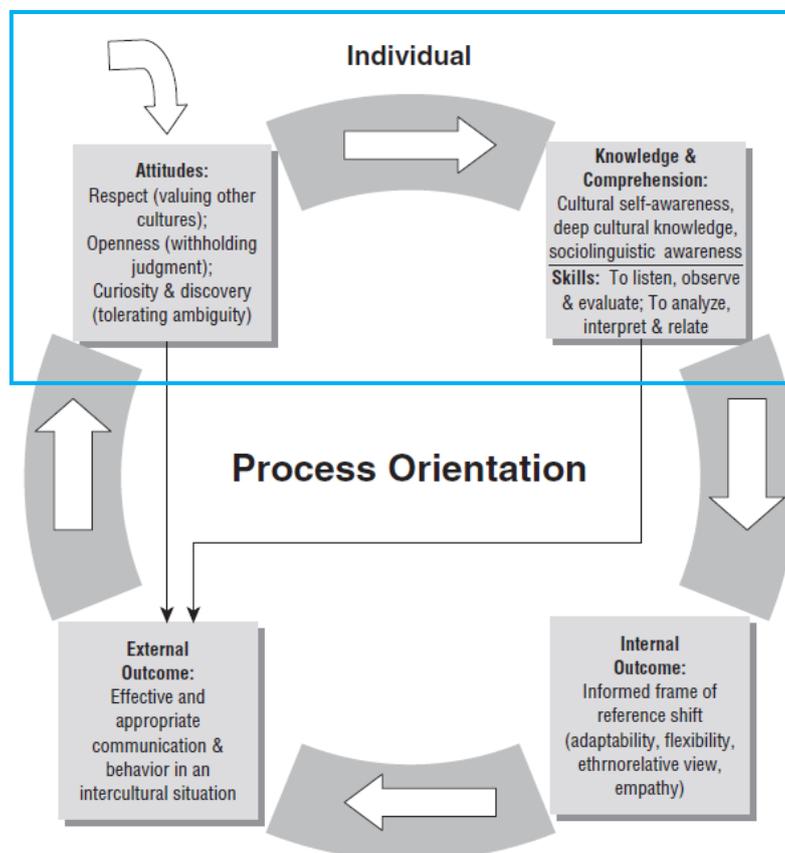
Source: Deardorff (2006, p.256).

Knowledge and skills are individual characteristics that emerge for the experience but they need an attitudinal background. Regarding knowledge, Deardorff (2006) highlighted the relevance of cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness. In this line, Reimers (2009) affirmed the importance of knowledge of one's own culture in achieving cultural empathy. The author believed that a firm understanding

of one's own culture and perspective would facilitate comprehension and sense-making of other cultures. In addition, individuals need to have a holistic understanding of globally significant topics such as health, sustainability, security conflicts, and economic development, as well as how these issues are related to relevant countries.

Also, Hunter, White & Godbey (2006) and Bresciani (2008) considered "Knowledge" as an important step in helping individuals become globally competent: they must acquire specific knowledge regarding the foreign culture. This knowledge should go beyond conventional surface-level familiarity with foods, greetings, customs, etc. Knowledge must be sufficiently in-depth to provide students with the imperative context to comprehend the complexity of global phenomena.

With regard to skills, Deardorff (2006) emphasises skills to listen, observe and evaluate, analytical skills, goal-achievement skills and interpretative skills. This author argues that individuals must demonstrate a set of *skills* necessary for them to function competently in an intercultural environment. Although they are an important dimension well-recognised in nearly every global competence-related study, there is substantial disagreement on what exactly these global skills are. They range widely from personal characteristics, such as leadership, self-management, self-reliance and self-control, to acquired capabilities such as second language proficiency, adapting to difficult situations, handling stress and communication skills, and even to such a seemingly trivial matter a sense of humour. In order to categorise these large varieties of skills, Piacentini (2017) considers the construct of skills to comprise three sub-dimensions: (i) the ability to acquire, analyse, evaluate information, use cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems; (ii) the skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds; and (iii) the capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown. For a more holistic approach, this can be complemented with the skill of self-management, which becomes key in out-of-the-comfort-zone situations: "Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organisation, responsibility, and self-reliance" (Ornella et al., 2018, p.113).

According to the Deardorff (2006) model, KSAs can generate effective and appropriate behaviour in intercultural environments (external outcomes), i.e. someone could behave properly in a new intercultural situation without changing their mental frame (having learned a behavioural pattern without understanding it). However, ideally, intercultural effective and appropriate behaviour should be achieved through adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view and empathy (internal transformation or internal outcomes). For example, living abroad and cohabitation with different languages and cultures led students to deeper cultural understanding and better intercultural communicative competences – i.e. a complex combination of KSAs necessary for appropriate and effective interactions with people from different countries and cultural backgrounds – where not only communication in a foreign language but also engaging with is specific cultural nuances (Jacobone and Moro, 2015).

2.5 The theoretical approach used in the Erasmus Skills project

As we mentioned before, the Erasmus Skills project focuses on soft KSAs related to mobility experiences, with special emphasis on intercultural or global issues. In other words, we focus on the characteristics that Deardorff describes as individual (see Figure 1), understood as the key ingredients that a student would need to gain and deploy specific competences during its interactions during mobility.

Accordingly, the tools produced by the Erasmus Skills project aim at supporting the development of those KSAs necessary for gaining mobility-related competences, i.e. we put our focus on the learning mobility outcomes understood as KSAs, not on the process through which those KSAs merge and are combined to yield specific competences. In doing so, we intend to foster a deep self-reflection among students so that they can explain to others (e.g. universities, employers, family and friends) all the added value to their training thanks to their mobility experience. Using the KSA approach, students could acknowledge the mobility benefits in detail, without losing the information that a competence approach (more general, complex and abstract) could entail. In this way, we

intend to help students to adapt their speech to the expectations of the listener (e.g. different employers may be interested in specific KSAs, information that we would lose if we focused on competences) and make the most out of their mobility experience.

Table 2 summarises the theoretical approach and KSAs described along Section 2 and used in the Erasmus Skills project.

Table 2. Dimensions and sub-dimensions of soft competences considered in the Erasmus Skills project.

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Source
Knowledge	- Cultural self-awareness: knowledge on one's own culture in the global context; - Deep cultural knowledge: knowledge about the other culture in question; - Global knowledge: understanding of global issues, processes, trends, and systems; - Sociolinguistic awareness; - Specific higher education knowledge (higher education system, methods and field-related knowledge).	Deardorff (2006), Reimers (2009), Gonzales & Wagenaar (2003)
Skills	- Ability to acquire, analyse, evaluate information, use cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems; - Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds; - Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown; - Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.	Piacentini (2017), Ornellas et al. (2018)
Attitudes	- Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities; - Tolerance and respect to cultural differences and ambiguity.	Hunter (2004), Deardorff (2006)

3.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO GAINMOBILITY-RELATED KSAS: INSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES, ACTIVITIES OR SERVICES
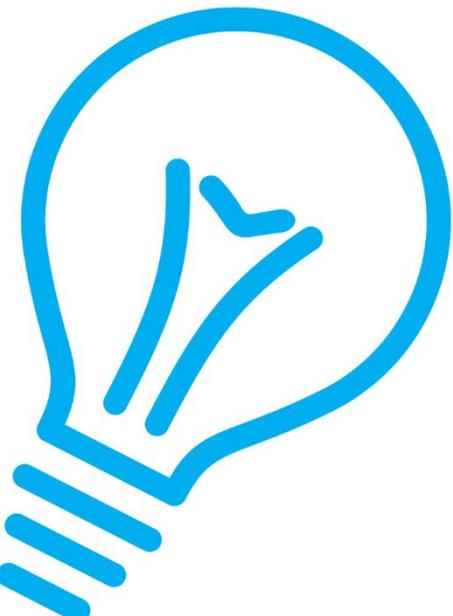
This section explores the actual initiatives, activities or services carried out by universities and other institutions in order to: (i) support students developing the above-mentioned knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs); (ii) assist (academic or administrative) staff in supporting students to gain some of those KSAs. In this section, we describe a set of institutional initiatives, activities or services that may help universities to provide support to mobility students in making the most of their mobility experience for the development of KSAs related to soft competences. We also provide some concluding remarks on the gaps identified in the institutional support offered to mobility students and propose some alternatives.

3.1 Methodology

The collection of initiatives was carried out through an online form in two separated phases. In the first phase we collected initiatives carried out within the partner institutions of the Erasmus Skills project, testing and validating the questionnaire. On the basis of this test, the online form was modified with two purposes: (i) keeping the same methodology (questions) to ensure continuity and comparability of the answers (initiatives) collected in both phases; and (ii) reducing ambiguities and possible misleading formulations of the questions. In the second phase, the final survey (see Annex I) was distributed by all partners among their networks.

To collect initiatives from different partners was one of the indicators of success that we defined in the Erasmus Skills project proposal. In the proposal, the consortium compromised to reach 2 initiatives per partner with a total of 12 initiatives collected. As soon as we were developing the survey, we decided to expand it further and to reach a broader audience with more perspectives, so we could provide a wider variety of examples that could help those HEIs' practitioners that still have limited experience in supporting students and staff on mobility related KSAs.

This survey was designed to collect the following information:

- Institutional information: name, type of institution and country.

-   Descriptive information on the initiatives, activities or services: name of the initiative, description, related KSAs[2], duration, target audience, assessment and implementation of the initiative, dissemination, etc.

3.2 Analysis of the initiatives, activities and services identified

The survey was sent to 749 addressees (68 in the first phase and 681 in the second phase) from European and non-European higher education institutions, companies, foundations and NGOs. Although the initial commitment of the Erasmus Skills consortium was to collect 12 initiatives, thanks to our extensive dissemination we received up to 32 valid answers[3]: 13 in the first phase and 19 in the second phase - not surprisingly, the response rate was higher in the first phase, in which the survey was tested within the partner institutions. In this section we provide an exploratory analysis of the 32 initiatives identified, with the aim of helping HEIs' practitioners in reflecting about the support they provide to students and staff on mobility related KSAs and provides examples on how to do so - Annex II includes a description of the 32 answers finally considered. However, it is not our objective to provide general and extrapolatable conclusions from this analysis – the size of the sample is valid for the purposes of this study, but not for additional objectives such as reaching extrapolatable conclusions, identifying general trends or recognising patterns by type of institution or country.

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[2] The list of KSAs included in the survey was based in the draft version of the questionnaires for Erasmus students' self-assessment (see Section 3).

[3] Nine answers were excluded from the analysis because they do not address competence development issues, are incomplete or are occasional activities implemented by chance without any institutional support/planning.

Graph 1. Institutions that answered the survey: by type of institution.
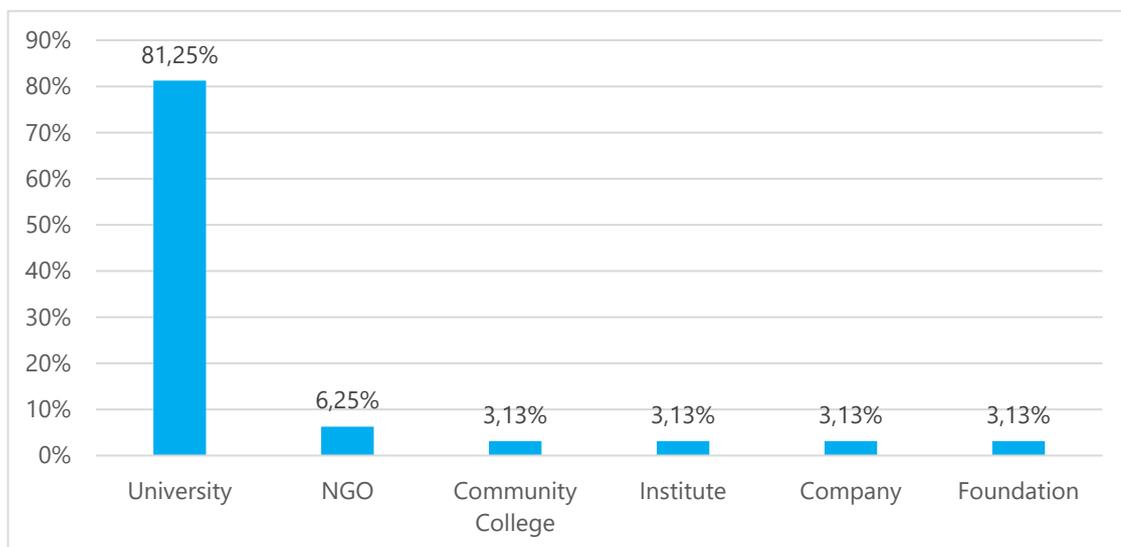
The analysed initiatives came mostly from universities (26) but also from NGOs (2), community colleges (1), institutes (1), companies (1), and foundations (1) – see Graph 1. Answers came from institutions from 14 different countries, mostly from Europe: Belgium (8), Finland (1), France (2), Germany (2), Greece (4), Italy (4), Poland (1), Portugal (3), Romania, (1), Spain (1), Sweden (2) and The Netherlands (1); but also from the United States of America (1) and Canada (1) – see Graph 2.

Graph 2. Institutions that answered the survey: by country.
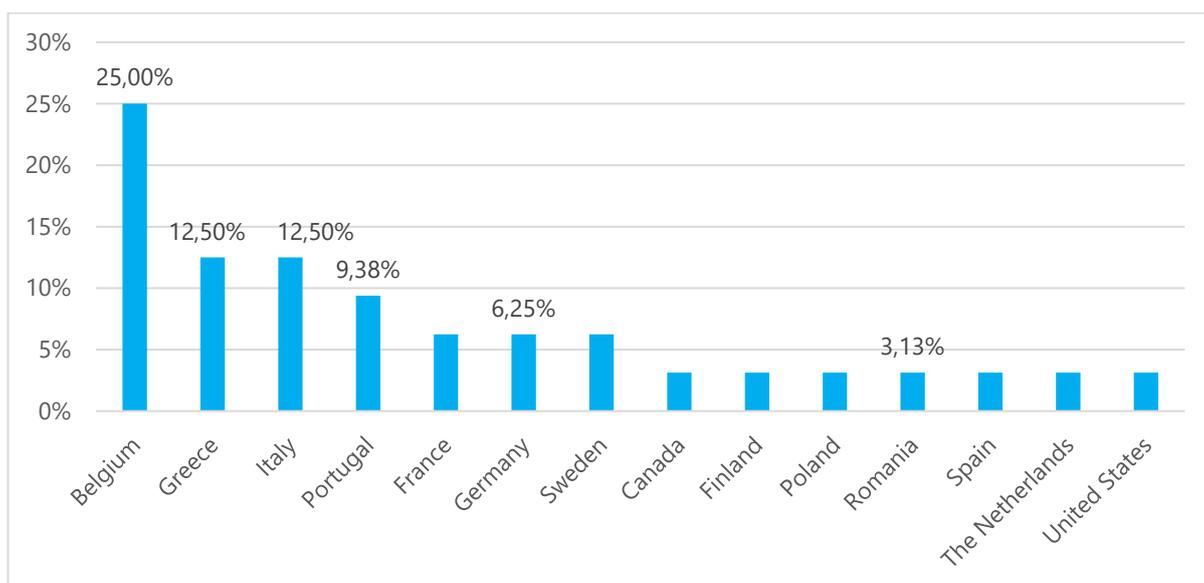
The 32 initiatives collected can be classified into *initiatives aimed at supporting students before mobility (17 initiatives - 53.12%)* and *during mobility (15 initiatives - 46.88%)*. We did not identify any initiative aimed at supporting students after mobility. In the case of initiatives assisting (academic or administrative) staff in supporting students, we only found some informative meetings regarding application processes and paperwork, but not on KSA development and student integration processes. Further information about the initiatives identified is available in Annex II.

3.2.1 Initiatives aimed at supporting students before mobility

In our sample, the initiatives supporting students before they participate in mobility experiences have two distinct purposes: (i) encouraging students to participate in international mobility programmes; and (ii) training students in those mobility related KSAs – see table 3.

There are three types of initiatives that seek to encourage students to participate in international mobility programmes:

- <u>Seminars on the international job market:</u> seminars in which Experts from European companies are invited to share their view on the international industrial context and the requirements for companies operating in such environments. It is aimed at all students, whether they will participate in a mobility programme or not.

- <u>International week/day to promote mobility:</u> once a year (usually during the fall term) workshops and meetings are held with partners (foreign universities) to inform students about mobility options. More specifically, students get information from study advisors and international offices regarding where/when they can go abroad and they also get information and inspiration from incoming or returning students.

As for those initiatives that offer training in mobility-related KSAs, they may be classified as follows:

- <u>Pre-mobility language courses:</u> specific language courses addressed to outgoing Erasmus students. In most cases, the focus is put on academic language, but also on general communication skills in the foreign language. All courses follow the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

- <u>Informative meetings prior to mobility:</u> formal or informal meetings in which outgoing students receive basic information for their arrival to the host country/university (in some cases they also include contents related to intercultural competences). They seek to offer information and clarify doubts before mobility. All initiatives facilitate discussion between outgoing and returning (or incoming) students so they can exchange experiences and advice.

- <u>Workshops/courses/tools on mobility-related KSAs</u>: training sessions, workshops or courses addressing mobility-related KSAs. They take the form of face-to-face or online courses and they do not always address outgoing Erasmus students (e.g. introductory courses to first year students that include modules concerning social and cultural integration. Most trainings apply an overall perspective, covering a wide range of KSAs necessary during the mobility experience, for example, travel safety and health issues, intercultural awareness and cross cultural communication, culture shock, information about the target culture, student learning possibilities, etc.; however, some initiatives include a strong focus on intercultural competences or international employability and job-seeking – there are even some initiatives addressing exclusively these issues. They usually share materials to clarify frequent doubts and offer tips to students, in addition to tackling the prejudices they may have. These are very varied in their durations: from 3 hours to 3 ECTS.

Table 3. Summary of the institutional initiatives, activities or services collected addressed to outgoing students.

Objective	Short description	No.	KSAs
Encouraging student mobility	Seminars on the international job market	1	-(K) Technical skills, Cultural knowledge, Educational context -(S) Analytical skills, Creative thinking, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability -(A) Open mindedness, European identity, Transcultural understanding
	International week/day to promote mobility	3	-(K) Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context, Sociolinguistic awareness, administrative steps and scholarships -(S) Problem solving, Organizational skills, Adaptability, Creative thinking, Communication skills, Language skills -(A) Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, Transcultural understanding, independence, autonomy and proactivity
Training in mobility-related KSAs	Pre-mobility language courses	1	-(S) Communication skills, Language skills
	Informative meetings prior to mobility	4	-(K) Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Cultural knowledge, Educational context, history, contemporary society -(S) Adaptability, Communication skills, Language skills, Team work, Activity design, Confidence (Attitude) -(A) Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Transcultural understanding, Confidence, Equality & Equity, Confidence

	Workshops/courses/tools on mobility related KSAs	8	-(K) Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Educational context -(S) Problem solving, Creative thinking, Adaptability, Communication skills, Analytical skills Activity design, Team work, Organizational skills, Negotiation skills, Language skills, Adaptability -(A) Open Mindedness, Confidence, European identity, Transcultural understanding, Proactivity and Engagement, Equality & equity

Graph 3 shows the type of knowledge that the initiatives in our sample that support outgoing students try to enhance. More than 82% of the identified initiatives aimed at improving the cultural knowledge of outgoing students, followed by self-awareness (76.5%) and sociolinguistic awareness (47.1%). On the contrary, the type of knowledge that less initiatives aimed at improving are technical knowledge and knowledge on the educational context: they seem to be types of knowledge expected to be acquired mostly during the mobility experience and not beforehand.

Graph 3. Types of knowledge addressed by the initiatives supporting outgoing students.
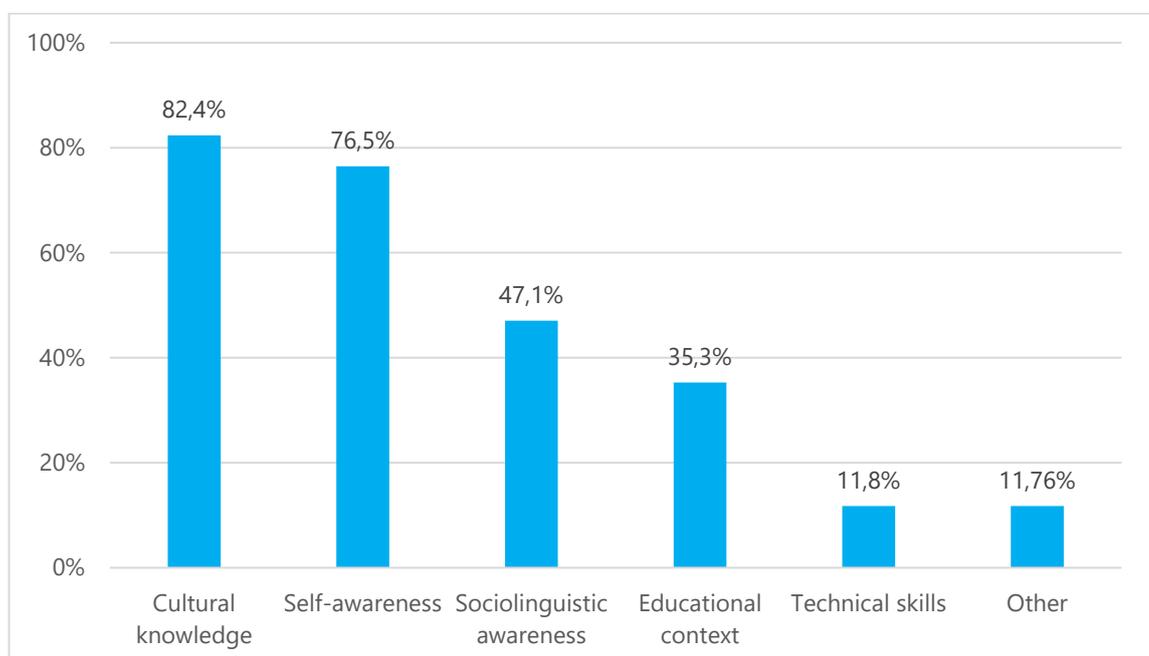
As for the Skills (see Graph 4), more than 76% of the collected initiatives aimed at improving the communication and the adaptability skills of outgoing students, followed by language skills (47.1%) and problem solving (41.2%). These results may entail that, before mobility, the main concern of the respondent institutions is to facilitate students' future adaptation to their host country: they will have to communicate in a different language and context and adapt to a new culture.

According to Graph 5, the main Attitudes addressed by those initiatives supporting outgoing students are open mindedness (88.2%) and transcultural understanding

Graph 4. Skills addressed by the initiatives supporting outgoing students.
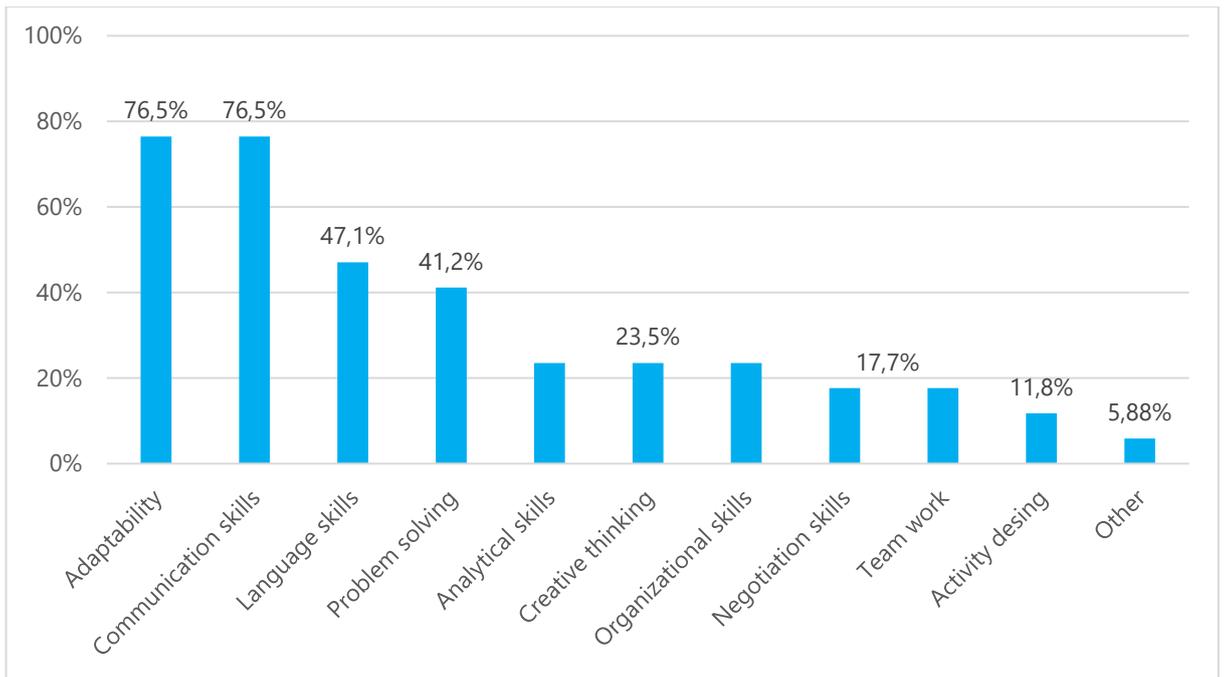
(82.5%). These results show again the concern of the respondent institutions about facilitating students' adaptation to the host country: the collected initiatives aim mostly at improving empathic attitudes and mental appraisals that support tolerance and understanding towards foreign cultures.

Graph 5. Attitudes addressed by the initiatives supporting outgoing students.
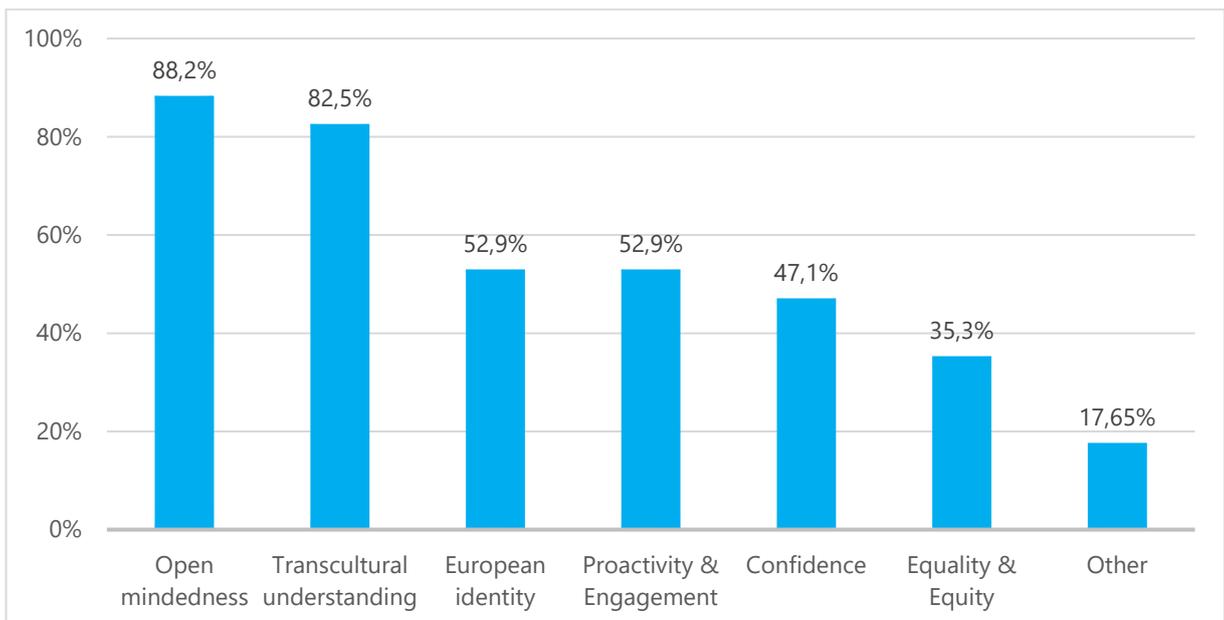
3.2.2 Initiatives aimed at supporting students during mobility

The initiatives in our sample supporting students during mobility have the following objectives: (i) the integration of the incoming students in the city, the university and/or the culture and (ii) the support of KSAs development – see Table 4. As for those initiatives favouring the integration of the incoming students, we have classified them as follows:

- <u>Welcome meetings to deliver information to students:</u> these meetings allow universities to deliver practical information about the university and also to meet other exchange students and establish social relationships. Some of the activities which are carried out are the tour of the university, presentation of services for students and description of administrative processes.

- <u>Accompaniment initiatives</u>: we have identified a number of initiatives aiming at accompanying incoming students upon their arrival or during their mobility experience in order to facilitate their integration in the city/university/culture. These initiatives are diverse: e.g. on-line psychological support, buddy programmes (native students support incoming students by participating in integration activities or providing information and advice), academic guidance by tutors, social and cultural activities and workshops (e.g. photography, folk dancing, city/university tours, etc.).

- <u>Student engagement:</u> some initiatives seek KSA development through active engagement of mobility students with the university context. They include: (i) invitations to international students to deliver presentations on their home countries to school children and (ii) on-campus job/volunteering opportunities (to all undergraduate students including international students) along with experiential and reflective venues where students are encouraged to reflect on their learning process.

Table 4. Summary of the institutional initiatives, activities or services collected addressed to incoming students.

Objective	Short description	No.	KSAs
Student integration	Welcome meetings	3	-(K) Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context, Technical skills -(S) Activity design, Team work, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability -(A) Confidence, Open Mindedness, Proactivity and Engagement, European identity, Transcultural understanding, Equality & equity
	Accompaniment initiatives	5	-(K) Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Technical skills, Educational context -(S) Language skills, Adaptability, Communication skills, Organizational skills -(A) Open mindedness, Transcultural understanding, Confidence, European identity, Equality & Equity
	Student engagement	2	-(K) Technical skills, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Sociolinguistic awareness, Educational context -(S) Problem solving, Team work, Communication skills, Negotiation skills, Adaptability, Organizational skills, Language skills -(A) Proactivity and Engagement, Confidence, Open mindedness, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding

Training in mobility-related KSAs	Language courses	2	-(K) Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context, Technical skills -(S) Team work, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability, Problem solving, Organizational skills -(A) Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
	KSA measurement and development	3	-(K) Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Awareness of skills-oriented to labour market needs, Technical skills, Cultural knowledge, Educational context -(S) Analytical skills, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Team work, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability, Transversal skills, Soft Skills, Activity design, Organizational skills, Negotiation skills -(A) Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, Transcultural understanding, Resilience, self-reliance, self-insight, European identity

The initiatives supporting KSAs development are the following:

- <u>Language courses</u>: different language courses are offered to incoming students (not only in the native language of the host country). These courses are available in wider programmes, together with other courses based on non-linguistic KSAs such as conflict resolution or host culture.

- <u>KSA measurement and development</u>: respondents of our survey portrayed initiatives aiming at supporting KSA development. These initiatives include: (i) a conceptual framework for international competences gained during volunteering activities while participating in a mobility experience and a survey; (ii) a survey on the skills developed by students volunteering on international contexts; and (iii) a digital learning toolkit for training to take advantage of the opportunities of an Erasmus experience for personal skills development, together with training in communicating the experiences gathered during mobility and the insights and personal developments achieved.

Graph 6. Types of Knowledge addressed by the initiatives supporting students during mobility.
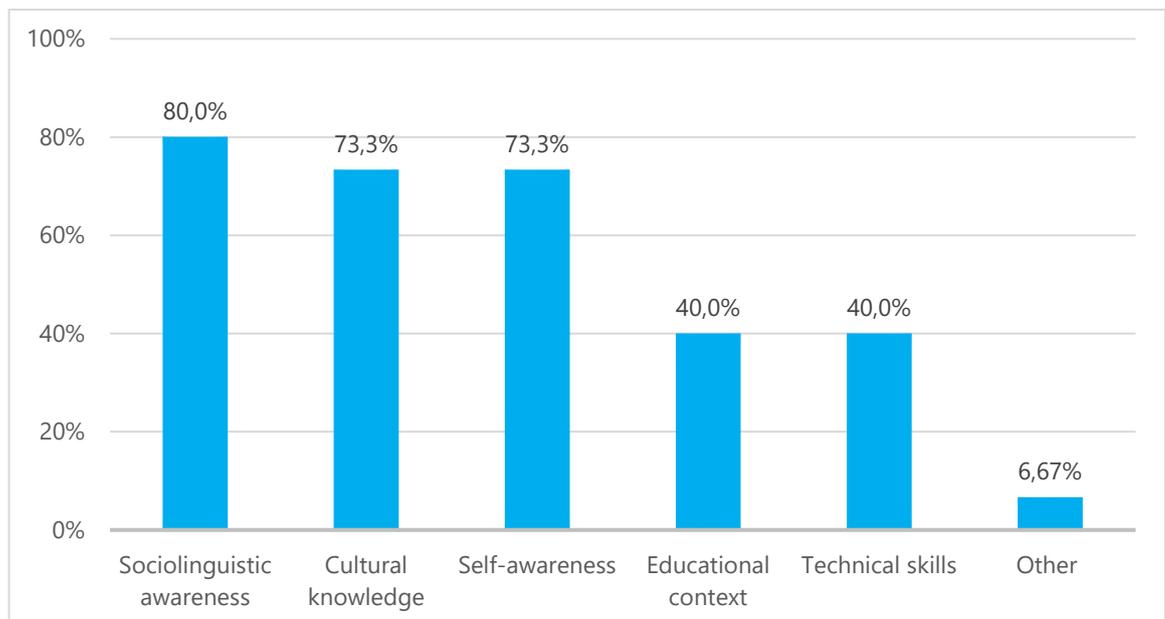
Graph 6 shows the type of Knowledge that the collected initiatives supporting students during mobility intend to enhance. The types of knowledge addressed the most are sociolinguistic awareness (80%) and self-awareness and cultural knowledge (73.3%) as we already found for those initiatives supporting outgoing students (see Graph 3). However, in this case initiatives also intend to improve knowledge on the educational context and technical knowledge (40% in both cases). Basically, initiatives aim at facilitating the two main areas in which students need to mature: daily life outside their comfort zone (sociolinguistics and self-awareness) and academic life (educational context and technical knowledge).

Graph 7. Skills addressed by the initiatives supporting students during mobility.
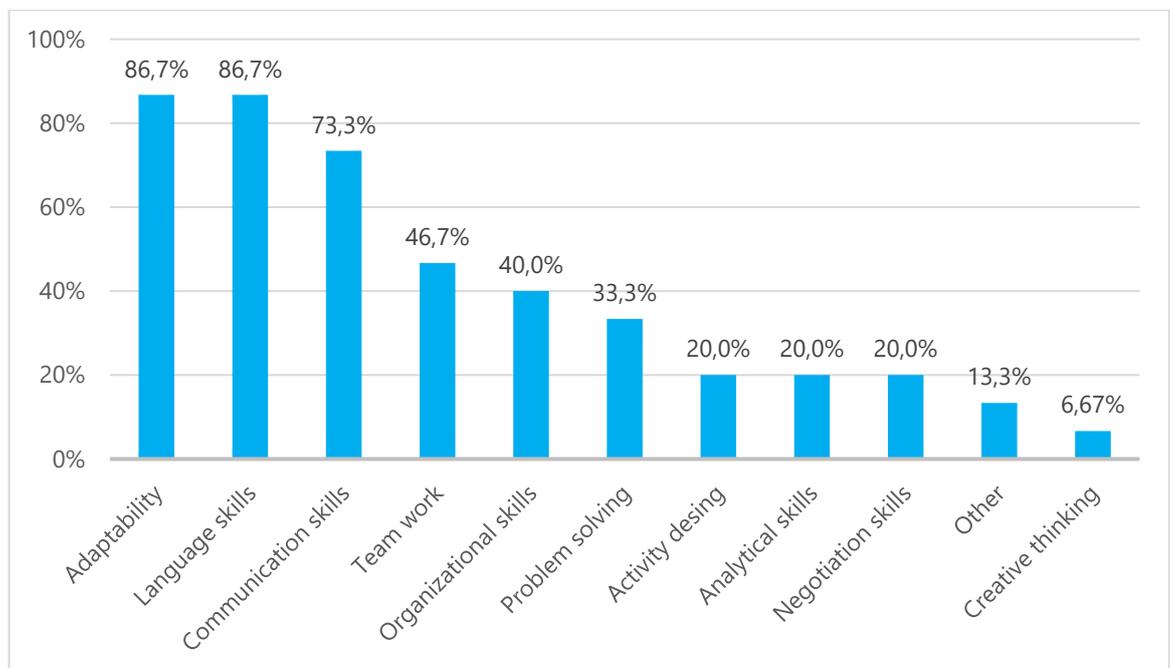
As for the Skills (see Graph 7), the distribution is quite similar to the case of the initiatives supporting outgoing students. Again, most of the collected initiatives address adaptability and language skills (86.7%), communication skills (73.3%) and teamwork (46.7%) since the main concern regarding incoming students is still to facilitate their adaptation and integration in the host country/city/university. Additionally, it is worthy to highlight that very few initiatives support the development of creative thinking. This may entail that these in the respondent

institutions skills are usually addressed in university courses but not through institutional initiatives tailored to incoming students.

According to Graph 8, the main Attitudes addressed by those initiatives in our sample supporting outgoing students are transcultural understanding (73.3%), confidence and open mindedness (60%) and proactivity and engagement (53.3%), favouring student's integration.

Graph 8. Attitudes addressed by the initiatives supporting students during mobility.
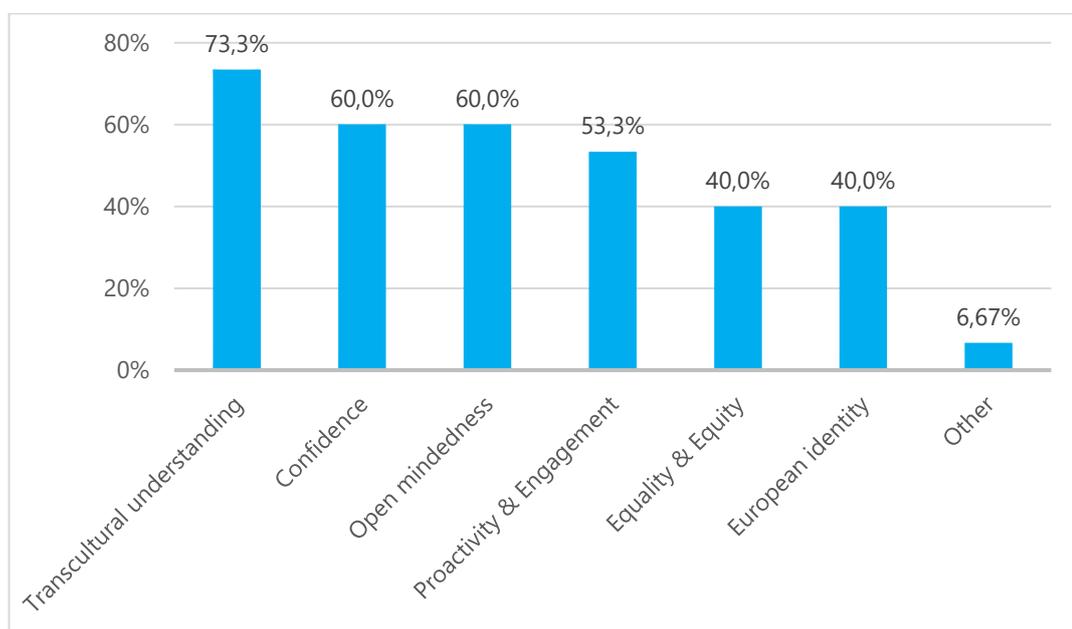
3.3. Conclusions: gaps in the institutional support to the development of student-international competences in Europe

From the analysis in Section 3, on our sample, we can make the following reflections – we remind these are not extrapolatable conclusions but useful tips for helping HEIs' practitioners in reflecting about the support they provide to students and staff on mobility related KSAs.

In the case of the initiatives addressing outgoing and incoming students, we have identified two ways for supporting students' KSA development: (i) passive initiatives

based on delivering relevant information for the mobility period to students –; and (ii) active initiatives based on training activities and activities for student integration in host university/city/culture. We consider a good practice to combine both types of initiatives since they complement each other; however, the data collected does not allow testing if combining them is a common practice or not.

Most interestingly, we have not identified any institutional initiative supporting returning students. The only initiatives that involve returned students are those in which they can share their experience with outgoing or incoming students; however, these initiatives do not aim at addressing the needs of the returned students. Although the limited size of our sample prevents us from extrapolating these results to other universities and countries, this gap is aligned with the results of ESNsurvey (Josek et al., 2016), in which Erasmus students reported the lack of support services after the mobility period, even though several studies show that in many cases coming back to their home country is a difficult time for mobility students. The Erasmus Skills project may provide relevant information in the future for universities to provide support to students in this sense, at least in the reinforcement and root of the mobility-related KSAs acquired during the mobility experience based on the results of the self-reflection performed through the Erasmus+ App. However, specific questionnaires of students' difficulties for reintegration may be useful too. In this mobility phase, Erasmus coordinators and tutors may play a fundamental role in this mobility phase, since they could provide advice and support for self-reflection and re-adaptation. Also, the scope of the interaction between outgoing and returned students could be extended to the reinforcement of the benefits for returned students.

We have neither found in our sample initiatives aiming at assisting (academic and administrative) staff in supporting students to gain mobility-related KSAs in our sample. Indeed, the only initiatives reported that involve university staff consist in providing administrative information on mobility programmes. The Erasmus Skills project intends to facilitate the implementation of initiatives supporting the university staff both through the contents included in this Guide and through the workshop guidelines available in the Erasmus Skills website.

Regarding the assessment of the initiatives implemented, respondent institutions either do not gather any feedback from students or base the initiatives' evaluation on satisfaction questionnaires that do aim to collect information on KSAs development. Notwithstanding, we did find an interesting exception based on a conceptual framework on the KSAs that should be developed in a mobility experience (Social Erasmus project). Gathering KSAs feedback may help in making more explicit this objective, revising initiatives to render them more effective in this sense and reinforcing the students' understanding on the goals of the Erasmus experience. In this sense, the self-assessment questionnaire on mobility-related KSAs that we have included in the Erasmus+ App is a useful tool for universities, since they can check which are the weakest KSAs of their students before leaving, which are the KSAs in which their incoming students do not improve, and in which KSAs returned students need further support. With this information, universities can revise and re-think their set of institutional initiatives for mobility-related soft KSA development.

As we already mentioned, there are some KSAs that only few of the collected initiatives support. For example, technical skills and creative thinking are addressed by few initiatives, probably because the respondent institutions usually address them in university courses but not through institutional initiatives tailored to mobility students. Also, surprisingly enough, very few of the collected initiatives support the development of students' European identity or key European values such as equality and equity. The workshop guidelines and webinars produced within the Erasmus Skills project could be very useful for universities to overcome this gap. Also, initiatives aiming at encouraging the mobility students' participation in the daily campus life, student associations, among others, may help.

Summarising, we have identified interesting initiatives encouraging the participation in mobility programmes, facilitating incoming students' integration and supporting the development of mobility-related KSAs. Some of these initiatives are very interesting and could be easily extended to most universities (see Annex II for a detailed description). However, universities should define their strategy in this field, making explicit the characteristics of the mobility experience that they want to offer and its expected learning outcomes (including KSAs). In this way, they could design a

set of activities (and assessment and monitoring tools) that exploits their complementarities and work in a coordinated way as an effective plan to reach the university goals. This set of initiatives should include incentives for student participation as well as informative sessions and training for the staff involved.

4.

SUPPORTING STUDENT SELF-REFLECTION ON MOBILITY-RELATED KSAS: SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE ERASMUS+ APP
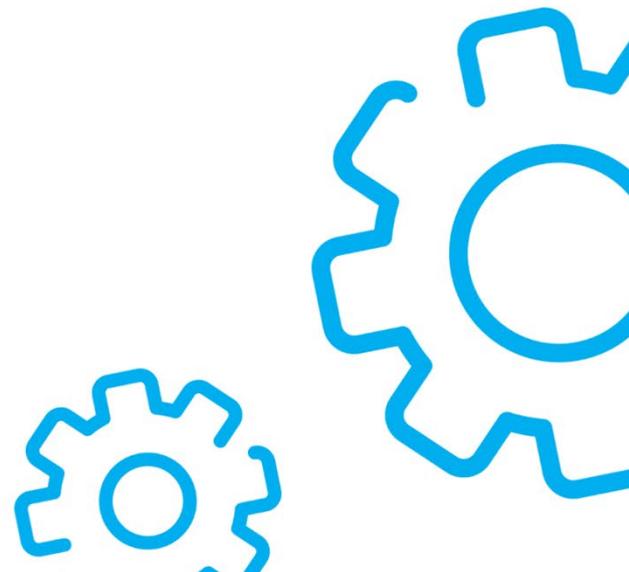
4.1 Self-assessment questionnaires on mobility-related KSAs: a new functionality in the Erasmus+ App

The Erasmus+ App is a tool for Erasmus+ students, currently available for mobile devices. The App is divided into several marketplaces and offers different services to support students throughout the mobility process, accompanying them from the start of the mobility to the return to their home country.

The App has experienced constant growth in functionalities and the process will only continue. As of now, the Erasmus+ App offers the following features:

- Step-by-Step checklists to guide students through the most important milestones during mobility

- Push-notifications with crucial information from home and host Higher Education Institutions

- Updates of the status of the Online Learning Agreement

- Useful tips from other Erasmus+ participants and the chance to contribute

- Information on relevant events from local ESN organisations

- A newsfeed and local events and activities

- Connection to the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support

- Structured information on other opportunities available under the Erasmus+ umbrella

As we have previously discussed (see Section 2), during their international mobility experience students are immersed in a process of personal and professional development through the acquisition/enhancement of mobility-related KSAs. To help students to communicate this personal and professional development, the Erasmus Skills project has created a new marketplace into the Erasmus+ App that allows students to self-assess their learning mobility outcomes (KSAs). This new marketplace consists of two separated questionnaires (integrated into the App in the form of two checklists):

- "Before questionnaire": a self-assessment questionnaire on KSAs for outgoing students. This questionnaire is to be answered before the mobility experience starts.

- "After questionnaire": a self-assessment questionnaire on KSAs for returning students. This questionnaire is to be answered once the mobility experience has ended.

These questionnaires allow students to self-reflect on their learning process and provide a qualitative approach towards mobility and the evaluation of the related KSAs. After fulfilling each questionnaire, this functionality shows relevant information to facilitate adaptation and enhances awareness on mobility-related KSAs during the mobility experience. Additionally, after completing both questionnaires "Before" and "After" the mobility, the students will be able to see if and how the above-mentioned KSAs have changed during the Erasmus mobility. A document will be issued to help the students reflect on what the Erasmus exchange has brought them and will serve as a strong asset for their CVs and future job interviews.

Through this tool, the Erasmus Skills project intends to provide students with a tool for raising their awareness on their learning mobility outcomes (mobility-related KSAs) and therefore maximise their learning curve and increase their ability to present them also to potential employers. The innovation in this sense is to provide students with a tool that allows them to put concrete words on their personal and professional experience abroad.

According to our theoretical approach (see Section 2), the final questionnaire preserves the KSA approach of the Erasmus Skills project, since we aim at triggering an in-depth self-reflection on students so they can acknowledge the mobility benefits in detail, without losing the information that a competence approach (more general, complex and abstract) could entail. In this way, we intend to help students to adapt their speech to the expectations of the listener (e.g. different employers may be interested in specific KSAs, information that we would lose if we focused on competences) and make the most out of their mobility experience.

The questionnaires are available in the [Erasmus+ App](#), being easily accessible by a huge number of Students – the Erasmus+ App has been downloaded more than 100,000 times by the date, it offers a one-stop-shop for students (freely available on Google Play and Apple store) and it can be used in web browsers as well without the need to download it from the stores. Also, the visualisation available in the [Erasmus+ App](#) will allow the students to get a visual representation of the effect of their student mobility and understand their learning outcomes – respecting the breakdown in KSAs approach of the [Erasmus Skills](#) project, it shows different clusters of learning outcomes. The visualisation allows students to evaluate and compare their mobility-related KSAs before and after their Erasmus experience, and see their evolution through time. The tool is based on the visual aggregation of data from the self-assessment questionnaires (see Section 4.2 of this Guide) and built through aggregating the average scores of KSAs clusters based on the answers of the students – before and after their mobility experience, respectively.

These averages are compared to an overall average from the responses from all students. Students are able to get a personal report that they can export and help them identify the impact of their mobility for their academic progress and later employment opportunities through CVs and interviews. The tool is developed through a micro-service that can be linked through multiple tools beyond the [Erasmus+ App](#).

4.2 The self-assessment questionnaires for mobility-related KSAs

Based on the theoretical framework followed by the [Erasmus Skills](#) project (see Section 2), we have developed two questionnaires to encourage reflection and awareness of students about their learning process abroad with regards to KSAs: one to be fulfilled before the mobility experience and second one to be fulfilled after mobility. To design these questionnaires, we followed the next steps (an in-depth description of our methodology is available in the [Erasmus Skills](#) website):

- Extensive literature review on mobility-related KSAs: the draft questionnaires were built by selecting questions already used in previous studies that were relevant for the Erasmus Skills project's purposes. Following the theoretical framework described in Section 2, questions sub-grouped in three dimensions: Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes.

- Pre-test (at the three partner universities) of the draft questionnaires by 6 outgoing students for the "before questionnaire" and 7 students (5 after returning from mobility and 2 students during mobility) for the "after questionnaire". Additionally, the draft questionnaires were also tested by 2 staff members dealing with competency-based learning. The main intention was to ensure the understanding of all questions and get some insights on how to improve the questionnaire.

The purpose of pretesting the questionnaires was to determine: (i) whether the questions' wording was clear and easily understood by respondents; (ii) whether structure of the questionnaire was correct (order of the questions, Likert scale, etc.); (iii) whether additional questions were needed or whether some questions should be eliminated; and (iv) whether the instructions to fill in the questionnaires were adequate.

On the basis of this pre-test, the "before" and "after" questionnaires (together with their instructions) were revised.

- Validation (at the three partner universities - Belgium, Greece and Spain) of the revised questionnaires through in-depth face-to-face interviews with 22 students: (i) three focus groups with 11 outgoing students - leaving for Austria, Belgium, Finland, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Sweden and studying business, economics, education, food processing, engineering, physics and medicine; and three focus groups with 12 returned students returned from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK and studying business, economics, international politics, law, film studies, education, philosophy and pharmaceutical sciences. The consortium applied a standardised methodology (see Annex III).

The focus groups were divided in two sections: (i) test of the revised "before" or "after" questionnaire; and (ii) discussion among students on the questions posed by the facilitators (see Table 5). In this way, we tested the adequateness of the questionnaires and made sure that we the questionnaires did not miss relevant KSAs for Erasmus students.

Table 5. Questions posed during focus groups**.**

Focus group with outgoing students	Focus group with returned students
- What is the purpose of Erasmus? How do you perceive the purpose of Erasmus?	- What is the purpose of Erasmus? How do you perceive the purpose of Erasmus?
- With what purpose did you choose to enjoy an Erasmus grant? How did you decide to join Erasmus for studies? What are your main motives for making this decision?	- Could you define the KSAs you gained during this mobility experience?
- Could you define the KSA you expect to gain or gained during your mobility experience?	- Was your discipline taught differently in your host institution?
- In what way do you think this experience will be valuable for your career?	- In what way do you think this experience was valuable for your career?
- What support do you think you will need to make the most of this experience?	- Could you please give some recommendations to students who are going to study abroad under Erasmus, on how they can maximise their experience?
- Readiness for the experience - Do you feel well prepared for this mobility experience? In what way?	- What support do you think you should have had to make the most of your mobility experience?

As a result of the pre-tests and validation process, the questionnaires were modified, and questions on KSAs were grouped in five main clusters or topics: intercultural competence, adaptability to change, teamwork, planning & organization and creativity. Table 6 shows the final questions and clusters that have been included in the Erasmus+ App self-assessment tool.

Table 6. Questions on mobility-related KSAs included in the self-assessment questionnaires.

Cluster	Question		KSA	Subdimension	Reference
European Identity and Global Citizenship	I am interested in knowing what happens in Europe daily (politics, economy, culture, education, etc).	A	European identity	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	European Commission (2014, p.129)
	I feel European.	A	European identity	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	European Commission (2014, p.129)
	I feel like a global citizen.	A	Global identity	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	OECD (2018)
	I respect the views and the thoughts of others even if they are significantly different from mine.	A	Equality & equity	Tolerance and respect to cultural differences and ambiguity	Petrova (2010, p.2), Deardorff (2004)
	I respect and follow the principle of equality in humanity.	A	Equality & equity	Tolerance and respect to cultural differences and ambiguity	Petrova (2010, p.2), Deardorff (2004)
	I am interested in knowing what happens in the world daily.	A	Proactivity and engagement	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	McKinnon (2012, p.2), Lorent et al. (2014)
Cultural knowledge	I have a clear sense of my own cultural identity.	K	Cultural knowledge	Cultural self-awareness: knowledge on one's own culture in the global context	Bennett (2008), McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I am aware of how my culture influences my perception of what is "normal" in behaviours, communication styles or values.	K	Cultural knowledge	Cultural self-awareness: knowledge on one's own culture in the global context	Bennett (2008), McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I am aware of the assumptions that I hold about people of different cultures than my own.	K	Cultural knowledge	Cultural self-awareness: knowledge on one's own culture in the global context	Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (n.d)

	I am aware of the political and economic life of the host country.	K	Cultural knowledge	Deep cultural knowledge: knowledge about the other culture in question;	McKinnon (2012, p.2), Social Erasmus+ (n.d.)
	I am aware of the customs, traditions, religion in the host country.	K	Cultural knowledge	Deep cultural knowledge: knowledge about the other culture in question;	McKinnon (2012, p.2), Social Erasmus+ (n.d.)
Social skills	I enjoy meeting and cooperating with people from different cultural backgrounds.	A	Transcultural understanding	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	Deardorff (2004), McKinnon (2012, p.2), Keeley (2014), Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (n.d)
	I see the value of interacting with different cultures.	A	Transcultural understanding	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	Deardorff (2004), McKinnon (2012, p.2), Keeley (2014), Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (n.d)
	I am able to (effectively) communicate my ideas in intercultural social environments.	S	Language skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	Reid et al. (2010), McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I can understand well nonverbal communication and gestures across cultures.	S	Communication skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	Reid et al. (2010), Evrard and Bergstein (2016)
	I put effort in meeting new people.	A	Transcultural understanding	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	Deardorff (2004), McKinnon (2012, p.2), Keeley (2014), Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (n.d)
Curiosity / Openness attitudes	I feel comfortable when I encounter differences in race, colour, religion, language or ethnicity.	K	Cultural knowledge	Global knowledge: understanding of global issues, processes, trends, and systems	Bennett (2008), McKinnon (2012, p.2)

50

	I accept that today's globalised societies are characterized by diversity.	A	Open mindedness	Tolerance and respect to cultural differences and ambiguity	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I see the value of interacting with different cultures.	A	Open mindedness	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I am tolerant of other persons' values and behaviours.	A	Equality & equity	Tolerance and respect to cultural differences and ambiguity	Petrova (2010, p.2), Deardorff (2004)
	I am ready to live abroad and learn new things.	A	Open mindedness	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	McKinnon (2012, p.2), Lorent et al. (2014)
Discipline Awareness	I am aware that my field of studies can be applied differently in other countries.	K	Educational context	Specific higher education knowledge (higher education system, methods and field-related knowledge)	Bracht, et al. (2006), Social Erasmus+ (n.d.)
	I am aware of the teaching and educational methods used in the host university.	K	Educational context	Specific higher education knowledge (higher education system, methods and field-related knowledge)	McKinnon (2012, p.2.), European Commission (2014)
	In my discipline, I am able to handle problems from different perspectives and think in an original or creative way.	S	Problem solving	Ability to acquire, analyse, evaluate information, use cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems;	Petrova (2010, p. 2), Reid et al. (2010), McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I feel prepared to enter the (international) labour market of my discipline.	A	Confidence	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	Petrova (2010, p.2), Reid et al. (2010), Keeley (2014)
Communication in different languages	I do not let my language level hold me back from speaking with people.	S	Language skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and	Reid et al. (2010), McKinnon (2012, p.2)

				connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	
	I can explain clearly to local people of the host country what I need and why I need it.	S	Language skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	Reid et al. (2010)
	I have working knowledge of the language spoken in the host country.	K	Sociolinguistic Awareness	Sociolinguistic Awareness	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I feel confident about giving a presentation in a language different from my mother tongue.	S	Communication skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	Reid et al. (2010), Evrard and Bergstein (2016)
	I am able to communicate my ideas and thoughts to people from other cultures.	S	Communication skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	Reid et al. (2010), Evrard and Bergstein (2016)
Adaptability to Change	I understand that open-mindedness regarding new challenges is important.	A	Open mindedness	Openness, curiosity and discovery to intercultural opportunities	McKinnon (2012, p.2), Lorent et al. (2014)
	I apply logic and reasoning to identify alternative solutions and approaches to problems.	S	Problem solving	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	Petrova (2010, p. 2), Reid et al. (2010), McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I create solutions in difficult or challenging contexts.	S	Problem solving	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	Petrova (2010, p. 2), Reid et al. (2010), McKinnon (2012, p.2)

		S	Adaptability	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	Petrova (2010, p. 2), Reid et al. (2010)
	I am able to adapt to new environments.				
	I feel confident enough to deal with unexpected events.	S	Adaptability	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	Reid et al. (2010)
Teamwork in diverse environment	I am able to work collaboratively in teams	S	Team work	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I can work easily in intercultural groups	S	Team work	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I am able to interact with people who hold different interests, values, or perspectives	S	Team work	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I am able to work together with people from a different scientific discipline.	S	Team work	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	McKinnon (2012, p.2)
	I feel confident in expressing my honest opinion in a group.	S	Team work	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and	McKinnon (2012, p.2)

				connect with people from other cultural backgrounds	
	When different opinions are arising in a group, I am able to reconcile.	S	Negotiation skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from other cultural backgrounds;	Keeley (2014)
Planning & Organizing	I consider myself able to plan and organise tasks and activities.	S	Organizational skills	Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.	Evrard and Bergstein (2016), Ornellas et al. (2018)
	I am effective at managing time.	S	Organizational skills	Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.	Evrard and Bergstein (2016), Ornellas et al. (2018)
	I am able to synthesize information and to provide analysis with a critical point of view.	S	Analytical skills	Ability to acquire, analyse, evaluate information, use cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems	McKinnon (2012, p.2)

		S	Analytical skills	Ability to acquire, analyse, evaluate information, use cultural references to think critically and solve practical learning problems	Haselberger et al. (2012), Ornellas et al. (2018)
	I am able to gather, analyse and articulate information from resources from different backgrounds in order to solve problems and make decisions.				
	I am capable of setting priorities.	S	Organizational skills	Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.	Evrard and Bergstein (2016)
	I am capable of keeping deadlines.	S	Organizational skills	Ability to set goals and priorities through the selection and distribution of tasks and resources. It also encompasses time management, organization, responsibility, and self-reliance.	Ornellas et al. (2018)
Creativity	I know how to develop an idea and put it into practice.	S	Creative thinking	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	European Commission (2019)
	I can express myself creatively.	S	Communication skills	Skills to listen, observe, and relate, as well as communicate and connect with people from	Reid et al. (2010), Evrard and Bergstein (2016)

				other cultural backgrounds	
	I am able to think outside of the box to bring new ideas to solve problems or seek solutions to a particular situation.	S	Creative thinking	Capacity to use acquired knowledge to extend one's access to learn the unknown	European Commission (2019)

Note: questions are inspired in the indicated references; however, some of the questions have been simplified after testing and validation of the questionnaire in order to facilitate its understanding.

4.3 Insights from Erasmus students relevant for practitioners

In this section, we present the main conclusions withdrawn from the discussion among the 22 students on the above-mentioned questions (Table 5) participating in the focus groups – see Section 4.2 for further details on the characteristics of the participating students and the methodology applied during the focus groups. Focusing on outgoing students and their readiness for the experience (*Do you feel well prepared for this mobility experience? In what way?*), participants expressed two distinct attitudes:

- Insecurity regarding their personal ability to adapt to the new context, especially because of potential housing difficulties and the possibility of travelling to the host country on their own (not along fellow students).
- Excitement and willingness to face this challenge. This attitude is mostly expressed by students that have been abroad previously or by those who are going to go to the host university along with fellow students.

As for the institutional support that Erasmus+ students would welcome (*What support do you think you will need to make the most of this experience?*), Table 7 summarised the suggestions posed. Before their mobility experience, outgoing students requested easier access and communication with the receiving institution (and coordinator/tutor), house seeking support and "welcome days/week" as a way to receive information on the new culture/institution, and as a networking opportunity. After their mobility, returned students in all three universities suggested better communication between the home and host universities along with other rather concrete ideas (see Table 7).

Table 7. Suggestions from students on institutional support in Erasmus mobility.

University	Suggestions
Home institution	- Make the bureaucratic process as easy as possible. - IRO: wide opening hours, updated website with clear information, friendly staff, effective and efficient staff that answers calls and e-mails. - Communication/coordination between the tutors/coordinators of the home and host institutions. - Control of the quality of the tutor/coordinator: list of equivalent subjects in the home and host institutions in order to standardise the criteria applied by coordinators/tutors in learning agreements. - Erasmus grant: the amount of the grant should be closer to the cost of living of the home city. - Network – Platform with former Erasmus Students who share their experience and useful insights of the host universities
Receiving institution	- Information about necessary paperwork and bureaucracy. - Improvement of Digitalization and communication process with administrative staff before mobility and arrangement for housing - Concrete program of studies, flexibility in the evaluation of the Erasmus Students, diminish of recognition problems. - Academic support: There should be a specific guide for courses, in which the bibliography, as well as the demands of the course should be outlined, in order the Erasmus students to be able to know what is expected from each course. - Language Courses in the local language free of charge, obligatory for Erasmus Students, practical and with local students invited to help in the running of the courses - Integration activities: meetings, parties, social events and activities not only with mobility students but also with native students. - ESN or similar structures - Use of Erasmus+ App

Regarding the purpose of the Erasmus+ programme (*What is the purpose of Erasmus? - How do you perceive the purpose of Erasmus?*), outgoing students mainly described Erasmus as an opportunity for them to obtain intercultural awareness, create a sense of European belonging, develop or improve language skills, compare different academic environments and experience different methods of teaching and conditions as a way of improving their studies. Also, they mentioned the opportunity for personal change as they expected to meet new people, experience a different country and exchange ideas, as well as the opportunity to improve their career development prospects.

As for returned students, they also mentioned both personal (personal growth as for living abroad, challenging comfort zone, etc.) and academic (e.g. working on thesis, getting lab experience, language skills advancement etc.) implications. Although Greek Returned students recognise and acknowledge the European integration as an important goal; it is interesting that almost all mentioned that they feel less European after this mobility experience and pay more attention to what distinguishes their own culture from the others.

On the subject of competence development (*Could you define the KSAs you expect to gain/you gained during your mobility experience?*), both outgoing and returned gave similar answers, which may entail that Erasmus+ fulfil students' expectations in this area. They KSAs mentioned during the focus groups are the following:

- Knowledge: both outgoing and returned students mentioned academic or subject related knowledge (specific knowledge on their respective field of knowledge, experiencing new learning techniques and methods of teaching) although returned students gave more concrete examples in order to justify their acquired knowledge. Also, groups agreed on the improvement of non-native languages knowledge (English and/or the main language of the host country)

  Returned students, however, also listed the acquisition of socio-political knowledge (they experienced another's country way of life, medical system, history, politics, ecology, feminism, religion etc.) and cultural knowledge (getting in contact with local people of the host country but also with other international

students), internalising social practices not only from the host country but also from the home country of their colleagues. In this process, students self-reflected and carried out comparisons among their own native culture and the other cultures, which lead them to improve their opinion about their own country/culture.

- Skills: for outgoing students they were difficult to define. They expect they will improve their social skills and language skills and become more independent. Also, they think that experiencing new learning and teaching methods will help them learn how to apply the knowledge acquired.

  As for returned students, they agreed that Erasmus mobility is a vital experience that improves both professional and personal skills. According to them, they developed communication skills, such as expressing their ideas and opinions in another language, interacting with other people and working in groups. After their mobility, they became more self-confident, more extroverted in terms of networking and more open to listening and understanding other ideas and opinions. Also, they improved their time management, flexibility and organisational skills. Almost all of them agreed that the mobility experience helped their personal development, as it challenged their comfort zones, helped them to become more independent and improved their problem-solving skills.

- Attitudes: outgoing students were laconic. They expected to become more open-minded through meeting new people from different backgrounds – they will change themselves and they will change how others see them. Returned students agreed on the latter. They mentioned that they have become more confident, self-aware of their abilities and of their intercultural understanding and respect. Also, they acknowledged having become more sensitive to specific global issues such as ecology, environment or feminism. Their attitude towards money changed too: they realised the monetary cost of their activities and acknowledged the privilege of subsidised higher education.

Focusing on the specific benefits for professional life of the Erasmus+ experience (*In what way do you think this experience will be valuable for your career?*), both outgoing and returned students agreed on the following:

- Valuable experience for deciding whether or not to search for work/research opportunities abroad.

- Skills development: adaptability to new environments (outside their comfort zone), independence, productivity and result orientation despite difficulties (e.g. manage to get good grades). Returned students added to the list linguistic and communication skills (ability to speak other languages), teamwork, problem solving, analytical skills, networking and access to new (labour) markets.

- Leverage in the labour market: the Erasmus+ mobility is an extra asset that renders their CV more competitive and interesting to potential employers, both in their home country and abroad. They see their Erasmus+ experience as evidence for employers on their skills and attitudes (e.g. adaptability or effort to make the most of their degree) and of their familiarity to the cultural context of the host country. In the specific case of Greek returned students, they did not foresee any direct impact on their career prospects: they mention that the Greek labour market does not recognise the KSAs they may have developed during mobility, considering local networking a more effective career strategy. However, they do acknowledge that an international experience may have an indirect positive impact, as they have enhanced their academic interests and, maybe, the experiences gained will help them define their career goals better (e.g. for master studies or new directions towards their specialisation).

As for the academic differences between the home and host universities (*Was your discipline taught differently in your host institution?*), returned students in all three universities found that abroad there was a more flexible programme of studies based on more practical, applied and teamwork learning and teaching techniques. They all regarded the host university as better organised and with better use of

communication and technology than their home university. They also made references to different evaluation systems and research opportunities.

Finally, we also asked returned students about their recommendations for future Erasmus students (*Could you please give some recommendations to students who are going to study abroad under Erasmus, on how they can maximize their experience?*). All students recommended having an "open-minded" attitude, trying to meet native people of the host country as well as other Erasmus students in order to have an easier adaptation to the new environment and have a positive experience, improve language skills and make the most of their mobility period. In this sense, they recommended attending the welcome days at the host universities, and living near the city or have other Erasmus students as housemates (but not forgetting to make native friends).

As for more practical recommendations, some of them mentioned how important it is to make a conscious choice of the country and the host university, as it affects the quality of teaching / learning and the cost of living. On the other hand, they did agree on recommending enjoying an Erasmus mobility regardless of whether you get the destination you initially wanted or not. As for practical – administrative tips, they would recommend paying the necessary attention to the Erasmus paperwork and warn outgoing students that the learning agreement is important but once in the host institution you can change it. They also recommended avoiding courses with a final test in their evaluation process.

4.4 Recommendations to students according to their progress self-assessments

Based on the literature review and the results from the focus groups, we propose concrete recommendations for students that can help them in different phases of their mobility.

4.4.1 Recommendations for students before mobility

The pre-departure phase concerns preparation that can enable students not only to cope better with some of the challenges they will encounter during their time abroad, but also to further develop their mobility skills. This involves linguistic and cultural preparation, practical preparation (housing, passport, etc.), academic preparation (defining and agreeing on learning objectives, searching for information about the obligations and choosing courses) and psychological preparation (how to deal with homesickness, isolation, culture shock, etc.).

Linguistic preparation:

Having basic comprehension skills of the host country's language can ease students' adaptability as it diminishes the feeling of insecurity and helps in daily interaction with local people (EOPPEP, 2012b). Also, having good English language skills or skills in the host university's main language of instruction can help in active participation in class and meeting the obligations of coursework.

There are several instruments to test English language skills or those of the host country's language. Students could test themselves, start learning or refresh their foreign language skills via platforms such as **Online Linguistic Support** ([OLS](#)). OLS is a free online language learning platform designed for Erasmus+ participants. It offers online language assessments and a wide variety of flexible courses and other opportunities for improving language skills. Students can use this platform before or during their Erasmus Mobility, in their own time and at their own pace in order to adapt their learning experience to suit their needs. Also, there are some fun games, language challenges and more info on European Languages available at the site of [European Centre of Modern Languages](#). Furthermore, students could attend language courses tailored to their needs organised by their home university and specifically by their foreign language centre (as mentioned in the university initiatives to support students' KSA development – see Section 3).

<u>Practical Preparation:</u>

- Returned students who participated in our focus group recommended outgoing students to make conscious choices when selecting Universities and the country where they are going abroad. Setting concrete learning goals will help when facing challenges. However, even if offered a place that was not their choice, do not have second thoughts about taking part in an Erasmus programme. According to all Erasmus Impact Studies and our focus group participants, it is better to have an experience, than to be a non-mobile student.

- Arranging paperwork such as the learning agreement, selection of courses, travel documents etc. can be overwhelming, but thanks to the [Erasmus+ App](#) and digitalisation of the Erasmus Administration all these may be more easily arranged.

- Get in contact with the IRO department of the Home University, read all the necessary documents and course guides carefully and do not hesitate to ask questions politely to the correct source – person responsible. Collecting valid and accurate information, evaluating the information found and effectively using it to accomplish a specific purpose are dimensions of valuable information management skills that students should and could develop in this phase.

- Meeting former Erasmus students from their own University, who have previously been there, can give an insight of all the procedures they may have to follow. Also, it is a very good source of information for practical aspects of this University and place, such as, housing, transportation, weather conditions, cost of living, etc.

- Meeting international students from the country they are going to, such as networking with the ESN branch in their Home University can also help. Hanging out with them, may not only help students get useful information for practical issues (cost of living, means of transportation, food, weather, etc.), but also become aware of the customs and traditions, and learn some things about history, politics etc. that can help them imagine the place they are going to live in for some months.

- Visiting web pages of local and national portals and foremost the webpage of the University and following the host university's social media; in this way students may become acquainted with the new place and they may also find information about housing, transportation etc.

- Arranging to travel to the city or the country to which they will go beforehand, helps to get a hands-on experience of the hustle and bustle of the place. Having been there before, minimises the fear and anxiety of orientation and the time needed for adjustment.

- Watching the recorded Erasmus Skills project's webinars can also help students to learn more about European Integration and the history of the Erasmus Programme, as well as to get useful advice on how to be well prepared to maximise the benefits of mobility.

Psychological Preparation:

Feeling insecure about this new experience, especially if this is the first time abroad, is normal and expected. Reading some info about culture shock phases, arranging practical issues and keeping a positive attitude towards this new life challenge are good tips for being psychologically prepared.

4.4.2 Recommendations for students during mobility

Typical challenges for international students who are going abroad to study result from the cultural change related to the differences in social behaviour, customs, norms, the cost of living, weather, climate and language. Bennet (2002) sets light on three different dimensions of culture shock:

- culture surprise is a small thing that is noticeable, such as how the toilets work;

- culture stress is handling the small events in the new culture such as how to wait in lines, traffic lights or cultural rules in social settings;

- culture shock is overarching larger events such as realising that people's ideas of values are different in this new place.

Students need to find appropriate support services to overcome anxiety and fear. Some good recommendations and advice are the following:

- **Give it time**… While culture shock is usually temporary it is common among international students. There may be differences between the way things are done compared to what the student is used to at home. These include the way people speak and behave, the teaching and learning styles, the food – and other aspects of life. This can be frustrating and disorienting at first, as even something simple like buying a bus ticket can create questions and frustration, and therefore the individual needs to figure out, for instance, where can I buy it from? (On the bus, from a shop or kiosk?) Do I have to validate it? Does it cover a single trip, or a set period of time?

   Eventually one will soon learn the new "rules" to get along, but it may be reassuring to know that it is perfectly normal to find it hard at first. Former Erasmus Students shared the same experience and almost all international students would feel the same. According to research, this might last 1 month. There are 5 stages (Honeymoon, Increased Participation, Crisis Phase, Gradual Adjustment – Recovery Phase, Adaptation Phase) described as U-Curve of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955) that international students usually go through on their time abroad.

   Furthermore, no matter how frustrating this experience might be at first, eventually it will help students develop transversal skills such as problem solving, intercultural communication and increasing their confidence.

   If someone is more interested about this, it might be good to consult the following sources for additional information:

   ▪ The UK Council of International Student Affairs' information on [facing culture shock](#) (2018).

   ▪ The report on [Mobility Advice Interview](#) published by the Euroguidance Centres of Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Romania (Lorent et al., 2014).

- **Seek and ask for help**. In case students experience feelings of isolation that are hard to handle and experience difficult situations, it is advisable to seek and reach counselling services offered by the host University. Also, students can talk to their peers and advisor. People are willing to help, if they are asked to.

Academic Adaptation:

- Meet regularly with the study abroad coordinator and ask for advice, information and support about the time schedule, study programme, obligations, exam system, etc. The academic advisor is the official representative of the host University to support the mobility experience.

- Set learning goals for your study abroad. Having specific learning goals will help when facing challenges. Write your goals beforehand and try to note down regularly what new things and experiences you have acquired.

- Try to have evidence of your experiences abroad such as collecting reference letters of professors or supervisors of your assignments, photos of presentations that can help when updating your portfolio and be useful as proof of your experiences.

- Watch the recorded Erasmus Skills project's webinars to get extra tips and advice on how to maximise your studying abroad experience for your career advancement.

Linguistic Adaptation:

- In order to acquire foreign language skills of the host country, attend language and cultural courses offered by the host University. Learning about the history of the place, the culture and the customs enables intercultural understanding and communication. Put an effort into getting to know local people and talking to them in their native language. This is the best way to practice your speaking skills. Even if it is hard to comprehend at first or difficult to express thoughts, eventually your language skills will improve.

- Accepting any invitation of tasting food, traveling in the country and experiencing the daily life of local people are some of the recommendations that former

Erasmus students made. Hanging out with locals helps to improve cultural knowledge, communication and social skills, as well as understand the value of cultural diversity and challenge the attitudes and assumptions of what is considered normal and appropriate in a social context.

4.4.3 Recommendations for students after mobility

Psychological reintegration:

Returned students, especially after a long period of staying abroad, may experience a reverse culture shock and need assistance to reintegrate properly into the home environment that suddenly has become foreign. For them, we pose the following recommendations:

- Join workshops or seminars about reflecting on the learning experience.

- Networking with ESN and assisting foreign students to adapt in your own University can be helpful to adjust oneself smoothly and keep contact with an international experience.

- Be an ambassador of your institution and share your experience with peers.

- Join alumni networks in the host and home institution to keep relations at a professional level.

- Try to keep contacts with the Erasmus fellow-students and friends via not only personal (Facebook) but also professional (LinkedIn) social media. Writing references, giving endorsements can be a vice versa process and prove profitable for one's career prospects.

Academic procedures:

- Arranging all the paperwork for courses' recognition can be overwhelming. Again politeness, accurate information and problem-solving skills can help during this process.

- Use all new field terminology learned while being abroad correctly in your mother language. Similarly, adapt yourself in the "home etiquette" when writing emails and contacting your professors or supervisors.

<u>"Translate" Erasmus Skills into career opportunities</u>

To maximise the Erasmus skills in a beneficial way for your career prospects, it is also advisable to learn how your new set of skills can combine with the needs of the local labour market. According to Predovic & Dennis (2019), "international experiences matter for employers but only if graduates can transform skills acquired into behaviours that are observable and translatable into value-adding workplace performance". This is in line with the employer survey of Ripmeester (2014), where employers underlined the need for students to be able to articulate what their study abroad experience has taught them. Therefore, try to make your research on the skills needed and show off your Erasmus Skills in a tangible way for recruiters and employers in your home country. You can take ideas and useful advice by watching the recorded [Erasmus Skills](#) project's webinars on discovering the benefits of studying in the EU.

Students may find interesting and useful the following resources:

- Information from the Finnish National Agency for Education on [Hidden Competences: International Competence in working life](#), which offers toolkits for students and materials for teachers, counsellors and coordinators (available in English, Finnish, Swedish, Nordic).

- The "[Guide for Mobility in Europe for students, higher education students, Young people and anyone else interested in searching opportunities for studies or work](#)" published by the Greek National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications & Vocational guidance (EOPPEP, 2012a) as a self-help tool for students (available in Greek).

- The article "[Six Tips for adapting to new language and culture](#)" (Liu, 2019).

- The blog entry "[5 things I wish I knew before: Returning to my home country](#)" (Norvaisaite, 2016).

- The blog of CareerProfessor.works.

- The book chapter "Understanding how international experiences engage employability: A game-based analytics approach" (Pedovic and Dennis, 2019).

- The information on "Learning activities to prepare you for study in the UK" provided by the e-learning research and development group in Modern Languages and Linguistics (eLanguages) at the University of Southampton.

- The blog of the Erasmus Student Network (ESNblog).

- The book chapter "When Being 'Book-Smart' Is Not Enough. Skills Graduates Need to Succeed in the Future Workplace" (Ripmeester, 2018)

5.

TRANSFERRING EUROPEAN VALUES AND CULTURE TO STUDENTS FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

5.1 Webinars for students

The Erasmus Skills project also intended to provide mobile students with a comprehensive understanding of European values and the integration in the European labour market. In order to do this, the project consortium prepared an online training (webinar), ensuring that students have easy access to curated information that will help them prepare for their arrival in the host country, but also upon their return to their home country.

Webinars worked both as a training and communicative tool to bring the essence of the Erasmus Skills project closer to students and university staff. Students will have the chance to participate in an E+ Online Training that explains another part of an Erasmus experience. This training was particularly focused on the intercultural understanding and employability skills as integral benefits of the mobility period for students. The first speaker was Professor Ferdi de Ville from the Centre for European Studies of UGent, who addressed the topics of EU values & culture, while also addressing the positive impact of studying in the EU. The second speaker was Nannette Ripmeester, international mobility expert and director of Expertise in Labour Mobility, who focuses on the identification of the soft skills gained abroad and on maximising the impact of the experience of studying abroad.

The E+ Online Training in September 2020 is the recorded version and a product of two live webinars that took place in October 2019 and January 2020. These first two webinars provided the project team with valuable feedback on what students expect and need to gain from this training. Feedback was gathered through live question time and two evaluation forms and was later incorporated in the design and delivery of the recorded E+ Online Training, which is now available on the Erasmus Skills website and the Erasmus+ App.

5.2 Guidelines for practitioners on how to build training sessions (workshops) tailored to Erasmus students

Delivering a webinar such as the Erasmus+ Online Training is a great way to convey important information on KSAs' learning outcomes, while also reaching a wider population of students without any geospatial restrictions. However, on-campus workshops promise a more in-depth and individualised training experience. Consequently, Erasmus Skills has also worked on producing a document with related workshop guidelines. The Erasmus Skills Workshop Guidelines are designed to support university staff, by providing useful information on how to prepare workshops and training sessions tailored to Erasmus+ students for a more conscious acquisition of mobility-related knowledge, skills and attitudes by facilitating their preparation for an experience abroad, but also helping them unpack the skills gained when returning to their home country.

These workshop guidelines offer the information, examples and advice needed to prepare and deliver effective workshops at your higher institution and support Erasmus students in maximising the benefits of their learning mobility. The guide is divided into three phases: **preparation, delivery and following-up.**

Firstly, the guidelines discuss the process of outlining the workshop fundamentals and the preparation of the resources needed to create an effective workshop that will engage students to participate. The second part focuses on the delivery of the workshop, providing useful information and tips on how to convey important information and get students involved. Lastly, it looks into planning the workshop follow-up, asking participants for feedback and offering additional information and assistance to ensure that students get the most out of the workshop.

The workshop guidelines complement the overall E+ Online Training and 'drive' workshop interaction with both outgoing and incoming students at a university. The goal of the Erasmus Skills workshop guidelines is to provide effective tips to help you gain greater results from workshops and help students realise and leverage the benefits of Erasmus+ mobility for their personal and professional developments.

These strategies can be effective in both on-campus and online events and are available on the Erasmus Skills website.

6.

INCLUDING INTERNATIONAL
SOFT SKILLS IN STUDY PROGRAMMES:
HOW TO TRANSLATE KSAS
INTO SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

Finally, the set of tools produced within the [Erasmus Skills](#) project also includes a methodology meant to support universities in the general integration of learning mobility outcomes, further referred to as mobility-related KSAs, with special emphasis in international and intercultural KSAs, in the curricula. Current challenges in society make us aware that contemporary curricula are no longer acceptable without all graduates achieving international and intercultural KSAs. Whereas the rest of tools focus on students going on mobility, in this case we want to broaden internationalisation to all students and shift the focus from mobility as an end in itself to internationalisation as a driver for educational quality.

This methodology is meant to be used in a broader process within a university, at the level of faculties and programmes as the integration of international and intercultural competences in the curricula is a process and a joint responsibility and endeavour of different stakeholders:

- Units at central & decentral level;

- Units responsible for educational quality

- Units responsible for curriculum development

- Units responsible for internationalisation

The process of integrating international/intercultural KSAs in the curricula starts with defining a vision on internationalisation. In this way, the added value of internationalisation for a programme can be made explicit by the university. This vision on internationalisation of the programme then creates a firm basis for the implementation phase, which consists of three main steps:

1. Defining and describing the programme's international/intercultural competences;
2. Creating enough learning experiences in the programme's curriculum to allow the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural KSAs;
3. Measuring the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural competences.

The envisaged international/intercultural KSAs can be of different nature in one programme compared to another. Consequently, it is important to describe these competences clearly, since being internationally competent means something different for a biologist, an engineer, a journalist, etc. The concept of international/intercultural KSAs used in the Erasmus Skills project targeting mobile students can be a source of inspiration in this context and can be modified (made less general) to make it relevant and of use for all students within a certain programme.

Once the university has defined its international/intercultural KSAs, it is important to create enough learning experiences reaching all students: courses using English as language for instruction, Internationalisation@Home activities, Windows of Opportunities, etc. Additional opportunities are more clearly described on the Erasmus Skills website.

Finally, universities would need to measure the achievement of the envisaged international/intercultural KSAs. Different types of assessment can be used depending on the description on the programme's international/intercultural KSAs (Step 1). For mobile students the pre- and post-assessment developed in the Erasmus Skills project is a self-assessment tool to measure the extent to which growth in international intercultural KSAs (together with other mobility-related KSAs) has been achieved.

The process and the three main steps for integrating international/intercultural competences described in detail on the Erasmus Skills website.

7.

CONCLUSIONS
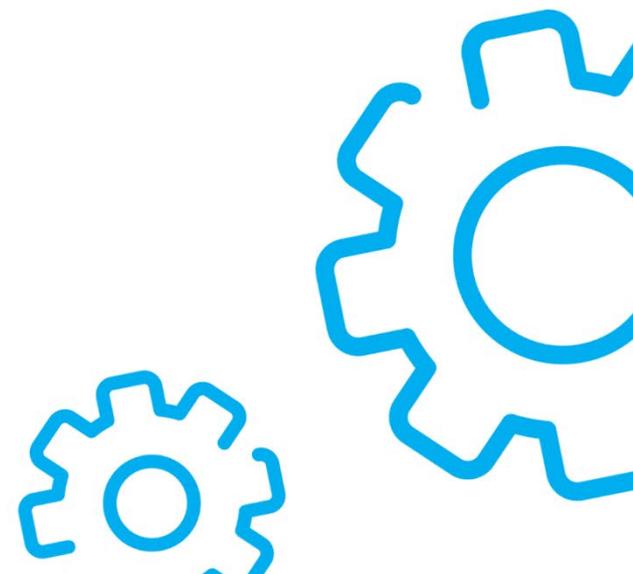
Students often face difficulties when they come back home after mobility and reintegrate in their hometown - feeling that it is difficult to describe the variety of experiences they had the opportunity to live. Students commonly undergo a strong process of personal development and feel that they have changed a lot, while their home community has not changed significantly. In this context, the Erasmus Skills project has produced a specialised set of tools to: (i) support exchange students in acknowledging their personal development by assessing their learning mobility outcomes; (ii) assist institutions and their (administrative and academic) staff to support students in this process. In doing so, this project mainly addresses the higher education priority area of promoting internationalisation and mobility, in line with the Bologna principles and tools.

In particular, the Erasmus Skills project aims at preparing students before going abroad on their learning experience and giving them the opportunity to assess their learning curve during their mobility experience to be able to translate their learning outcomes into words. The understanding and reflection process in which students get involved are key factors in their learning process, and helps them in recognising and becoming aware of their mobility learning outcomes. This support takes the form of self-assessment questionnaires on mobility-related Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) and mobility relevant information provided to students through the Erasmus+ App, as well as webinars on European integration and citizenship.

In addition, this project provides information on a set of 32 initiatives that universities and other institutions have implemented with the above-mentioned objectives, along with guidelines for the organization of workshops on these issues, providing a good set of examples for universities to support competence development among Erasmus students. Initiatives were collected among the partner institutions participating in the Erasmus Skills project and their contact networks. Among these 32 initiatives, we identified four main objectives: (i) encouraging student mobility; (ii) training in mobility-related KSAs for outgoing students; (iii) integration of incoming students; and (iv) training in mobility-related KSAs for incoming students. However, we found no initiatives addressing the needs of

returned students or assisting university staff in how to provide support to Erasmus students in gaining mobility-related KSAs. The self-assessment questionnaires in the Erasmus+ App will provide valuable information for those institutions implementing initiatives with these aims. In addition, very few of the collected initiatives supported the development of a European identity and European values among students, something relevant given that students reported during focus groups that, after their Erasmus, they felt less European and had a stronger belonging to their home culture. In this sense, the recorded webinar available in the Erasmus Skills website on European integration and citizenship and the guidelines for workshop organisation on these issues may be of great help for those institutions aspiring to reinforce this type of KSAs. Moreover, during focus groups, Erasmus students highlighted the need of improving the Erasmus coordination and administrative procedures within home universities, but most importantly, between home and host universities.

Finally, the Erasmus Skills project has also produced a three steps methodology for embedding mobility-related KSAs (with special emphasis on intercultural and international KSAs) in curricula, so students not benefiting from a mobility experience can also develop similar learning outcomes and mobility students can be better prepared for the mobility period and reinforce their learning experience.

The Erasmus Skills project has been conceptualised in a period when European member states reached consensus on the importance of learning mobility in their education systems and the relevance of the Erasmus+ programme in this context. While this is a fantastic opportunity for students and higher education institutions (HEIs), it is still a challenge to make a rapid increase mobility possible and strive for higher impact on students' learning outcomes. In this sense, the Erasmus Skills project expects to contribute to the success of the Erasmus+ programme.

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Annex I. Survey for the collection of institutional initiative

**Institutional initiatives for supporting students'
competence development in international mobility
contexts**

ERASMUS SKILLS   Co-funded by th
Erasmus+ Programm
of the European Unio

Dear participant:

The Erasmus Skills project aims at supporting mobility students in acquiring knowledge, skills and/or attitudes to strengthen their competences. With this purpose, we are analysing the existing institutional initiatives that support students in the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout international mobility experiences.

In order to support the Erasmus Skills project, please, fill the form below describing a practice, initiative, activity or service that your institution implements in order to:
-    Support mobility students to further develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes.
-    Assist (academic or administrative) staff in supporting mobility students to develop knowledge, skills and/or attitudes.

Filling the form will take around 15 minutes. Please, remember that the same practice could support several knowledge, skills and/or attitudes at a time.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Please, note that this research will follow the European Union data protection regulation. The Erasmus Skills project partners will ensure the protection of the data collected and the privacy of all participants. Data will only be used for research purposes.

Institutional information

1. **Name of the institution/organisation** *

_____

2.   **Erasmus code**
       If applicable

_____

3. Type of institution *

Choose only one option
Mark only one oval.

- ( ) University
- ( ) Company
- ( ) Foundation
- ( ) NGO
- ( ) Other: _____

4. Country *

_____

Description of the best practice

5. Name of the initiative, activity or service *

_____

6. Name of the department that implements it *

Organisational structure/office that implements
the initiative, activity or service (e.g. International
Relations Office, Student Attention Centre,
specific faculty or department, etc.)

_____

7. Contact person

_____

8. E-mail

_____

9. Description of the initiative, activity or service *

Describe what is the initiative about, duration, schedule, frequency, whether it is developed in-
house or using an external provider and any other characteristics that you consider relevant. Max
1,500 characters (including spaces)

_____

_____

_____

_____

**10. Since when have you been implementing this
initiative, activity or service?** *

Please specify the starting year of the initiative

_____

11. Which of the following types of knowledge are supported by the initiative, activity or service implemented? *

Check all that apply
Check all that apply.

- [ ] Sociolinguistic awareness
- [ ] Technical skills
- [ ] Self-awareness
- [ ] Cultural knowledge
- [ ] Educational context
- [ ] Not applicable
- [ ] Other: _____

12. Which of the following skills are supported by the initiative, activity or service implemented? *

Check all that apply
Check all that apply.

- [ ] Analytical skills
- [ ] Problem solving
- [ ] Creative thinking
- [ ] Team work
- [ ] Organizational skills
- [ ] Communication skills
- [ ] Negotiation skills
- [ ] Language skills
- [ ] Adaptability
- [ ] Activity design
- [ ] Not applicable
- [ ] Other: _____

13. Which of the following attitudes are supported by the initiative, activity or service implemented? *

Check all that apply
Check all that apply.

- [ ] Confidence
- [ ] Open mindedness
- [ ] Proactivity & Engagement
- [ ] European identity

- [ ] Equality & Equity
- [ ] Transcultural understanding
- [ ] Not applicable
- [ ] Other: _____

14. Audience targeted *

Check all that apply
Check all that apply.

- [ ] Students
- [ ] Academic staff
- [ ] Administrative staff
- [ ] Other: _____

15. Please specify, if your target audience is "students"

Check all that apply.

	Outgoing	Incoming	Returning
Undergraduate students			
Master students			
PhD students			

16. Which benefits for the targeted audience and for students have been identified? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. Does the initiative, activity or service include incentives for participation? If yes, which are those incentives? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Does your institution/unit assess the results/effectiveness of the initiative, activity or service described? If yes, how does your institution/unit do so? *

_____

_____

19. Have there been any difficulties in the implementation of the initiative, activity or service described? If yes, how have your institution/unit overcome them? *

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. How did you reach your target audience? *

Explain how the initiative was disseminated

_____

_____

_____

_____

21. Did you share this initiative, activity or service inside/outside your organisation to encourage others to support students' development of knowledge, skills and attitudes? If yes, how? (optional)

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. Is your institution committed with the development of competences? (optional)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Fully engaged

23. Which competences would your institution like to support? (optional)

_____

24. Upload any relevant document (optional)

Files submitted:

25. Indicate any relevant links (optional)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Additional comments or suggestions

26.

Thank you for your colaboration!

Annex II. Description of the collected institutional initiatives, activities or services to support mobility-related KSAs

Table 8. Initiatives, activities or services before mobility: main characteristics.

Training in mobility-related KSAs		
Informative meetings prior to mobility		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Annual meeting gathers all incoming and outgoing exchange students during an informal evening	Outgoing exchange students Incoming exchange students	**K**: sociolinguistic awareness, self-awareness, cultural knowledge
		S: teamwork, communication skills, language skills, adaptability
		A: confidence, open mindedness, proactivity and engagement, European identity, transcultural understanding
"Ambassadors' Cocktail", once a year activity gathering students who are going to do a mobility project the following year. Hands-on tips for their mobility (housing, language classes...) are provided. We tackle the issue of cultural shock and the fact that they will represent our University abroad. Returning students and incoming students take part, which enables our outgoing students to exchange and ask questions about their destination university.	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Adaptability
		A: Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Transcultural understanding

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
Intercultural preparation for outgoing students outside Europe. We first give a general information on health issues and visa issues. Then, an introduction on Africa, focusing on the history, contemporary society and diversity of Africa and countering some stereotypes still persisting on Africa. We then conclude with a number of testimonies given by students who went to Africa the year before. They often give tips and tricks for the new cohort.	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context, history, contemporary society
		S: Communication skills, Language skills
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
Organise an evening with typical country food where all incoming students meet with the next Erasmus students to get to know them and discuss about their countries and cultures.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Outgoing exchange students, Incoming exchange students	**K**: sociolinguistic awareness, self-awareness, cultural knowledge
		S: activity design, communication skills, language skills, adaptability
		A: confidence, open mindedness, proactivity and engagement, European identity, equality & equity, transcultural understanding
Pre-mobility language courses		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Language courses in English, German, French, and Italian.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Outgoing exchange students, Incoming exchange students	**S**: communication skills, language skills
Workshops/courses/tools on mobility related KSAs		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**

To provide students going abroad with knowledge and skills to prepare them for their program overseas. The course contains modules on: (i) Travel safety, health and risk mitigation; (ii) Culture (cross cultural communication, culture shock, an understanding of one's own culture and the culture of others); (iii) Ethical photography/social media and employability skills.	Outgoing exchange students, Academic staff	**K:** sociolinguistic awareness, technical skills, self-awareness, cultural knowledge, educational context
		S: analytical skills, problem solving, activity design, team work, organizational skills, communication skills, negotiation skills, adaptability
		A: confidence, open mindedness, proactivity and engagement, equality & equity, transcultural understanding
It is a ready-to-use digital tool that provides intercultural training and global careers advice. It is a game on three compelling topics: job hunting, doing business and social interactions.	Undergraduate students, Master students, Outgoing exchange students, Incoming exchange students, Returning students, Alumni	**K:** cultural knowledge
		S: communication skills, negotiation skills, adaptability
		A: open mindedness, transcultural understanding
Workshop with a career counsellor about adaptability, new environment, uncertainty and making decisions. Participants can interact, on previous traveling or mobility experiences.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Outgoing exchange students, Returning students	**K:** self-awareness, cultural knowledge
		S: problem solving, adaptability
		A: confidence, open mindedness, European identity, transcultural understanding
The intercultural preparation event takes place twice a year about international acculturation.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Outgoing exchange students	**K:** self-awareness, cultural knowledge
		S: communication skills
		A: open mindedness, European identity, transcultural understanding
Intercultural Experience Online Course: aims to increase students' intercultural awareness, blog text about student's recognition about different	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge

levels of culture and own culture, information about target culture, recognition about own learning possibilities and personal goals. Course has tasks before mobility, during mobility and after mobility. 3 ECTS credits.		**S:** Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Transcultural understanding
Intercultural workshops as preparation for stays abroad (internships and for study) and for a global work environment	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K:** Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Problem solving, Creative thinking, Team work, Communication skills, Negotiation skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
Intercultural Training Workshop taking place twice per semester, total workshop duration 10h, external trainer, 10-15 local and international participants. Goal is to prepare students for outbound mobility.	Students	**K:** Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Analytical skills, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Communication skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
Organising a joint introductory programme for new degree students at the faculty. This includes refresher courses in chemistry, mathematics, statistics and economy as well as modules concerning social and cultural integration.	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Analytical skills, Problem solving, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
Encouraging student mobility		
Seminars on the international job market		

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
Experts from EU companies teaching at university. Using the Erasmus+ STAI type of mobilities, experts from European companies are invited to teach some lectures and/or applications to our students, so that students not benefitting of a mobility could understand the international industrial environment and the requirements to become an employee in this environment.	Students	**K:** Technical skills, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Analytical skills, Creative thinking, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Open mindedness, European identity, Transcultural understanding

International week/day to promote mobility

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
International week: every year in October dedicated to the promotion of international mobility (1 day per campus called "mobility days" mostly for students but also for academic and administrative staff working in that field), development of internationalisation (3 days of workshops & networking with foreign university partners), mobility fair to connect students and partners. At the end of the week, we organise an international party for our international students as well as partners.	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K:** Self-awareness, Educational context
		S: Problem solving, Organizational skills, Adaptability
		A: Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement
"Study abroad theme week" to focus on the different possibilities for students to go abroad, during one week in autumn semester	Students	**K:** Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Not applicable
		A: Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement

The International Mobility Day is a meeting organised for students who look for a mobility period for studies or traineeships. This day is shared into 4 moments: a big meeting for administrative information about steps and scholarships, then a testimony video competition game and a brunch. During the afternoon we set up different workshops.	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, administrative steps and scholarships
		S: Problem solving, Creative thinking, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, Transcultural understanding, independence, autonomy and proactive skills

Table 9. Initiatives, activities or services after mobility: main characteristics.

Training in mobility-related KSAs		
Language courses		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Language courses for the Erasmus+ Incoming Students. The "*Local* Language and Culture Lab" offers two types of courses to the Erasmus+ Incoming Students. a) Language courses that cover basic knowledge (levels A1 and A2), for communicative purposes. No prior knowledge is required. b) Culture and civilisation courses that introduce the students to some landmarks. Both courses are free of charge and they are offered in the winter and spring semesters during the academic year.	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Team work, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
English and Spanish language classes. Learning a foreign language to assist students in their mobility, developed in-house.	Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K**: Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills
		S: Problem solving, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills
		A: Proactivity & Engagement, Transcultural understanding
KSA measurement and development		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Innovative digital learning toolkit. Students will be equipped with this Toolkit during their studies abroad, which will give them training in identifying experiences during studies abroad that offer excellent training opportunities to develop personal skills, which are highly sought after by employers. Secondly, it will offer training in communicating these experiences, insights, and personal developments narratively, in a way that is beneficial in a recruitment situation.	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Awareness of skills-oriented labour market needs
		S: Analytical skills, Problem solving, Creative thinking, Team work, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability, Transversal skills, Soft Skills
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, Proactivity & Engagement, Transcultural understanding, Resilience, self-reliance, self-insight
The SocialErasmus+ Competence framework focuses on defining a framework for students that engage in volunteering activities while they are on exchange. Because of their engagement, they will have a more intense learning experience, that allows them to step out of their comfort zone and engage with different	Undergraduate students, Master students, Outgoing exchange students, Incoming exchange students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Analytical skills, Problem solving, Activity design, Team work, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Negotiation skills, Language skills, Adaptability

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
groups in society that would otherwise not be so easily reached.		**A:** Confidence, Open Mindedness, Proactivity and Engagement, European identity, Equality & equity, Transcultural understanding
Skills Acquisition Questionnaire established a connection between the fields of action and the skills developed; and between the positions occupied and the skills developed.	ESN Volunteers	**K:**
		S: Analytical skills, Problem solving, Activity design, Team work, Organizational skills, Communication skills, Negotiation skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Proactivity and Engagement, Transcultural understanding

Student integration

Welcome meetings

DESCRIPTION	TARGET AUDIENCE	KSA
Erasmus Welcome Day & Week: organised in the beginning of each academic semester (10 days to 2 weeks) and it comprises a variety of activities aiming to welcome the Erasmus+ incoming students to the University and the city, to get them acquainted with the customs and traditions of the country and to get in contact with each other and the local students. Some of the events are: Welcome Day; Exploration & City Game; Movie night; Introduction to the University Gym; Visit to animal shelters; Buddy Challenges; Human Library; International Picnic; Trips to the nearby towns;	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Incoming exchange students	**K**: Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Team work, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open Mindedness, Proactivity and Engagement, European identity, Equality & equity, Transcultural understanding

It is designed to welcome international exchange students. They receive practical information about studying and living issues.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Incoming exchange students	**K:** sociolinguistic awareness, self-awareness, cultural knowledge, educational context
		S: activity design, team work, organizational skills, communication skills, language skills, adaptability
		A: confidence, open mindedness, proactivity and engagement, European identity, transcultural understanding
Welcome Week organised twice a year, before the semester's start a Welcome Week' for all the new incoming students. The office organised in each Department of the University a meeting addressed to the incoming students, in collaboration with the Students Office and with the Erasmus coordinators. They provide the students with all the needed information on courses and on how to orient themselves inside the University life and the city life.	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**A:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Not applicable
Accompaniment initiatives		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Online psychological help to provide confidential short-term counselling, crisis intervention services and evaluation of needs for academic support. It is offered to both students and staff on international exchange.	Undergraduate students, Master students, PhD students, Outgoing exchange students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K**: self-awareness
		S: adaptability
		A: confidence

Buddy Project started last year. For the next academic year, we are activating a Platform https://buddysystem.eu/en/	Students	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Communication skills, Language skills
		A: Open mindedness, Transcultural understanding
Within a strategy for welcoming and integration of international students several events are promoted: workshops and monitoring activities throughout the academic year. For example: Guided tours; Workshops of photography, gastronomy, dance, theatre activities; traditional events; Buddy programme, etc.	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding
The tutor system is organised at departmental level. The aim is to give to the incoming student a permanent guide directly in the Department where they study and to give them instructions about the courses, receiving hours of professors and about Department life in general.	Students, Academic staff, Administrative staff	**K**: Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Not applicable
Buddy system activities. The aim is to support the incoming mobility and to give to the exchange students a welcome 'student to student', involving them immediately in the social and academic framework of the city and to give to the incoming exchange students a practical support for their stay. The buddy students are students selected from the University who take care of the new incoming students	Students	**A:** Sociolinguistic awareness, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Language skills, Adaptability

and follow them along all their stay: each buddy has usually not more than 3-4 incoming students to follow, trying to integrate them in the academic and social life		**A:** Not applicable

Student engagement		
DESCRIPTION	**TARGET AUDIENCE**	**KSA**
Services, support and opportunities are available to students to provide a more holistic educational experience. Experiential and reflective venues including service-learning programs, volunteer programs, internships, learning abroad programmes and student activities (including student employment) are offered. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning and development that is occurring throughout their time at the University—to be "authors" of their life experiences.	Undergraduate students, Incoming exchange students, Returning students, Academic staff, Administrative staff, Student employees/student affairs/student unions	**A:** Technical skills, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge
		S: Problem solving, Team work, Communication skills, Negotiation skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open Mindedness, Proactivity and Engagement, Equality & equity, Transcultural understanding
Classes without Frontiers. Project coordinated by the local Department of Education, with local secondary schools, in collaboration with the International Office of the University. In this initiative, international students are invited to participate in a school class and talk about their home country, its culture and language to 12-18 year-old students, who are curious to meet "travellers" with exciting stories.	Students	**K**: Sociolinguistic awareness, Technical skills, Self-awareness, Cultural knowledge, Educational context
		S: Organizational skills, Communication skills, Language skills, Adaptability
		A: Confidence, Open mindedness, European identity, Equality & Equity, Transcultural understanding

Annex III: Standardised methodology followed during the focus groups to validate the self-assessment questionnaires

Designing and Conducting Focus Groups
OBJECTIVES

- to discuss the findings from the first phase of the study on the skills selected and the description of the variables
- to produce recommendations to students on how to maximise their mobility soft-skill learning curve (giving examples of concrete results and evidence for future reference to employers)
- to validate the designed questionnaires, at the end of the session

Characteristics of Focus Group Interviews

Participants
- 5 to 10 people per group, 6-8 preferred (mixed as for discipline, sex, etc)
- Similar types of people (students before / after mobility)
- Consent form - clear privacy and confidentiality statements on how the data they provided will be stored and used within the project.

Methodology
- Face to face discussion
- Language (mother tongue for UAM and AUTH students, English for UGent)
- Focus groups will be recorded. Transcription will not be necessary.

Environment
- Comfortable
- Circle seating
- Tape recorded

The Research Team

a. **Moderator**
<u>Main mission:</u> To conduct and maintain the discussion facilitating group interactions
- Skilful in group discussions
- Uses predetermined questions
- Establishes permissive environment

b. **Recorder / Rapporteur (Assistant Moderator) Skills**
<u>Main Mission:</u> To sum up and present daily the most significant topics resulting from discussions

- Help with equipment & refreshments
- Arrange the room
- Welcome participants as they arrive
- Sit in designated location
- Take notes throughout the discussion
- Operate recording equipment
- Do not participate in the discussion
- Ask questions when invited
- Give an oral summary
- Debrief with moderator
- Give feedback on analysis and reports

Conducting a Focus Group (useful info)

1. Establish a welcoming and open environment with some basic ground rules:
   - Emphasize there are no right or wrong answers to the questions.
   - Ask participants to listen respectfully to each response.
   - Have all attendees turn off cell phones?
   - Require that only one person speak at a time.

2. Role of Moderator:
   - Facilitate the conversation.
   - Present questions in a conversational style, one at a time, and allow processing time if needed.
   - Probe deeper into responses by providing appropriate prompts.
   - Manage the conversation to encourage equal time for all participants.

3. Role of Recorder:
   - Record focus group basics such as date, time, topic, and number of participants.
   - Briefly summarise responses including both positive and negative points of view.
   - Capture interesting quotes and note non-verbal communication that may be useful.
   - Assist the moderator in monitoring time.
   - Emphasise there are no right or wrong answers to the questions.
   - b. Ask participants to listen respectfully to each response.
   - c. Have all attendees turn off cell phones.
   - Require that only one person speak at a time.

Questions that Yield Powerful Information

<u>Use open-ended questions</u>

✔ **Questions for the focus groups on the "before questionnaire"**

1. What is the purpose of Erasmus? (How do you perceive the purpose of Erasmus?)
2. With what purpose did you choose to enjoy an Erasmus grant?
3. How did you decide to join Erasmus for studies? What are your main motives for making this decision?
4. Could you define the KSA you expect to gain during your mobility experience?
5. In what way do you think this experience will be valuable for your career?
6. What support do you think you will need to make the most of this experience?
7. Do you feel well prepared for this mobility experience? In what way?

✔ **Questions for the focus groups on the "after questionnaire"**
1. What is the purpose of Erasmus? How do you perceive the purpose of Erasmus?)
2. Could you define the KSAs you gained during this mobility experience?
3. Was your discipline taught differently in your host institution?
4. In what way do you think this experience was valuable for your career?
5. Could you please give some recommendations to students who are going to study abroad under Erasmus, on how they can maximise their experience?
6. What support do you think you should have had to make the most of your mobility experience?

Be cautious of phrases such as "how satisfied" or "to what extent"

✔ **Avoid dichotomous questions**
These questions can be answered with a "yes" or "no"

✔ **Why? is rarely asked**
Instead ask about attributes and/or influences. Attributes are characteristics or features of the topic. Influences are things that prompt or cause action.

✔ **Use "think back" questions.**
Take people back to an experience and not forward in the future

✔ **Use different types of questions**
Identify potential questions
Five Types of Questions
1. Opening Question (round robin)
2. Introductory Question
3. Transition Questions
4. Key Questions
5. Ending Questions

✔ **Use questions that get participants involved**
Use reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings, etc.

✔ **Focus the questions**
Sequence that goes from general to specific

✔ **Be cautious of serendipitous questions**
Save for the end of the discussion

Don'ts
- Expect the group to reach consensus to the topic
- Express judgement when moderating the group
- Ask yes or no questions.

Analysis and Reporting
- Systematic analysis
- Verifiable procedures
- Appropriate reporting

Source:
- Krueger, Richard A. & Casey, M.A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (4th Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Krueger, R. (2002). *Designing and Conducting Focus Groups Interviews*. http://oiep.cofc.edu/documents/assessment-documents/Designing%20and%20Conducting%20Focus%20Groups.pdf

KNOWLEDGE
SKILLS
ATTITUDE

UAM
Universidad Autónoma
de Madrid

ARISTOTLE
UNIVERSITY
OF THESSALONIKI

ESN
Erasmus Student Network

EUF
EUROPEAN
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FOUNDATION

ELM
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UNIVERSITEIT
GENT