KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

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QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INTERNATIONAL WORK PLACEMENTS IN KYMENLAAKSO UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES BUSINESS DEPARTMENT

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ABSTRACT

The spectrum of international work placements is vast, ranging from the unpaid to the paid, compulsory schemes to optional involvement, and from small companies to grand multinationals all offering various opportunities. Without sufficient assessments, criteria, and prerequisites for quality, the professional and personal experiences and gains fluctuate heavily between different placement organizations.

The objective of the thesis was to assess the quality of the international work placement process of KyUAS, mainly from a student trainees perspective, and to develop improvement suggestions based on the research results. The aim was to improve post-graduation employability for the student trainees taking part in the process.

The research was carried out qualitatively, via thematic in-depth interviews of past student trainees as customers of the examined process. A number of five trainees were interviewed, making the research non-exhaustive i.e. limited in transferability.

The research resulted in a number of actionable improvement proposals regarding the studied process, as well as suggestions for further research.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Kansainvälisten työharjoittelupaikkojen spektri on laaja, vaihdellen palkattomasta palkalliseen, pakollisesta harjoittelusta vapaaehtoiseen osanottoon, ja pienistä yrityksistä suurin monikansallisiin jotka kaikki tarjoavat erilaisia mahdollisuuksia. Ilman riittäviä arvioita, kriteereitä, ja vaatimuksia laadulle, saadut ammatilliset sekä henkilökohtaiset kokemukset ja hyödyt vaihtelevat suuresti harjoitteluntarjoajien välillä.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tehtävänä oli arvioida KyAMKin kansainvälisen työharjoitteluprosessin laatua pääosin opiskelijan näkökulmasta, sekä tehdä kehitysehdotuksia tutkimukseen perustuen. Työn tavoitteena oli parantaa prosessin läpikäyneiden opiskelijoiden valmistumisen jälkeistä työmarkkina-arvoa.

Tutkimus tehtiin kvalitatiivisesti, prosessin asiakkaita eli entisiä opiskelija-harjoittelijoita temaattisesti syvähaastatellen. Vain viittä opiskelijaa haastateltiin, tutkimus ei siis yltänyt saturaatioon. Tämän johdosta tutkimus on siirrettävyydeltään rajallinen.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena syntyi muutamia toiminnallisia parannusehdotuksia tutkittavan prosessin suhteen, sekä ehdotuksia mahdollisille jatko-tutkimuksille.

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1   INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis topic originated from the author's personal difficulties in finding a high-quality international work placement, as well as frustrations with the perceived quality experienced at tried placement organisations. The Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences (KyUAS) international office recognizes that the quality of available international work placements varies greatly and that there is a need to establish procedures for assuring international placement quality. This belief, after author's shared experiences, led to the commissioning of this thesis by the KyUAS international office.

The goal of this thesis is to develop suggestions for improvement within the international work placement process of KyUAS, therefore hopefully ending said frustrations for aspiring international student trainees of the future.

Ideally, this research should help the management of the international work placement process in KyUAS by providing an in-depth look at the KyUAS international work placement process as its customers perceive it, thereby constituting a possibility for long-term process improvement. The objective is the creation of a framework for creating this possibility, rather than the establishment and implementation of a ready-made all-around quality assurance system.

The societal aim of the thesis is the overall improvement of students' post-graduation employability via students gaining more relevant and applicable work experience already during their studies. Successful placement quality assurance procedures would also be likely to strengthen the link between higher education and working life internationally, provided that cooperation sees an increase as a result. Due to the limitations of the research, the societal aim cannot be realised through the research presented in this work alone, but rather through continued research on the topic. The real world aim of this work would thus be an attempted waking-up of such activity in the field.

The research question developed for this thesis is the following: which quality assurance / management methods would best support the process of sending students on international placements? From this, three sub-questions have been derived to lead the research. The sub-questions are as follows:

1. *Which quality assurance / improvement methods are related to service quality and applicable to improving a specific process?*

2. *What are the students perceptions and expectations of quality of international placements?*

3. *What are the problems / shortcomings of the process currently in place as observed by the students?*

There are some concepts that are frequently used in this thesis, but not further examined. The most essential concepts are explained here.

The concept *international work placement* in this thesis refers to a work placement, internship, or traineeship acquired outside of Finland by native Finns, and outside of Finland or their home country for foreign students studying in Finland.

Placement provider, placement organisation – This concept refers to the entity, organisation or company, where an international work placement takes place.

Student trainee – refers to a student undertaking an international placement.

2 WORK PLACEMENT PROCESS

2.1 Background

The Finnish polytechnics are built on the supposed closeness to the working world with a more practical approach to learning than universities, which constitutes the main form of differentiation between the two (Virolainen 2007, 296). In Finland a distinction is made between university-based and polytechnic based-placements, mainly differing in that all university programmes do not have a requirement for carrying out a placement whereas the polytechnics do. Universities also tend to have less control over their students' placement procedures. (Mutanen 2009, 9-11.) A number of studies based in the UK and the US discussing mostly domestic to own country work placements confirm that placements are, or would be, a valuable part of any degree programme (Bullock et al. 2009, 482; Gault et al. 2010, 78; Green et al. 2011, 102; Neill & Mulholland 2003, 93; Knouse & Fontenot 2008, 61; Morse 2006, 736). These studies are mainly related to various university subjects and faculties, not polytechnics or their home country equivalents. Notably the much-studied UK sandwich placements usually take up a full academic year, where the Finland-based placements usually vary from two to five months, often taking place during the summer holidays. Most of the studies done on the subject also discuss placements as an optional experience, not as an institutional requirement. Because of these differences, direct comparisons should be avoided since the objectives, goals and motivations of the longer placements are considerably more varied and both the monetary as well as the time investment much larger than in their Finnish counterparts.

Employability of graduates and connecting education to the working world are themes often mentioned in papers discussing placements (Gault et al. 2010, 76; Morgan & Turner 2000, 454; Morse 2006, 735; Neill & Mulholland 2003, 89; Nuffic 2002, 3; Rae 2007, 605; Virolainen 2007, 290). Especially studies based in the UK seem to be concerned with the oversupply of graduates (Rae 2007, 606) and express criticism (Neill & Mulholland 2003, 89) that the "traditional educational programmes are failing to address the needs of both learners and industry." Another concern (Rae 2007, 607-608) is the relevance of offered courses to the employment

market, where courses offered tend to follow student-favoured trends instead of direct demand imposed by the labour markets. Placements can be seen as a "shop window of the industry," meaning the placement experiences can serve as a guide for initial career direction in both good and bad (Walmsley et al. 2006, 361).

2.2 Work placement organisation

The three most common ways to organise work placements are 1) institutionally offered placements, 2) self-sought placements by students and 3) third party commercial placement organisation -offered placements. In the first two cases the main parties involved are the students, the educational institution and the work placement organisation, whereas the third option includes also the commercial placement organisation.

The Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education (Nuffic 2002, 6-13) and the European Association for International Education (EAIE 2010, 38) seem to prefer structured international work placement organising by the educational institutions in cooperation with partner companies and organisations. A studied UK university arranges placements for their students via placement officers, who "provide an indispensable service" in that they give the students a possibility to reflect their thoughts and concerns against someone who has the information, and preferably experiences, related to their concerns (Bullock et al. 2009, 483, 493). Neill and Mulholland (2000, 96) suggest a relationship marketing approach between institutions and employing organisations, with members of staff of the educational institution assigned to Key Account Management -positions to the most important placement providers. Neill and Mulholland (2000, 91) suggest a basic phasing of a structured placement process, loosely transferred here as follows:

1) preparing students
2) completion of initial documents
3) informing students on other related documentation
4) reviewing placement possibilities with students
5) gathering placement preferences from students

6) preparation of CVs

7) training on professional (legal) issues

8) interview preparation

9) placement visits by staff

10) resolving emerging problems

11) reviewing documents and assessments from all three parties involved

In this particular example, the final placement review would be made by a placement tutor specifically trained for the task. Such structured placement processes would require strong commitment from both the institution's staff and the placement organisations. These kinds of key relationships would likely be easier to manage locally than on an international scale. Nuffic (2002, 7-8) proposes a way around this via careful selection of target countries and organisations, limiting the resource requirements on key regions only. A brief summary of the process proposed by Nuffic (2002, 8-9) follows: At least twelve months should be allowed for the whole process to be successful, starting from the selection of countries, followed by placement acquisition ideally through visits to potential placement organisations. Final choice of regions should be cleared (8-9 months before) after which students indicate preferences regarding job content and desired countries, as well as explain their motivations in interviews held within the institution. The students should then be given introductions to the potential organisations (6-7 months before). After this initial screening, another application stage with the placement organisation should take place if necessary, after which the students would attend support sessions ensuring their preparation 4-5 months before their placement starts. Thus, already three months before the start of a placement, everything should be in order.

The structured placements then have a number of pros including knowing the organisations involved, leading to less risks in the process. If done properly, a thorough matching of a students existing skills and competences to placement requirements can be made through joint-development of learning goals with all the parties involved, as well as increased amounts of contact between them (Virolainen 2007, 300). They provide a possibility for continuity in placement practices, possibly resulting in long-term cooperation (EAIE 2010, 40). They also allow for

setting clearer responsibilities covering the students' legal position (Nuffic 2002, 1). Higher levels of professional learning could be expected through adequate mentoring (Knouse & Fontenot 2008, 63). Also student's wouldn't need to spend their own time locating and trying to organise placements abroad.

However, such a structure would considerably reduce the flexibility of the process, meaning higher time-wise student commitment to the set curriculum. The choice of geographic location and types of organisations would limit the choice of placement and leave less autonomy to the students, as well as impose heavy resource requirements on the institution. Where students time is saved then in locating placements, the staff's time is substituted for it.

In the international work placements in Finnish UAS the norm seems to be self-sought placement organisation. A common practice is to have a career and recruitment -person in charge of student employment for pre- and post -graduation functions, including compulsory placements. International affairs offices mainly coordinate, develop and administer the Erasmus and other placement-programmes together with the study programmes and internationalisation teams. The study programmes' placement coordinators and internationalisation coordinators are trusted with ensuring that the placement is relevant to the field of study. The main responsibility for finding a placement often lies with the polytechnic student himself. On occasion, international placements are made known to the international offices and are forwarded to the common Finnish polytechnic job -portal, Jobstep.net, where the students can find the openings. (Mutanen 2009, 11-12.)

Letting students find their own placements leads to independent, autonomous learning and emphasises flexibility concerning the students' personal situations (Virolainen 2007, 300). It provides a relatively free choice in terms of job content and position, limited only to what the student can find. Applying for placements also prepares the student for the job application process after graduation. However, this free choice is realised through a global supply of non-quality assured placements all over the world, constituting higher risk in the process. Contact between the educational institution and the placement organisation is likely mediated via the

student through official documentation only. Learning goals are then often formulated with only the educational institution with no participation from the placement organisation, leaving an emphasis on student's self-assessment (Virolainen 2007, 300). Continuity can be achieved on an *ad hoc* basis but is not the norm, when most students look for a 'new' placement instead of an already-known-to-institution -placement (Mutanen 2009, 12). Students may waste a lot of valuable study time trying to locate a placement abroad, since the possibilities are so extensive. The student is also left alone in terms of potential conflicts; if contact doesn't exist between the parties, joint problem solving isn't likely to occur either. Hence, a student organising his own placement can be seen as an obstacle to the overall process of placement quality assurance (EAIE 2010, 38). At some polytechnics students are discouraged to find their own placements if the quality cannot be assured (Mutanen 2009, 12).

Mutanen (2009, 13) encourages the use of placement networks in organising placements. Examples of such networks include: Erasmus, Leonardo, IAESTE, AIESEC, alumni-networks abroad, bilateral agreements, long-term placement contacts, and teacher-specific contacts. Third party placement organisations are a possible tool if the institution does not have the capabilities necessary to organise international placements through standardised contracts themselves (EAIE 2010, 40). Outsourcing the placement process is of course a heavy investment, but constitutes a number of benefits. Placement organisations could be selected on account of region specialisation, cultural knowledge and local offices abroad (EAIE 2010, 40), which are aspects an educational institution is unlikely to possess or invest in. Benefits of using commercial placement organisations would be similar to those of structured placements, but would also allow for increased flexibility in comparison to internally structured placement processes, as the organisation would be independent of the study programme curricula. Less institutional control in tying the placement content to the curriculum could become an issue, but negotiations with the placement organisation should allow for establishment of clear goals and mutual understanding.

International placement practices have not been studied as extensively as domestic ones. Information seems to be limited to examples of national cases as well as general discussion on the characteristics of placements. The placement process is always dictated by the arranging institution and its available resources. Any given process at one institution may or may not work at another due to organisational differences, lack of capabilities or resources, or any number of reasons. Most studies made on the topic of undergraduate placements according to Dillon et al (2011, 44) are limited to:

> "*(a) descriptive accounts of what individual schools had accomplished, (b) discussions of the pros and cons of internship programs in general, and (c) descriptive surveys, generally national in scope.*"

3   IMPROVING PLACEMENT QUALITY

3.1   Defining quality

In order to improve placement quality, an idea of quality in the work placement process should be established. According to Raivola (2000, 20), the problem of deciphering the meaning of quality comes from the different perceptions and subjective, contextual views given to it, thus making it very difficult to give it a uniform, objective definition. Miller (1996, 153) views quality as a multi-dimensional concept derived from the orientation of the person defining it, meaning considerable variation of understanding the concept between individuals.

The quality guru Dr. Edwards Deming as cited by Evans & Lindsey (2011, 91-92) never defined quality in a precise manner, claiming that "a product or a service possesses quality if it helps somebody and enjoys a good and sustainable market." Deming's main concern in quality practices was the reduction of variation in a product or service provided, thus he came up with various systems for accomplishing this mainly through complete transformation of organisational philosophies.

Deming's colleague Dr. Joseph Juran as cited by Evans & Lindsey (2011, 105-106) had a simple definition of quality still popular today, formulated in short as "fitness for use." In practice, this would mean the identification and establishment of measurable objectives and taking action to achieve these.

Philip Crosby, again as cited by Evans & Lindsey (2011, 107-108), takes on a behavioural view on quality, claiming that the only performance standard should be "zero defects" - in other words, a perfect track record of quality. He views quality as conforming to specifications, detached from ideals. Crosby argues that "quality is free", meaning that all defects and lack of quality are to be seen as lost resources, tracked down to not doing things right the first time, which should be the expectation. Therefore Crosby approaches quality as a psychological problem rather than solely an organisational issue. (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 107-108.)

3.2   Implementing quality

The two most popular philosophies for implementing overall quality in organisations are total quality management (TQM) and Six Sigma. Both of these concepts have their roots in the above mentioned ideologies and are largely based on Deming's and Juran's principles. A proposed theoretical definition depicts total quality management (TQM) as (Miller 1996, 157):

"an ongoing process whereby top management takes whatever steps necessary to enable everyone in the organization in the course of performing all duties to establish and achieve standards which meet or exceed the needs and expectations of their customers, both external and internal."

As such, TQM cannot be implemented into a given process as it is meant to be an influence throughout the whole organisation, not a particular process. Applied to an extent, it could be used if the process was isolated from other functions and thus would enjoy a prioritised position within the staff involved, thereby constituting an artificial, TQM-committed organisation in itself.

The Six Sigma approach is a statistically implemented tool for long-term quality control, with an aim of reducing errors and defects per million instances down to less than 3,4. It could be seen as a practical tool with which a TQM system can be implemented (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 133). Though they note that the philosophy's ultimate goal is to include all critical processes of an organisation under the same statistical scrutiny, Lecklin (2006, 204) explains that the method can be used for the improvement of individual processes. However, as it is a statistical tool originally designed for production processes, the sample sizes needed for effective and reliable use are very large, the implementation is extremely time and resource consuming and the processes under review would need to be adequately measurable.

3.3 Quality assurance & improvement

Both of the above mentioned concepts of Six Sigma and TQM can be viewed as frameworks for implementing quality assurance (QA). QA is summed up by Evans and Lindsey (2011, 4) and according to them:

"Quality assurance refers to any planned and systematic activity directed toward providing consumers with products (goods and services) of appropriate quality, along with the confidence that products meet consumers' requirements."

Thus the general objective of QA would seem to be very simple and straightforward. In terms of placement QA, the main words here are planned and systematic, which are key characteristics of a process management system. General process management consists of three phases, which are design, control, and improvement. In order to apply process management effectively, the process in question must be both repeatable and measurable. Quality then would be derived from the outcomes of the measured outputs reflected against the expected results of the process. (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 333-334.)

A very TQM-like philosophy in quality improvement comes from the Japanese word *kaizen* which translated means "gradual and orderly continuous improvement." *Kaizen* from a process perspective emphasises encouraging improvement suggestions from all participants involved in the process and implementing the emerging ideas proactively, little by little improving the overall outcome. (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 349.)

Various quality improvement processes (QIP) exist, sharing a number of common characteristics. Defining and analysing the problems of the process through collected information begins the process, followed by generation of possible solutions. These solutions are then evaluated and the best ideas selected, after which these ideas are implemented. One ideology that follows this structure is the PDCA Cycle, i.e. the Deming cycle whose stages are *Plan, Do, Check,* and *Act*. The Six

Sixma philosophy also includes a similar process improvement cycle DMAIC, whose stages are *Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve,* and *Control.* In the end, the choice of improvement process is of little importance as long as it is implemented in a systematic and controlled way. (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 353-359.)

3.4   Placement quality

Woodhouse (1999, 29-30) adopts the Juran view of "fitness for purpose" as the key idea with which quality is defined in higher education, allowing the institutions' measurement of their own success through reflecting their performance against their mission and objectives. Because of this relative freedom, a number of external quality review (EQR) agencies have emerged in order to maintain a degree of standards for requirements and results, though the extent to which these agencies are involved varies greatly between countries and regions. According to Woodhouse (1999, 30) QA in the context of higher education "refers to policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced." The EAIE (2010, 6) defines the purpose of quality assurance to be that of providing confidence and trust in the quality of services to stakeholders. The main tools mentioned for quality assurance, mainly used by the EQR agencies, are audits, assessments and accreditation. The purpose of audits is to check whether an institution achieves it's own objectives, where assessments and evaluations are used to give grades on the basis of measured outputs, and accreditation is used to determine if an organisation or a person is worthy of a desired status. (Woodhouse 1999, 32.)

According to Nuffic (2002, 1), QA of international work placements is ultimately a responsibility of the sending institution. As work placements are only a part of an educational institutions operations, the external quality assurance procedures are limited to reviewing the internal aspects of the placement process leading up to accreditation, leaving the placement organisations out of the loop. Because of this, the only officially assured guarantees of placement quality are those that are included in the process of sending students on work placements abroad. Thus the

management of a placement process holds a key position when examining the quality of a student's placement experience.

Each phase in a process management structure deals with different issues. Process design is concerned with assigning correct inputs, control with measuring performance, and improvement with achieving higher performance levels (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 334). When designing a placement process, the ultimate goals and requirements of the activity should be clear. For instance, if the goal would be to achieve higher levels of graduate employability through quality placement practices, the process and its inputs should be designed in a corresponding manner. The level of commitment is also to be taken into account; a placement process could be seen as having an internally derived support function on behalf of the educational institution, but the student and placement organisation may view it externally as a value-creating activity. This multi-level quality perception is often present in service processes (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 334).

For instance, if the objective of having international work placements in a curriculum was the increased employability of graduates, the objective of the placement process itself should be something more concrete and immediately measurable. This could be e.g. a certain level of placement satisfaction measured through end-placement surveys, integrated into the process. Placement satisfaction according to Knouse and Fontenot (2008, 63) seems to be facilitated by a number of factors. Challenging, diverse and clear assignments and tasks together with logical feedback and respectful treatment create a reference for a successful placement. Mentoring is mentioned as particularly important in international placements, where mentors could lead to increased learning levels, improved socialisation to the organisational culture, as well as an increase in the number of job offers at the end of a placement. Thus overall placement satisfaction could be measured through surveying the aforementioned aspects.

Placement satisfaction may not be the best measure of quality though, since the student evaluates the placement as it relates to own expectations and views placement quality accordingly and subjectively. Although basic criteria need to be

met in order to consider a placement as of having sufficient quality, it is noted that a placement isn't always 'bad' just because it does not match the student expectations. Every student has different expectations based on previous personal experiences and developments, which have an effect on perceived placement quality. (Walmsley et al. 2006, 367).

Such 'bad' experiences also constitute learning in a different sense. Instead of immediate subject knowledge gained, the learning may facilitate itself in the long-run as time passes. This is noted in the study by Walmsley et al. (2006, 367), which observes that in the end such negative placement experiences were ultimately viewed in a positive light by the students.

Once the placement process has been designed, a control mechanism measuring its outcomes should be established, upon the results of which it is possible to identify problem areas and take corrective action for achieving standard conformance. Once the process is under control regarding standard conformance, identification of improvement opportunities can begin. (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 341.)

Possible elements to be considered when designing a structured work placement process could include, for instance, choice of countries and continents relevant to study programme content, condition requirements for the chosen regions and organisations, a timeframe in which a placement should be organised, financial effects on cost of supervision, establishment of a placement network, insuring against risk, procedures to be taken in emergency situations and covering the legal position of student-trainees (Nuffic 2002, 7-11.) The size of the placement organisations also play a part in the type of learning to be expected. Larger companies are likely to have more structured placement-programmes leading to formal training procedures, where smaller companies often tend to treat the students as full-time employees with increased levels of responsibility and more diverse assignments (Walmsley et al., 2006, 364).

There are some issues that have a negative impact on placement quality. Process-wise, often too much time is spent on organising the placement and the elements

surrounding it, while the actual work content is not given sufficient attention (Nuffic 2002, 6). Virolainen (2007, 302) notes that workplace guidance and dialogue between students and guides constitute a large part of the quality of a placement, or lack thereof in the absence of such dialogue. Independent self-assessment by students is often left as the sole form of assessment, bearing no relation to any in-depth guidance. Career guidance is often also seen as a disconnected entity from work placements (Virolainen 2007, 302). Another possible problem is that the students as customers of the process do not understand the goals nor their needs regarding the placement before undertaking one (Evans & Lindsey 2011, 335), which is why gathering and sharing information from students who have partaken in one is of vital importance.

Practical recommendations for improving international placement quality include having the responsible teachers or supervisors experience a period abroad in order to better reflect on possible problems and issues, as well as go through intercultural training regarding the host countries chosen. Placement supervision should be based on clear agreements in order to reduce possible failures, and academic supervisors should have to meet certain criteria such as related cultural and linguistic knowledge, work content knowledge, familiarity with supervision in relation to the study programme, previous placement supervision experience, and sufficient contact availability. Similar criteria should also exist for the work placement supervisor at the placement organisation. (Nuffic 2002, 12-15.)

Mutanen (2009, 12) notes that the main methods recognised for the improvement of placement quality practices in Finland at the moment are a) increasing communication between the institution and placement, b) monitoring, and c) training placement providers. This approach would require a strategically limited network of placements. Virolainen (2007, 290) notes that in Finland:

> *"The development of quality in workplace learning is heavily dependent on local initiative, as introducing connectivity is a practical process that has to be implemented and reflected on by networks of professionals."*

While the above comment is made from a national viewpoint with no visible agenda toward international placement procedures, the same idea could also be applied to international placements if "local initiative" was to be replaced with a strategic approach to certain geographical areas of development and creating international placement networks.

4   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The employability of graduates seems to be the central concern in most placement studies (Gault et al. 2010, 76; Morgan & Turner 2000, 454; Morse 2006, 735; Neill & Mulholland 2003, 89; Nuffic 2002, 3; Rae 2007, 605; Virolainen 2007, 290) and could be seen as the ultimate benefit of the whole education. Thus the trainees' own perceived effect on future employability, satisfaction and relevance-to-study of job content, as well as experienced levels of mentoring should be taken into central consideration also in this thesis. Joint-development of learning goals (Virolainen 2007, 300) should supposedly lead to an increase of the relevance of job content to study. Increased professional learning could be achieved through mentoring activities (Knouse & Fontenot 2008, 63) also having a positive effect on employability, and through that connection would likely increase levels of job satisfaction as well.

The potential value of structured placement processes as proposed by Nuffic (2002, 6-13) and EAIE (2010, 38) should be paid attention to, even though such models go against the grain with regard to the traditional Finnish placement practices. This would allow for comparisons to the current model for identification of problem and improvement areas. The self-sought placement model emphasises autonomy (Virolainen 2007, 300), but is in a conflict with the idea of QA in that students may be discouraged to find placements without pre-ensured quality (Mutanen 2009, 12). The use of networks and possible commercial placement organisations as explained by Mutanen (2009, 13) should be explored as an option or an addition to both previously mentioned models.

The placement officer model proposed by Bullock et al. (2009, 483, 493) combined with a career and recruitment person as implied by Mutanen (2009, 12) is worth examining via an assumed role of a dedicated placement coordinator and the possibility of using former student trainees as 'placement mentors'. This would supposedly lead to less distress in the placement process and reduced time spent on finding and organising placements. In addition, the concerns voiced by Nuffic (2002, 6) could be addressed as more attention could be paid to the work content of

placements, meaning less time would be spent on practical matters. As explained by Evans & Lindsay (2011, 335), the trainees as customers of the process may not fully understand what is expected of them and of the placement organisation before they have gone through the process themselves. This pre-placement mentoring could help in countering this effect, in crafting expectations, and evading unnecessary concerns while attending to acute ones.

Together, the role of continuity (Mutanen 2009, 12) and the lack of its existence as opposed to Nuffic's (2002, 6) presented concerns of wasting time and losing focus when finding placements add up to an area in need of investigation.

Knouse & Fontenot's (2008, 63) description of placement satisfaction characteristics constitutes a large part of the possibly measurable perceived quality through self-evaluation. The level of engagement via adequate tasks, feedback, respectful treatment and mentoring are thus in a central role when evaluating the placement organisation's performance.

As the process under investigation is not a production but a service process, the process application of Six Sigma (Lecklin 2006, 204) to reduce statistical variation would be out of the question due to the resulting small sets of data. As far as the classical understanding of TQM by Miller (1996, 157) could be applied, the process in question does not concern the whole organisation of KyUAS and as such would be invalid to use in this research. However the TQM-like philosophy of *kaizen* (Evans & Lindsay 2011, 349) promoting gradual and consistent improvement would be a valuable part of any process, regardless of other systematic improvement efforts.

Instead of applying the higher education definitions of QA (Woodhouse 1999, 30; EAIE 2010, 6), in this work QA is viewed from a more traditional perspective as per Evans & Lindsay (2011, 4). The reasoning behind being that the official higher education QA measures seem to be more concerned with the overall performance of an organisation than that of an individual process. Hence the goal of QA in this work is the establishment of a planned and systematic quality control mechanism

regarding the process. The most appropriate measure of quality then would be Juran's 'fitness for use' (Woodhouse 1999, 29-30; Evans & Lindsay 2011, 105-106), in that the process fulfils its purpose only if its set goals are achieved consistently. This would make the quality 'accessible' in that the goals should be measurable and this supposed consistency, or lack thereof, could be determined. It would also decrease the degree of dependency on student trainees' self-evaluation regarding the process performance.

The improvement of the process itself is in the heart of this research, as the internal aspects of potential placement organisations cannot be reached or influenced without an existing structured placement process which integrates the placement organisations into itself. E.g. the levels of mentoring could be expected to vary greatly from one placement organisation to another without institutional control over or guidelines regarding it. In order to ensure placement quality then, the educational institution should behave as a kind of an EQR agency toward their placement providers, echoing their own quality standards to their cooperators. This QA activity would most likely be left to the process owners of the international work placement process. As such, an effective process control and improvement strategy as part of a process management system (Evans & Lindsay 2011, 334) could function as the skeleton of achieving higher levels of placement quality. The PDCA Cycle would be applicable for use as the QIP framework under which continued process improvement can take place.

5   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the objective of the research is to probe and understand the process in order to develop improvement suggestions, and as there are no readily available statistics on the subject or a sizeable enough target group related to the specific process studied for a statistical analysis, the logical approach for this thesis is of a qualitative nature.

Qualitative research refers to any and all methods of study that do not include quantitative, statistical or numerical methods. It's purpose is to portray, understand and interpret the research topic as opposed to creating applicable generalisations. The researcher is thus more involved in the process than in quantitative research, where a certain distance is required between the researcher and the studied subject. (Kananen 2008, 24.)

For evaluating the research, the quantitative concepts of internal and external validity as well as reliability are transformed under corresponding qualitative concepts of credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity) and dependability (reliability), according to the synchronisation presented by Kananen (2008, 125). These transferred terms will be used throughout the thesis to replace the use of the quantitatively understood terms of validity and reliability for a clear distinction from quantitative research methods.

For the research, themes were developed under which it was formulated. The following figure shows a gross simplification of the framework on which the research is based.
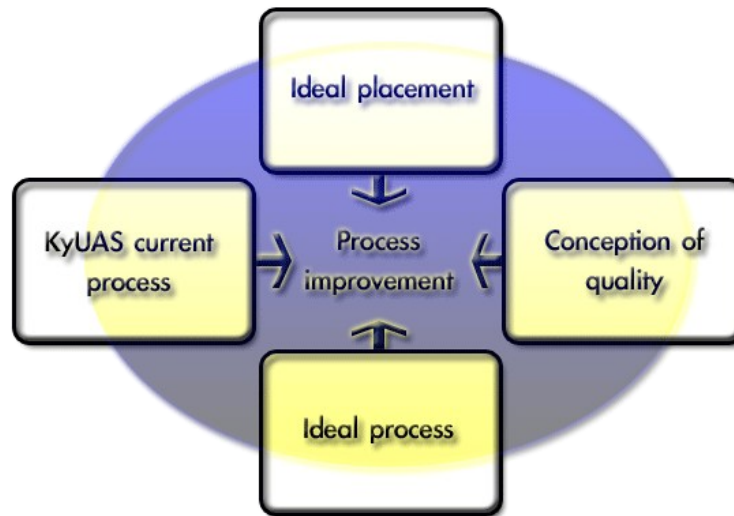
Figure 1 Research framework

To clarify figure 1, KyUAS current process refers to all possible benefits and shortcomings that are a product of the current process in place. Ideal process is aimed at finding out what could be done better within the internal process, whereas the ideal placement is concerned with finding desirable placement qualities that the process should pursue. The conception of quality then is meant to examine what would be sufficient in terms of the nature of quality pursued or targeted. All of these aspects are taken into account in order to access the process for improvement. The current placement process is then reflected against the idea of an established process management system. Like this, the process design is examined to see if there is a need for re-design. The process is checked to see if it is under control regarding standard conformance or not, and to assess the need and degree to which take corrective action if not. As process improvement has been previously nominated as the manifestation of QA in this thesis, the 'soul' of the research is not called quality assurance, but instead process improvement. There are some practical matters related to the process that have been overlooked in the theoretical part of this thesis, yet are included in the research, e.g. the theme of compensation. These practical issues are discussed for a better depiction of the circumstances under which the placements were carried out.

The data acquisition method that was best fit for understanding the research problem was found to be thematic interviewing, as the student perspective of the process' functionality is best viewed through the process' customers. The respondents chosen for this thesis are students of KyUAS who have completed, or attempted to complete, work placements abroad. This group was chosen since the students have gone through the studied process as its customers and thus have first-hand experience related to the process. Because their views are subjective and one-sided with no involvement on the organisation-side of the process, they are able to provide a fresh, individual perspective towards it. They are also the only people that have gotten to experience the end-results of the process as such and thus would have been the main beneficiaries of included higher quality. Thereby the expectation was that the respondents had been previously pondering issues related to the research problem, or had had the topic in mind as a thought process prior to being interviewed.

The theoretical sample group i.e. the choice of individuals that met these criteria, as well as the number of interviews was based largely on interviewee availability. A number of five students were interviewed, which implies that the research results are not exhaustive, i.e. saturation has not been achieved. This limits the study transferability.

The interviews took place at the KyUAS campus, time spent on interviewing ranged from about one to two hours per interview. The interview audio was recorded using a laptop computer. Four of the interviews were carried out in Finnish, one was conducted in English. The interview was thematically structured from a chronological process perspective as follows:

1) background information
2) pre-placement process
3) placement experience
4) post-placement reflections
5) improvement

The purpose of the background information was to relate the responses to the respondents' individual experience levels, as the respondents had done both basic and specialisation trainings and generally were of a variety of different backgrounds, also having varying levels of expectations and experience. The questions asked in this section were related to the study year during which the placement was carried out, the country where the placement was held at, the level of expertise, as well as the nationality or cultural background of the respondent. All of the aforementioned aspects had an effect on the way the respondent reacted to issues handled in the interview.

The pre-placement process covered aspects related to preparing oneself for going to a foreign placement and how the current KyUAS placement process supports this. The underlying motivations for going, methods and timeframes for locating placements, choice of and previous experience of the country, compensation arrangements and other financial matters, as well as the creation of learning goals were issues discussed in this part of the interview.

The placement experience part mainly focused on what the actual work content was and how well it matched the expectations of the student, as well as examined the level of involvement of KyUAS while carrying out the placement. Issues discussed included rewarding and conflicting experiences during the placement, the reactions to these experiences, experienced levels of mentoring at the workplace, as well as matters related to professional growth and levels of responsibility experienced during the placement.

Post-placement reflections then aimed at finding out how the KyUAS process helps the students better understand what they had done on their placement and what are the benefits they have gained. Also whether there is enough support available for adapting back to ones studies after a placement was under review. The initial expectations were mirrored to the perceived outcomes, and the relevance of studies to the job-role. Other issues discussed in this part included the perceived benefits and perceived effect on future employability, significance of the official reflections on the placement at KyUAS, goals of international placements as perceived by the

students, the best and worst aspects of the experienced placement, whether or not the student would carry out such placements again, possible discussion on continuation practices with the placement organisation, overall placement satisfaction, possible advise to aspiring student trainees, and if the respondent would be interested in mentoring these aspiring student trainees upon request.

The improvement section was mainly concerned with finding out practical solutions for the problems perceived by the respondents themselves, as well as finding out what the ideal placement could be and how would they go about finding one now after their own experience, as they would likely be better equipped to tackle the search. Questions asked covered topics such as the ultimate responsibility holders of international placements, particularly weak areas in the current process, mirroring the benefits of self-sought placements to structured ones, opinions on third party placement organisations, the value of international placements as opposed to domestic ones, possible benefits of perhaps hiring a dedicated placement coordinator, and at last the word was free for any other improvement suggestions.

While carrying out the interviews, the interview structure served as a backbone and many offset questions were asked leading into very individualistic interview experiences. None of the interviews had exactly the same questions as the other.

The recorded interview data was transcribed into text word by word and then summarised into general language, resulting in a summary of each respondents summarised response under the originally asked question. Next, the data was coded under recurring themes surfacing from the responses. Next, motivational elements were identified and quantified, and in the end, all responses were categorised into topical clusters. As such, the analysis is loosely based on the interview structure, in that the clustered themes following are not the same as the themes formulated for, and used in, the interview.

A content analysis of the interview results follows in chapter six discussing the findings of the interviews. For analysis purposes, the Finnish interview data and

direct quotes have been contextually translated to English in order to best portray the content received from the respondents.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Current process

The KyUAS' set goals of practical training that can be found in the virtual study platform Moodle (KyUAS Moodle – Practical Training), are listed here:

- *"to give students an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practice*
- *to develop readiness for independent working*
- *to deepen the skills of the student*
- *to prepare for assignments in the field*
- *to support studying which is in accordance with the training programme"*

These objectives are mentioned in the general forum for practical training and as such should be valid objectives for both domestic and foreign placements. Measuring the attainment of these goals is largely left to the student for self-evaluation via writing a placement report and attending the training seminars where the placement experience is shared with others.

There are no separately stated goals for international placements. The KyUAS website lists the expected benefits of international work placements as follows:

- *"Experience a different educational and cultural environment.*
- *Gain a new perspective on your subject area.*
- *Increase your employability within an international market.*
- *Improve your language skills.*
- *Gain credits which will count towards your degree.*
- *Go for one semester or academic year and pay no tuition fees.*
- *Funding available to offset mobility costs.*
- *Become more independent and confident.*
- *Travel and make new friends.*
- *Have the best time of your life!"*

Even as the above list seems to be made with visibly a marketing motive, the expected benefits can only be realised if the goals of the process support them. The first three listed benefits seem to constitute a large part of the intangible qualities which both also surfaced from the theory and were mentioned by the respondents. The rest of the benefits seem to be either financial, accreditation, or personal development related, which are already largely covered by the existing process. Thus the improvement process should be focused and directed at further developing the chances of successfully gaining these benefits, especially that of increased international employability.

The current official KyUAS international work placement process is described below (KyUAS International Service Quality Handbook):

1) The student finds a placement for a time of his/her choosing
2) The student petitions for acceptance of placement from his/her placement supervisor and agrees on the documentation to be delivered
3) As soon as the above has been agreed to, the student contacts the international office
4) The student may apply for grants and receive support and guidance for the upcoming period abroad from the international office
5) After the placement, the student returns the requested documentation to the international office
6) The placement supervisor marks the placement as done in Winha

At a glance, the process appears very superficial, e.g. points three and four are largely the same. The process seems to be mainly concerned about the bureaucracy of the accreditation, idea which is supported by the complete chronological gap for anything taking place during the placement.

The real process includes also an information session, giving the students a chance to present questions on any doubts they might have. The students must also attend a number of two basic training seminars as well as two specialisation seminars, where they are able to listen in on the experiences of the former trainees. The student then

proceeds to find a placement. Once found, the student creates own learning goals and fills in a placement plan and agreement. There are different documentation standards for placements in the EU and outside of it (KyUAS Intranet – Students going abroad). Students undertaking placements in the EU use the ERASMUS templates (Training agreement, Placement agreement, Placement information form), whereas the students going abroad somewhere other than the EU use another template OPM/AMK (Contract of work placement, Grant application). It is noteworthy that the ERASMUS Training agreement includes a quality commitment clause detailing the EU-set responsibilities of each party involved, where the OPM/AMK contract of work placement does not. This quality commitment clause includes some peculiarities, such as the detailing of the negotiation and agreement of the training agreement as a joint-activity between the institution and the placement provider. According to the commitment, the placement provider is also required to draw up a contract or equivalent complying with the placement host country's national legislation, which is not a requirement in the basic work placement contract of KyUAS nor the OPM/AMK contract. The pre-placement procedures e.g. assistance in 'choosing' a placement as opposed to the Finnish common practice of 'finding' one is mentioned in the responsibilities of the institution, instead of the student. In the commitment, the student's responsibility is to comply, abide, and make the best out of anything coming their way. This quality commitment clause would then seem to be in a slight conflict with the concept of independence encouraged by the Finnish placement ideology and practices.

Once the respective documents are filled in, the placement coordinator reads through them, checks the learning goals and other details and then either agrees to the details, or asks the student to specify the details until agreeable, confirming them by signature. Once the documentation is in order and the agreements all signed, the international office can be contacted about grants, if the student so wishes. For ERASMUS trainees, the ERASMUS grant is available. For those going outside of the EU, an OPM/AMK-grant is the equivalent. Once the grants are settled, the student leaves to undertake the placement.

After the placement, the students are required to write a report on their experiences and hold a presentation in one of the training seminars. The placement coordinators use these media as tools for quality control, and take action accordingly if needed.

As for process-integrated help for finding an international placement, the Moodle platform (KyUAS Moodle – Practical Training) includes a word-file named 'Work Placements Abroad' listing websites of job portals, agencies, associations and some commercial placement organisations as well.

If framed within the idea of a process management structure, it seems the current process would only meet the proposed level of a process design phase as there are no measurable outcomes other than obtained credits upon completion. Even if successful completion would be deemed as a reasonable and measurable outcome of the process, it would allow for very little use in the way of process control or potential improvement. Even though the students self-assessments are reviewed, they are highly subjective, thus they may not the best possible tools for quality control.

Taken to the extremes, if the goal of the process were to eliminate variance of measured outcome, and the outcome measured were the successful completion of placement and thus obtained credits, it would still not allow for much control of quality as the experiences and gained benefits of the individuals who have partaken in the process would still significantly vary. This implies that the current process is not consistently repeatable, nor adequately measurable.

Thus it could be argued that from a traditional process management perspective, the current process is not under sufficient control for establishing any effective improvement schemes. A renewed stage of process design should take place for establishing the possibility of effective process improvement.

Despite it's shortcomings from a process quality perspective, it seems the process is perfectly in line with the typical Finnish placement process, apart from not having a dedicated placement coordinator.

6.2 Interview results

The data clusters after summarising and coding the data, in the end formed under the following headings:

1) circumstances
2) response similarities & contradictions
3) communication issues
4) placement & process perceptions
5) perceived problems & benefits
6) responsibilities

The categories were subject to multiple changes and have gone through a number of transformations over the timely process of analysing the data. As the interviews were in many ways unique and the topics covered varied between the interviews, the analysis does not cover each and every single issue mentioned throughout. Rather, the analysis attempts to point out what is relevant to the research problem.

Some of the data overlapped in a number of clusters as certain responses may have referred to more than one category e.g. perceived problems and communication issues. These overlaps were eliminated through best applicability in choosing categories.

6.2.1   Circumstances

The way in which the respondents had found their placements varied greatly. Three of the respondents had a more or less systematic approach and clear strategies as to what and where they wanted to do and already had the network or other prerequisites necessary to achieve this end. One of these respondents was already on a student exchange in the country of the placement, and thus had the opportunity the search for a placement on-location which is not often the case. Two of the respondents credited the found placement to their network and existing contacts.

The remaining two respondents had found their placements largely by chance, one had been told about a placement opportunity by a KyUAS staff member, whereas the last one had found the placement casually browsing for something interesting on Jobstep.net.

The time spent on looking for the placement varied from the minimum of a few days (via network) to a maximum of five months of on-location and online searching.

The compensation arrangements at the placements were all very different. One respondent was not compensated at all, but in relation to the professional experience obtained from the placement probably gained the most out of the respondent group. Another respondent was paid EUR 50 a week but noted that even without any compensation, the grants and such would be more than enough to cover the necessary expenses. One of the respondents was arranged free accommodation at the organisation's home office and noted that without this benefit, going through with the placement may have needed a second thought. Other respondents were compensated via transport fees and lunch, and one with a local level salary on top of the grants.

In general, none of the respondents had run into financial trouble during their placement, though the sources of financing were different. The KELA study support,

the placement grant offered by KyUAS, outside grants, salary, and priorly owned funds had been sufficient for all the respondents.

Three of the respondents had carried out their placements within the boundaries of the EU and were thus under the ERASMUS-programme, while the remaining two respondents had done their placements outside of the EU.

All of the respondents had found their internships in SMEs, mostly in micro-organisations with staff numbers amounting to less than ten people. This has a negative impact on research transferability as there are no comparisons drawn between placement organisations of varying sizes. Potential respondents having completed placements through the same process in larger organisations would likely have had very different opinions on the issues discussed in the interviews.

6.2.2   Response similarities & contradictions

This cluster gathered all the responses that the respondents for the most part had a common ground on, either in terms of interview responses or placement experiences.

The motivational elements related to undertaking a placement were roughly quantified from context as they were found to be recurring throughout the interviews. The frequencies of found occurrences are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 Frequencies of mentioned motivational aspects

As the figure illustrates, the two most popular motivators were learning languages and gaining new experiences, which were both mentioned altogether nine times throughout all the interviews. Aspects such as gaining professional qualities in a specific country or international work experience were only mentioned a few times, though most of the respondents had been abroad for their specialisation training. This could be attributed to self-created learning goals and lack of supervision or clear criteria as to what it is that a specialisation training should consist of.

All of the respondents had formulated their learning goals themselves, with no special involvement on KyUAS' behalf. Where the learning goals were specified, they were rarely achieved. Where the learning goals were more general and vague, the goals were often achieved. There was very little difference between the learning goals of those who did their basic training and those who did their specialisation.

The majority of the respondents believed that the goals of a placement abroad either should be, or are, more related to the cultural and personal development than gaining professional competences.

The placement mentoring was repeatedly mentioned as something of an *ad hoc* activity, thus not carried out in a very systematic way with the exception of one respondent, who had been given a specific task list weekly following the progress. Even in this case, the mentoring itself was left with very little consequence as there was a communication barrier between the student and the mentor. The unofficially appointed mentors at the placements ranged from managing directors and owners to secretaries, some were often present while others were scarcely available. The experienced levels of mentoring thus varied greatly between the respondents.

In terms of an ideal placement, four out of five respondents highlighted the importance of sufficient support and guidance at the workplace. Other issues were given significantly less importance.

When asked about possibly helping out or 'mentoring' students at KyUAS with plans of doing a placement abroad, all of the respondents immediately responded with a strong yes and believed it would be useful. The establishment of such position would constitute a number of benefits e.g. help with finding a 'better' placement, help with creating realistic expectations, less fractured and up-to-date information, and increased control over the process. The desirable duties of such a person could include e.g. relaying information and having the time needed to help those thinking about undertaking placements with practical matters, and providing sufficient guidance in the process. Another way to achieve similar benefits would be to employ the willing former trainees as assistants to the process.

Although few, some contradictions could be found in the interview data. Satisfaction-wise, one respondent noted being 80 per cent satisfied with job-content but regarded overall satisfaction as 'average' in that she believes she could've gotten more out of working there with better mentoring instead of trying to figure things out by herself. She couldn't get as much out of her placement as she wanted, expressing a certain regret. As she had carried out her basic training abroad, she had re-evaluated her placement priorities and thought that it might be better to do her specialisation in Finland for a chance at a higher quality placement. This was noted despite having a generally positive and satisfactory experience at the placement.

Another respondent noted that the placement was the best possible placement for him, but only rated overall placement satisfaction with a school grade of three out of five.

One respondent was happy about having *"some interesting things to do as well"* at the placement, but noted that she wouldn't return to the company in question nor would've gone if she had known what it was like before going.

Four of the five respondents believe they would've done a placement even if it wasn't required, though if they were asked to go again all of them wouldn't return to the same company but would opt to go abroad somewhere else, hoping to get 'luckier'.

6.2.3 Communication issues

The theme of communication enveloped the largest amount of concern by the respondents. Possible problem areas were identified in all the possible connections, thus between KyUAS and placement organisation, between the student and KyUAS during placement, as well as between the student and the placement organisation throughout the whole process. Internal communications within KyUAS and the placement organisations were also identified as problematic in some cases.

Lack of contact between KyUAS and the student while undertaking a placement attracted attention from the respondents and was detailed as an area of needed improvement. During the placement, none of the respondents had been pro-actively contacted by KyUAS officials regarding the placement. Those respondents who had any contact, had to actively pursue this contact themselves, and as a result some of them felt neglected as the school hadn't expressed any interest in their on-going placement progress. Also, none of the respondents had had any sort of continuation discussion neither with the school nor the placement organisation. Even if the students knew the placement organisation would take more interns in the future, no one at KyUAS would have been aware of this.

The majority of the respondents felt that they been unlucky when choosing their placement, but also believe they could not have made a better decision based on the information they had prior to going. Two of the respondents noted that they hadn't understood the job content completely before going, but believe they should have been able to do so based on the job descriptions. Thus the most significant communication problem between students and potential placements seems to stem from a mismatch between the given job descriptions and the students' expectations prior to starting the placement.

As per this particular group of respondents, it was established that there had been a lack of communication between KyUAS and the placement organisations in question, apart from one case where a placement was found through a teacher's suggestion. The respondents' feelings on the subject varied, with some strongly against the idea of such contact, and others heavily in favour of it.

A number of issues came up regarding communication within KyUAS, e.g. the required placement presentation was in one case completely unheard of, and in another case, one respondent revealed an interesting approach to them:

> *"When my friends ask how was my internship I say 'Ohh it was so*
> *bad and it was so hard' but when I was doing the presentation it*
> *was 'very good!' and the manager was 'very nice!'"*

While the above was only an individual remark, it may facilitate a cause of concern if the students expect their role and orientation in these presentations to be mainly marketers of the placement process, instead of critically evaluating themselves, their performance, and the process itself.

One of the respondents admitted to not knowing how involved KyUAS is in the placement search, despite somehow having gone through the process. In another case, the second part of a student grant wasn't paid accordingly due to a miscommunication in the process.

Overall, the available information regarding the process was thus viewed as scattered and difficult to follow.

6.2.4 Process & placement perceptions

One of the respondents was concerned about some students claiming that they have been working abroad somewhere they actually haven't. A suggested medicine for this verification problem was to increase communication between KyUAS and placement providers, saying this would also increase setting realistic expectations, as well as lead to increased trust and reduced stress as a result.

Three of the respondents agreed that finding a quality placement abroad with the given process is largely a matter of luck. The freedom of finding a placement by oneself was thus viewed with a certain degree of cynicism, with comments ranging from *"the danger is you'll find yourself in a shithole"* to *"luck is definitely a factor if there is no one who knows about these things"* (referring to a dedicated placement coordinator). More cynicism was expressed when asked about ethical responsibilities of the placement providers toward students, with a respondent commenting *"maybe a big company only has ethical responsibilities,"* later noting that most of the placement organisations only care about their profits and have very little interest in helping the student-trainees get value out of their experience. Another respondent noted that *"very few placements are actually 'quality'."* Thus the risks of undertaking a placement abroad seem to be abundant and well understood after carrying out a placement, though they may not always be understood before going. The respondents also thought that at the moment, KyUAS isn't sufficiently focused on improving the process.

The practical difficulty of finding a quality placement abroad was also highlighted through commenting on the online availabilities. One respondent noted that:

> *"I was looking online, but it doesn't work. I have used several famous websites... but it doesn't work because there are so many things and they are mainly for executive positions or something..."*

The website Jobstep.net was mentioned by two respondents with a negative association, as it supposedly has 'cold' pieces of information about possibly unreliable and low-quality placements. General distrust towards these online job-adds exists, which was portrayed with some emotion via the following phrase: *"Nowadays I just hate reading those Jobstep announcements as you can so easily see who are the abusers."* The aforementioned reflects the risks perceived by undertaking a placement, as the respondent recognised that there are also placements out there that are using the system against itself, by taking advantage of the goodwill and work morale of the potential trainees. This may manifest itself through, for instance, over-promising and oversold job advertisements, detailing great responsibilities and very attractive work conditions, where in reality the job may be something completely different. The same respondent noted on the same issue that *"it is commonly known to be like this. Even my parents asked before I left: 'is it really a real and respectable company you're going to?' ."* The same respondent concluded the interview with the remark *"I just felt I gave too rosy an impression."* Thus it could be said that general confusion about where to go and what to do to find a reliably quality placement exists.

The most mentioned area of improvement in the process was help with finding a placement, the second being increased communication either between the school and student or the placement provider and the school. When asked about a possible dedicated placement coordinator, everyone noted it would be a very useful role and strongly encouraged its establishment. Very much in line with the placement satisfaction qualities proposed by Knouse & Fontenot (2008, 63), adequate communication or mentoring, respectful treatment, and challenging enough assignments were highlighted as the most important, thus also to be expected, quality attributes of international placements.

6.2.5   Perceived benefits & problems

The benefits of placements abroad were largely attributed to the cultural aspect and personal development. Even those respondents that had had a satisfactory placement in terms of professional development, highlighted the above-mentioned aspects.

All the respondents thought of the experience as beneficial, even those who claimed they could've been 'luckier' in finding a better quality placement nor were happy about the placement while undertaking it.

One respondent, when asked about the benefits of undertaking a foreign placement, claimed that *"it's (=the placement) just one line added on my CV"* but later on added that the placement had definitely added to her interest and motivation toward the rest of her specialisation studies upon returning to KyUAS. All of the respondents believed they had developed an understanding of their respective placements' industries, though on varying levels.

The respondents had various practical problems at their placements, some of which are highlighted here. For instance, one respondent's placement provider went bankrupt due to legal charges filed against the owner. The same respondent's job role as a purchasing manager had turned out to consist of sending employees grocery shopping to the local market. Another respondent had personal property confiscated by the placement organisation's General Manager. Yet another respondent had an alcoholic boss, who as a result acted out quite badly at times, for instance through cancelling promised holidays. Apart from practical issues, cultural problems were common at most respondents' placements.

6.2.6   Responsibilities

The respondents had very different views on who should be responsible for placement quality. Two respondents agreed that the student should be solely responsible for organising their placement, while the institution and the placement provider should only provide adequate information regarding it. One of these respondents claimed that *"final responsibility can't be with the school because the school is in Finland, as they don't know what's happening."*

One respondent claimed that the placement organisation should have final responsibility as they are the ones offering to take trainees. Another agreed with this on a more subtle approach, saying there should be shared responsibility between all parties with an emphasis on the placement provider. Another respondent noted that it would be good if the institution at least helped somehow in finding a placement *"as it is a school requirement"* thus assuming a part of the responsibility. Another remark made concluded that the institution cannot babysit the students too much either.

Similarly to responsibility, the respondents had varying perspectives but were more reserved in giving a definitive answer to whether a structured placement organisation model would be better than the current one. Comparisons between the options were made, with the often mentioned pro for self-sought organisation being the infinite freedom of choice. Though it was agreed that institutionally organised placements would be easier, they were mostly seen as a possible option for those who have a hard time finding a placement by themselves.

One respondent suggested a quota-based organised placement system, where the only applicants to the position would be from KyUAS and the trainees would be decided through an internal application process.

Collectively then, a type of a hybrid of self-sought and organised placement possibilities would seem to be the preference. It should be noted though, that most of the respondents were mostly not aware of the existence of structured placement

models and thus had a very short time to dwell on the subject, negatively impacting the credibility of the related discussion.

The respondents weren't very well informed on the idea of what third party commercial placement organisations are, thus very little discussion on the topic followed. After an explanation, three of the respondents agreed that in some cases, their use may be a viable option.

7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary of main results

To summarise, it appears that the current process would not explicitly meet the theoretical requirements for a quality assured process, even though efforts are being made to understand and improve it. At the moment, the quality assurance of the process is based on the reflections between the students' subjective self-evaluations and the placement coordinators' interpretations of those subjective accounts. Improvement then happens on an *ad hoc* basis on the noticed shortfalls.

The process in its current form is experienced by its customers very individually, with the time and resources spent on finding a placement, as well as the experienced quality of a placement, varying greatly.

The underlining motives for going on placements abroad seem to be mainly related to cultural issues rather than professional development. Identifiable qualities of a so-called 'good placement' include mainly support and guidance, though these were often just those aspects the placement providers either did not possess the capabilities for, or were otherwise barred from delivering due to communication issues.

The issue that attracted the most attention in the research was communication on all possible levels. This includes both internal communication between the institution and students, and the information flow between the student and the placement. Highlighted here is the mismatch between students expectations as opposed to the placement providers' job descriptions.

The students undertaking placements seem to be aware of the risks inherent in going abroad, but would appreciate extra interest in the affair from the institution in order to benefit more from their placement experiences. The possibility of finding a good quality placement is seen as an affair of luck more than something achievable by adequate planning, resulting in a cynical approach toward placement providers in general. Despite encountered problems and occasional negative feelings, the

respondents were in the end all glad they had taken part in the process and carried out their placements, though they may not have felt so during the placement itself.

The respondents had very differing views on the responsibility for quality, with no clear ideas or mutual understanding of who should, or does, own said responsibility. No clear preferences were indicated between alternate placement models either, as the concept seemed somewhat exotic to the respondents.

With regard to identified areas of improvement, the most attention-needy issue would seem to be help with finding a placement, communication issues not lagging too far behind.

7.2   Credibility, Transferability, Dependability & Delimitations

As this thesis is made specifically regarding the KyUAS international work placement process, the study is focused only on compulsory placements that are carried out at foreign organisations or companies. Data obtained in the research was gathered from business students of KyUAS only. As such, the Finnish placement practices concerning domestic placements are not under scrutiny in this research, though the research is made from a predominantly Finnish UAS perspective regarding international placement procedures.

The process investigated is based on a self-sought placement practice, which is the predominant international placement process form in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Hence this study is also mainly concerned with such processes. While the structured placement practices may seem like a lucrative option preferred by many, these would supposedly require a substantial overhaul of organisational philosophy and relatively heavy investments with little financial returns, which is why they are mainly treated as sources of inspiration for improvement rather than real-life options in this work.

Most of the research materials found on the topic are of a foreign origin and discuss the topic from a domestic perspective, which implies the use of substantial freedom

when interpreting the proposed theories and fitting them to the Finnish practices. Direct comparisons between, for instance, the UK or the US placement systems to the Finnish one would be fruitless, as the differences would be overwhelming. Due to this, the resulting development suggestions are only loosely based on their original theoretical context and have been adapted accordingly to the best of the author's abilities.

As for the credibility of sources and references used in the theoretical part of the thesis, most of the information used in describing the placement practices and related issues was obtained from fairly recent articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, obtained from online databases such as EBSCO, Emerald Insight, and ScienceDirect. Most of the publications in this respect were of a UK origin, time-wise the publications used range from 2000 to 2011, although older sources are also scarcely referenced.

Information and studies from the Finnish Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), its Dutch counterpart Nuffic, as well as materials from the European Association for International Education, were also used for painting a better background picture of the topic. For a thorough understanding of quality assurance and process management in the appropriate context, both Finnish and foreign books on the subject were investigated, with their respective publications ranging from 1999 (Woodhouse) to renewed editions as new as 2011 (Evans & Lindsay). Theoretical information on quality practices was mostly obtained from a secondary source, as Evans & Lindsay's Management and Control of Quality is a course material book which merely references the ideologies of the original quality gurus. This leaves more room for possible misinterpretations as there are more links in the chain. While the Finnish materials on the subject of quality by Lecklin (2006) and Raivola (2000) were interesting and insightful, they were of little consequence as references in this thesis due to their respective focus' on education and business performance.

Regarding the analysis of results, the author has participated in the studied process twice, meaning the analysis may suffer from personal subjectivity despite best efforts of avoidance. This may impact the credibility of the results. As only business

students of KyUAS have been interviewed for this thesis, there is no detailed discussion on the differences between departments. The research material used is mostly of a business orientation, further limiting the inter-departmental transferability of the research. General studies on the placement practices of other Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences are referred to in the theoretical part, as there are no earlier applicable studies close enough to the subject specifically regarding KyUAS or another individual Finnish UAS.

As the topic of this thesis is very closely related to KyUAS and its staff, and the respondents are all students of KyUAS, the respondents were promised anonymity in order to encourage openness and honesty in their answers. The background information of the respondents is not published in this work, limiting access to original research. This reduces the dependability of the research as the transcribed interviews are not available for repeating the analysis, meaning no availability for checking the consistency of results.

The theoretical sample group interviewed for the research isn't large enough to provide overall generalisations or extensive, reliable conclusions. The results rather serve as a fountain of differing perspectives regarding the research problem, providing an understanding of the international work placement process and its shortcomings as it is at the moment. As such, the results aren't readily transferrable for improving the placement process in other organisations, yet they could be applied to an extent if the study's limitations and differences between the processes are acknowledged.

It should be noted that while the interviews did provide valuable insight into the process, some of the individual topics covered were quite challenging to get a clear and mutual understanding of. As the interview questions were strongly rooted into the theoretical part of the thesis, the respondents may not have had exactly corresponding ideas as the interviewer regarding some of the questions during the interviews. This may have had a negative impact on the credibility of results.

7.3   Implications

While it seems that the current process might have room for improvement, the international work placement process for students could be seen as a potential value creating and adding activity. Relatively inexpensive procedures exist that could add significant value to the process. Some of these resource-light fixes are proposed in the following paragraphs.

1) Establish a procedure for systematic continuation practices with found 'quality' placements

If there is no plan for continuation, it is not very likely that continuation would be achieved either. If all the aspiring trainees have to find a so-called new placement, the chances are that the average time spent on finding a foreign placement will remain quite long. In order to eventually steer clear of this problem, the students going on placements abroad could be briefed and perhaps even given templates of a possible continuation practice contract agreement for review. If the student has had a satisfying placement experience and so chooses, he/she may at the end of the placement propose such continuation practice to the placement representative and inform KyUAS placement coordinators of this possibility together with the placement representative's contact information. The student could liaise this deal already before ending the placement, thus building a bridge for a possible new trainee in the same organisation. The responsibility would fall to the placement coordinators together with the head of programme from the liaising student's study programme. They should be primarily responsible for the creation of these agreements as they are the ones most likely to be involved in the process and know the most about the student in question as well as the placement under review. Together with the student they should be able to build a solid understanding of what the placement organisation does, what it is like to be a trainee there, and if it is suitable or attractive enough to a larger number of potential trainees. The final details of the contracts should be negotiated by a member of KyUAS staff, up until to the point where standard contract models become possible. It is likely that KyUAS would not be able to send students over consistently every time a placement

organisation needs one, so initially there should be no exclusivity promises or quotas in these contracts. The general conditions and guidelines of such agreements should be established by the practical training correspondents, with separate sets for both basic and specialisation trainings.

The initial deals and contracts negotiated by the student would not need to be very complicated or demanding, first of all to encourage involvement and to not make it too hard for the placement organisation, and also as a show of goodwill and trust. As such, the first agreements would likely be more based on gut-feeling more than anything, but as a procedure goes on it evolves and progresses. More demanding elements could be added later on down the road.

This procedure, after trial and error and upon successful take-off, should slowly accumulate to a sizeable network of placements over time. By no means would this be an overnight solution to anything, but a very *kaizen*-based effort at gradual improvement. Even with a good number of such agreements, it is likely that not all the students wanting to go work abroad would want exactly these placements on-offer. This would be dependent on the characteristics of the placements as well as schedules and curricula at KyUAS. Most of all, this would be dependent on personal preferences of the students themselves. Thus it may be a good idea to limit these possible agreements to the programmes with the largest amounts of students, or if known, the programme with the largest amount of students willing to go for a work placement abroad.

2) Establish an internal mentoring scheme consisting of matching former student trainees and aspiring ones

At the moment, former student trainees could be seen as a wasted resource of QA. The international office could assign the available former trainees to help and share their experiences with the aspiring trainees also outside of the seminars, as the seminar attendance is likely limited and will not reach all of the potentially interested audience. This could be done with as little effort as giving out the contact information, e-mails and phone numbers of the willing former trainee to those with

doubts and worries about the process. The actual benefits of this scheme would remain to be seen, but from the research it would be reasonable to conclude that the themes of guidance and support are equally important in the sending end as in the receiving placement end.

3) Measure the process performance

Though self-evaluation is included in the process, quality comparisons between individual accounts are difficult to draw due to the subjectivity of perceived quality. Thus such individual accounts of the student trainees should not be the only measures of placement quality. Because of this, accurately measurable outcomes of the placement process would need to be partly independent from the student trainees' subjective influence. When the former trainees come back from their placements, instead of just self-evaluation, both the head of programme and international coordinator could have one-on-one talks with, or create questionnaires directed at, former trainees in an effort to find out the true benefits and value of the experience gained. This talk or questionnaire would evaluate the characteristics and qualities of the placement and the process. The measured areas in the student questionnaires could include aspects such as overall placement satisfaction, work content relevance to studies, the degree of challenge experienced, adequacy of mentoring, trainees willingness to work in the placement organisation in the future, and students' experienced levels of responsibility. The questionnaires aimed at the placements could then ask about the perceived benefits by the placement provider, providers willingness to employ trainees of KyUAS in the future, possible willingness to pursue other joint activities or projects with KyUAS or the trainee, and willingness to employ the trainee in the future.

In addition, clear self-evaluation criteria for the student's own performance should be established by both the head of programme and the international office in relation to the training objectives. This should be done in order to numerically 'score' the individual results for creation of measurements that could be compared to the aforementioned talks or questionnaires. In those cases where the placement in question is carried out during the study year, this questionnaire or talk could be

divided into parts where the first part would be before the beginning of the placement, second sometime during the placement, and third upon the trainee's return to KyUAS. This would span out the evaluation of the process and its progress over time, instead of belching out everything at once when everything is already over and 'left behind' in many ways. In order to increase communication and reliability of such measured quality, the placement organisation could also be included in the loop with a separate questionnaire designed for measuring both their perceived performance of the trainee, and to reflect their own performance as a placement organisation. With the help of all three of these measurement systems, the final evaluation of a placement could be a reliable and useful tool in process improvement. At least more so than the lone student's freeform self-evaluation.

However, in possible conflicted situations between the students and placements, it could become rather difficult to evaluate either the placements or students real performance, as the smaller placement organisations' professional opinions could be quite synonymous with those of the individual owners or managers of the company. In such cases the placement would likely be measured a failure regardless of the gained real-life benefits on either side. The problem would then rear it's head in the accreditation phase of the placement process, since it would be difficult to justify accrediting a measurably failed placement. The proposed way around this problem could be to keep the evaluation process as a separate entity for process improvement, and have the completion of the placement as the only independent prerequisite for accreditation.

4) Assign a centralised information hub for clear communication concerning only the international work placement process

One of the biggest problems regarding the process at the moment may be the scattered information and the resulting confusion. Some information is available in the intranet, some in the practical training Moodle-platform, some from the international office and the placement coordinators, as well as anyone else with knowledge of individual placements or placement networks. Centralised distribution of this information would be the goal of this proposed platform. If assumed that

there are staff members at KyUAS who have networks or knowledge of possible placements, currently this information would most likely not reach the aspiring trainees. Also, staff of KyUAS involved in the placement process may not be aware of those who are looking for placements in the first place, as there are no separate communication platforms for those looking for international placements, only one for practical training in general. Thus there is no linkage to achieve this information flow. Bringing all of this largely hidden information together in one place would be a significant asset to the process owners as well as the trainees. The Moodle-platform would be perfect for this, as that would require the searching student to first of all participate and expose their search intention to the process owners. Secondly, on top of including the already existing relevant information found under the current practical training platform, it could include a wiki-platform for the former trainees to share their tips and possible placement contacts, or optionally just their own contact information. It could thus be used for effectively bringing together the proposed placement mentors and the aspiring trainees, as well as function as a continuously improving source of up-to-date information This should help bridge the gap between the aspiring trainees' pre-departure expectations and reality. The proposed platform could be managed by the international office in cooperation with willing former trainees. This task would mainly be a question of rearranging and categorising the existing information to a central location, as well as constantly adding newly-found relevant information to the platform.

All of the above activities would then need to be coordinated and occasionally checked by the head of business department to ensure both, cooperation between the staff involved, as well as the continued collective interest and action on improving the process. When the first batch of results based on the proposed performance measures were to arrive, an instant review of the effectiveness and applicability of the results would need to be checked jointly with all the staff involved. At this phase, the necessary corrections to the measurement system could still be made as the scheme would still be fresh and not completely forgotten. The international office would still be in charge of financial support matters, and placement coordinators responsible for ensuring that the placements match the study programme content in a sufficient manner and day-to-day handling of the process activities.

7.4   Suggestions for further research

This research only provides a look at the problem from a business student's perspective, in relation to their expectations and types of placements sought. The situation may be completely different in fields other than business. While cross-departmental studies exist (e.g. Virolainen 2007), they do not have an international perspective included, limiting their scope. As this thesis is limited to interviewing a few individuals and largely based on their accounts and personal experiences from a single process' perspective, further study on the subject on a more comprehensive level would be needed for thorough understanding of the research problem. Possible topics to cover include e.g. how the placement processes between the various UAS in Finland vary; the feasibility of establishing international placement networks; the potential for UAS-based joint-development of such networks; and examining the departmental differences of placement processes and adopting found best practices.

Outside of the made improvement proposals, a more effective but resource-heavy way of corresponding quality improvement could be to invest in building a newly-designed placement process around a foreign placement network, perhaps in conjunction with foreign partner universities in chosen key locations abroad. This would require further research in finding out which locations if any would be worth the trouble as KyUAS alone likely wouldn't have that many students carrying out foreign placements per year. Though the benefits would be substantial for those students partaking, the investment in such a practice would probably not be a financially feasible option. On the other hand, with such a quality process the perceived risk would also decline, so it is likely that more students were willing to go.

Similar result with a slightly lesser investment could be possible through the use of third party placement organisations. Without specific arrangements these are already available to students, but the knowledge of their existence in light of this research is not wide-spread nor are they treated as viable options. Not all individually found placements offer salary or other benefits as compensation, even though the financial risk of going abroad for a placement can be great depending on personal situations.

To counter this concern, some third party placement organisations may offer placements with salaries and many offer on-location integration services and support, ensuring the success of the experience. As they have the capability to provide such services, it could be worth examining if continuous cooperation with these organisations would be feasible.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview structure

1. Background information:

Basic or specialisation training abroad?

Which study year did you do your placement abroad?

What is your nationality?

Which country did you do your placement in?

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2. Pre-placement process:

Why did you initially choose to go abroad for an internship?

How did you look for placements abroad?

How long did it take you to find your placement from the beginning of your search?

How did you choose the country? Why that one?

Had you been in the country in question before?

What was the compensation arrangement if any? (Would you have gone without compensation?)

How did you finance your stay during your placement?

What were the learning goals of your work placement?

How were the learning goals formulated?

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3. Placement experience:

What did you learn during your placement?

To what extent did you have contact with KyUAS during your placement?

Was there something particularly rewarding during your placement?

What kind of conflicts did you experience? What basis were they experienced on (cultural, professional, organisational...)?

How did you react to the problem / conflict situation(s)? What were the results?

How was mentoring carried out at your placement organisation?

How much of an understanding about your placement organisation's industry did you develop?

How were you involved in cross-functional activities outside of your static job-role?
_____

4. Post placement reflections:

Were your initial expectations met? To what extent?

How did the content of your job-role relate to your studies?

How satisfied were you with your job-role / job content?

What did you benefit from the experience?

What do you think is the effect of your placement on your future employability?

With whom and how did you officially reflect on your placement after finishing it?

What do you think the goals of international placements should be? Why?

What was best about your placement?

What was worst about your placement?

Would you have undertaken a placement if it was not part of the curriculum (= optional)? Why / why not?

Why would / wouldn't you go again?

Was there any kind of continuation discussion about possibly sending other students to the same placement?

How would you advise / what advise would you give someone going on an international work placement?

To what extent were you satisfied with your placement overall?

If you were asked to mentor / help students who want to do international placement, why (or why not) would (/ wouldn't) you do it?
_____

5. Improvement:

In your opinion, what does the ideal quality placement consist of?

In your opinion, who should have the ultimate responsibility for the quality of international placements?

Is there any particular area in the placement process that could be improved?

What, in your opinion, are the benefits of finding a placement yourself as opposed to having a choice of placements given by the institution? Vice versa?

What is your opinion on third party placement organisations (AIESEC etc.)?

What makes going abroad for a placement more valuable than a domestic one? What are the main differences between them?

What do you think you would have benefited from a placement coordinator (with a specific task of helping students in organising placements abroad)?

Other improvement suggestions?

Appendix 2. Haastattelurakenne

1.Taustatieto:

Suorititko perus- vai erikoistumisharjoittelusi ulkomailla?

Minä opiskeluvuonna suoritit ulkomaanharjoittelusi?

Kansallisuutesi?

Missä maassa teit harjoittelusi?

_____

2. Prosessi ennen harjoittelun alkua:

Miksi alunperin päätit lähteä ulkomaille harjoitteluun?

Miten etsit harjoittelupaikkaa?

Kuinka pitkään etsimisen aloittamisesta kesti kunnes löysit paikan?

Miten valitsit maan? Miksi juuri se?

Olitko käynyt ko. maassa aiemmin?

Minkälaista hyvitystä sait harjoittelustasi? (Olisitko mennyt ilman hyvitystä?)

Kuinka rahoitit harjoittelunaikaisen oleskelusi?

Mitkä olivat harjoittelusi oppimistavoitteet?

Kuinka nämä tavoitteet kehitettiin?
_____

3. Harjoittelunaikaiset kokemukset:

Mitä opit harjoittelusi aikana?

Missä määrin olit yhteydessä KyAMK:iin harjoittelusi aikana?

Oliko harjoittelusi aikana joitakin erityisen palkitsevia kokemuksia?

Millaisia konflikteja koit? Miltä pohjalta ne syntyivät (kulttuuri, ammatti, organisaatio...)

Miten reagoit konfliktitilanteeseen? Miten selvisit siitä / niistä?

Millä tavalla mentorointi oli järjestetty harjoittelupaikassasi?

Missä määrin ymmärryksesi harjoitteluyrityksesi toimialasta kehittyi?

Miten olit mukana jokapäiväisten tehtäviesi ylittävissä ns. poikkiorganisatorisessa toiminnassa?

_____

4. Harjoittelun jälkeinen reflektointi:

Täyttyivätkö alkuperäiset odotuksesi ainakin jossain määrin?

Miten työroolisi oli suhteutettu opintoihisi?

Olitko tyytyväinen työrooliisi ja työn sisältöön?

Mitä hyödyit kokemuksestasi?

Miten mielestäsi harjoittelusi vaikuttaa tulevaisuuden työnsaantimahdollisuuksiisi / valmiuksiisi?

Kenen kanssa ja miten reflektoit "virallisesti" harjoittelusi jälkeen?

Mitkä tavoitteita mielestäsi ulkomaan harjoitteluilla pitäisi olla?

Mikä oli parasta harjoittelussasi?

Mikä oli pahinta harjoittelussasi?

Olisitko suorittanut harjoittelun jos se ei olisi pakollinen osa koulutusohjelmaasi? Miksi / Miksi et?

Menisitkö uudestaan? Miksi / Miksi et?

Miten neuvoisit opiskelijaa joka on aikeissa lähteä lähiaikoina kansainväliseen työharjoitteluun?

Missä määrin olit tyytyväinen työharjoitteluusi yleisesti ottaen?

Jos sinua pyydettäisiin tutoroimaan / mentoroimaan / auttamaan ulkomaanharjoittelua miettiviä opiskelijoita, miksi suostuisit tai miksi et?

_____

5. Parantaminen:

Mistä ihanteellinen harjoittelu mielestäsi koostuisi?

Kenellä mielestäsi pitäisi olla lopullinen vastuu harjoittelupaikan laadusta?

Onko harjoitteluprosessissa jokin tietty alue mitä pitäisi parantaa?

Mitä etua mielestäsi on harjoittelupaikan itse etsimisellä verrattuna oppilaitoksen järjestämään paikkavalintaan? Entä toisinpäin?

Mitä mieltä olet kolmannen osapuolen harjoitteluorganisaatioista (esim. AIESEC)?

Mikä tekee ulkomaanharjoittelusta arvokkaamman kuin kotimaisesta? Mitkä ovat suurimmat erot näiden välillä?

Mitä etua olisit mielestäsi saanut erillisestä harjoittelukoordinaattorista (jonka tehtävänä olisi auttaa opiskelijoita ulkomaanharjoittelujen järjestämisessä)?

Muita parannusehdotuksia?