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Skills Swap

sharing skills in hospitality

SKILLS SWAP

Sharing Skills for WBL in VET for Europe's Hospitality Sector

IO1 - THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
Summary

JUNE 2021

ABOUT THE SKILLS SWAP PROJECT

Skills Swap is a three-year international Erasmus+ project involving training and hospitality organisations in Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Sweden and the UK. Led by Rinova, in London, Skills Swap is designing and testing an innovative approach. It is building networks of SMEs and companies in the hospitality and tourism industry - who have a shared interest in training, retaining and retraining their employees and are willing to cooperate with one another – to exchange, or ‘swap’ staff and apprentices on a short term basis so they can learn skills that are vital to the services offered by their employers.

Our skills swap project is based in the European hospitality sector is the largest part of Europe’s tourism industry. The hospitality industry is a service sector that ‘straddles’ leisure & tourism & includes visitor accommodation, food & drink (cafes, bars, restaurants), event planning, attractions, cruises. Europe is the number 1 tourist destination in the world - 713 million international arrivals in 2018, which was ‘up’ from 670m in 2017 and 620m in 2016. It provides 25 million jobs with 5 million more expected in the next decade (Eurostat).

However, it has been decimated by Covid-19 and is now under recovery. Even before Covid, there were many challenges: a mismatch between the needs of the industry and the training ‘system’; major skills gap, including soft skills. In some quarters there is a poor image in the public, in families and amongst young people) of hospitality careers, with negative - and often out of date - perceptions of job quality: part-time, irregular hours, lower pay, fewer benefits, limited career prospects. Yet the modern hospitality industry has seen many raised standards, new and exciting occupations and better career pathways for those who enter it.

DESIGNING A NEW EUROPEAN APPROACH – THE SKILLS SWAP

By 'skills swap', we mean structured, work-based learning opportunities - where employees and apprentices are released from their roles with one employer for a fixed duration (typically half a day to 2 weeks) to learn skills provided by another employer.

On one hand, many employees in the hospitality sector have to be able to do many different things - and there is nothing new about them learning different skills in different places. However, we have set out to try and approach this need in a more systematic way. It started in London, where Rinova has been setting up a new Hospitality Training 'Academy' - bringing SMEs together who face real challenges, but who as employers are really passionate about the many and exciting new opportunities that are happening in hospitality - thanks to technology and the raising of standards, sustainable and international tourism, amongst many other reasons. These companies are not waiting for the system to train their staff - they are cooperating and getting involved to do so together.

Erasmus+ has now given the chance for this innovation to be shared and developed internationally and the Skills Swap project is the result. We have many questions - how does this approach work? How does it need to be supported? What kinds of things can 'swappers' learn? As well as the benefits, what problems are there? What do different countries, or different types of tourism economy, or companies have to offer - and what difficulties do they have. Can we find common solutions, do we need completely different and flexible solutions, or can we have a bit of both?

To take a first step to answer these questions and to develop a more systematic method and approach, therefore, we needed to explore the issues in a deeper way with those most affected - the companies themselves. Therefore, during the first months of 2021, despite all the problems presented by Covid and all the headaches faced by businesses in tourism, we were able to directly consult and engage about the skills swap concept with over 60 hospitality company representatives across Europe.

THE RESULTS

The company representatives were able to tell us about the skills gaps that they have. These were quite common across Europe, and include skills relating to:

- communication
- following procedures
- paying attention to details
- professionalism
- flexibility and adaptation to job roles
- digital skills / ICT and digitalization in tourism
- quality customer service
- fully supporting an excellent customer experience

Some issues relate to what is known as 'soft' skills – being adaptable, communications, presentation, teamwork and so on; others relate to quite specific 'hard' skills linked to particular tasks involved in the specific job, many of which are changing over time. And, of course, Covid has also thrown a lot of things up in the air.

Some companies told us that they could see exactly how skills swaps could work. They had very definite ideas and very specific opinions about when (i.e. what time of year – for instance, 'they must be off season'). Others had specific views about how long they should last (with one to two weeks being typical, but for some, it could be longer, or shorter).

However, other companies were very interested in the concept but their opinions were less strong and instead they wanted to know more. Many companies raised various issues that would need to be clarified– for instance, how to ensure that their employees were not 'poached' by the other companies? Or what support would they get to set up the swaps and run them properly, without it all getting too complicated or bureaucratic?

The overall conclusion we have come to is that if companies are willing to give, as well as receive, and take part in a network where they know and trust the people involved, then this is a major part of making this work.

In addition, it has to be formalised – companies have to have some guarantees – and it has to be supported, but it must not be over-bureaucratic. After all, it is voluntary – and after all, it is hospitality!

All of our detailed findings from our research and consultations have been written up in a formal study. This full study is only available in English – but you can access it as it is a public result, on the Skills Swap project website.

NEXT STEPS

We are watching the Covid situation carefully, since we want to build on this consultation by networking our companies and starting up the process – but recovery must come first!

We are also analysing all these findings to develop our next stage, which is addressed to those of us in the training ‘system’ who will support the companies to set up and organise the skills swaps. This will enable us to set out our job role and requirements to coordinate skills swaps. The results of the consultation and this study are vital in enabling us to address questions such as:

- *What do we need to be able to do when facilitating hospitality skills swaps amongst employers?*
- *What are the responsibilities and tasks that are involved?*
- *How do we ensure that we have the confidence of both the employer and the employee to encourage retention and progression? What kind of training do our staff need to do this role?*

We will also be analysing the results to produce a little later in 2021, some Skills Swap Guidance and Guidelines for Hospitality companies – with enough structure and practical tools and examples to help. All of these guidelines will be produced in close consultation with involved companies – to make sure they are easy to use, relevant and practical.

... and some are already trying out skills swaps now – just gently trying them out, but later in our project we will be organising formal testing and trials. Therefore, for any companies who would like to get involved, please contact us below:

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