



THE CONCEPT OF “IN COMPANY LEARNING MOBILITY” AND QUALITY

This chapter summarizes the process of establishing a clear and effective definition of “In-company Learning Mobility”, focused on apprenticeship schemes, but usable in other work-based contexts as well. The definition we apply has an impact on the quality criteria we recommend and the content of the guidelines. The definition is also a basis for further discussion for the network members, awarding bodies that will apply EQAMOB Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG) for In-company Learning Mobility.

Definitions to create a *new* meaning for In-company Learning Mobility.

It is safe to say that the international community has rediscovered the apprenticeship model in recent years. The INAP Network founded in 2006, brought together researchers from all over the globe through their interest of “re-discovering apprenticeship” (2010). This trend has influenced and sparked a new interest for learning in the workplace and the (re-)introduction of apprenticeship schemes with different characteristics, varying from region to region and with different traditions. However, they all have some characteristics in common and therefore it was necessary on the way to define “In-company Learning Mobility” to agree with some preconditions and definitions before it was possible to decide on our own definition of “In-company Learning Mobility”. We had to take into consideration existing definitions of “Apprentices” / “Apprenticeship Training”, “Work-place Learning”, “Learning Mobility”.

Apprenticeship

The definition of “In-company Learning Mobility” developed in the EQAMOB project is based on the definition of “**Apprentices**” formulated by the working group on mobility for apprentices and which was set up by the European Commission in 2009 and which was used later in the “EuroApprenticeship project and network”. One of the results of this working group in 2009 was the formulation of general criteria at a European level, as the definitions and scope of apprenticeships or alternate VET systems vary from country to country. The following core criteria for the definition of “Apprenticeship training” were agreed:

- It concerns Initial Vocational Training
- It is an alternate training scheme in which training takes place at the workplace (business) as well as in school.
- The business is involved/plays an active role/has responsibility in the constitution of the training program as well as in the decision if a person can leave on mobility – not necessarily a contractual link.

Other definitions were taken into consideration, but were criticized as too strict, too vague, too “country specific” and/or missing important aspects such as national recognition in the VET system:

Systematic, long-term training with alternating periods at the workplace and in an educational institution or training centre. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation.¹

¹ Cedefop, 2008 & Glossary- Quality in education and training CEDEFOP, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2011

Apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training and related instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. Apprenticeship programs can be sponsored by individual employers, joint employer and labour groups, and/or employer associations²

A system of training regulated by law or custom, which combines on-the-job training and work experience while in paid employment with formal (usually off-the-job training). The apprentice enters into a contract of training or training agreement with an employer which imposes mutual obligations on both parties.³

EQAMOB partnership decided to take particularly into account the further work on the definition of apprenticeships adopted by the **European alliance for Apprentices⁴**:

Apprenticeships are those forms of Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVET) that formally combine and alternate company based training (periods of practical work experience at a workplace) with school-based education (periods of theoretical/practical education attended in a school or training centre), and whose successful completion leads to nationally recognised IVET certification degrees. Most often, there is a contractual relationship between the employer and the apprentice.

Apprenticeships are a particularly successful form of work-based learning, based on the following principles: Apprenticeships are part of formal education and training programs and lead to a nationally recognised qualification; apprenticeships combine company-based training (periods of practical work experience at a workplace) with school-based education (periods of theoretical/ practical education in a school or training centre); most often, there is a contractual relationship between the employer and the apprentice, the apprentice are paid for their work. Apprenticeships differ from other types of in-company learning, such as internships/traineeships, that are often outside formal education and training programs, and not linked to recognised qualifications.

Work-place learning / In-company learning

Another definition to consider was “**Work-place learning**” which is used in different ways depending on who is addressing the issue.

- The European commission addresses workplace learning as a way to promote European Union employment policy, stating that there is a transition failure from school to work and a skills mismatch between labour demand and supply.⁵
- According to Billet and Choy⁶, work place learning cannot be approached only through traditional cognitive science. Learning in the workplace is multi-layered, influenced by socio-cultural aspects and different limitations that affect the learning in many ways. This observation makes defining work place learning in general terms a difficult task.

² A to Z Index.US Department of Labour

³ Glossary in A shared responsibility-apprenticeships for the 21st century, Australia Government

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1175&langId=en>

⁵ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/139011.pdf

⁶ Stephen Billett Sarojni Choy, (2013), "Learning through work: emerging perspectives and new challenges", Journal of Workplace Learning, Vol. 25 Iss 4 pp. 264 - 276

It leads to the conclusion that work place learning cannot be defined without context and meaning. It is precisely there where opportunities for learning, fostering and innovation in the workplace takes place.

- Unwin and Fuller⁷ have studied workplaces as a potential setting to create and use knowledge in different approaches for learning, defining the companies as restrictive or expansive.
- Lave and Wenger⁸ introduce the idea of learning involving a process of participation in a community of practice. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger build on the idea that learning involves an enriched process of participation of collective learning through a group of people that share a common concern or deep interest for something and learn to improve their skills through regular interaction.

*Learning in the workplace happens in an **authentic work setting** placing learning in a specific life context. Learning in the workplace provides students with a **sense of place and purpose** and an **introduction to relevant jobs and the world of work**. Learning in the work place can be directed at the development of identity through participation in practice. Assuming responsibility in the workplace increases the learning process. The assessment takes place **through systemic observation and reflection** thus contributing to the product value for the work community.⁹*

This definition has a wider approach, especially compared with definitions that define work-based learning as provision of specific skills and competencies according to a respective profession and training profile.

This definition above does not explicitly say something about professional skills, but more than other definitions, covers aspects such as identity, responsibility for production, social responsibility to the community and to the environment, etc. A workplace in this sense can be seen as a place of learning, transfer of knowledge and skills moving from expert to novice and the other way round. These ideas have also influenced our conceptual framework. They are quite coherent with our approach and vision of the meaning of “In-company learning”.

Learning mobility

Finally, yet importantly, another approach to consider was the one of “Learning Mobility” based on a definition that was already used in the EuroApprenticeship network. It is a definition published by Søren Kristensen:

Placements abroad are considered as a didactic tool for fostering skills, notably professional and technical skills, international skills (foreign language proficiency, intercultural competence and personal (broad, generic) skills). Learning mobility consist of a period of work experience (or work-based learning) undertaken in another country. The immersion in practices (in contrary to "work shadowing" and "work visits") in an intercultural context foster an ability to identify (and question) work practices and learning processes by offering a "contrast medium", a background against which known practices and their relativity become visible. Combining practice and inter-cultural aspects,, mobility also fosters personal skills and the ability for reflection on their own learning and for self-directed learning (taking responsibility for their own learning process).

⁷ <http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/apprenticeshipcommentaryFINAL.pdf>

⁸ <http://wenger-trayner.com/>

⁹ (Elsa Eiríksdóttir and Jón Torfi Jónasson (2014) Presentation – VET at Schools and at the workplace – The Icelandic case. School of education, University of Iceland.)



Another, shorter and less extensive, definition that leaves a lot of space and does not say much about the learning environment and the skills that should be fostered or acquired during the mobility process was published on a European platform:

By learning mobility, we mean transnational mobility undertaken for a period, consciously organised for educational purposes or to acquire new competencies or knowledge. It covers a wide variety of projects and activities and can be implemented in formal or non-formal settings.¹⁰

Conclusion

After this desk research, taking also into account all EQAMOB partner contributions and discussions, the partnership decided to carry on working with the following definition of **In-company Learning Mobility**:

In-company Learning Mobility consists of a period of work experience (or work-place learning) undertaken in another country. The objective of In-company Learning Mobility is to promote and enhance professional, international and transversal skills. Situated learning in a work environment allows for learning in context. Practical experience in an intercultural context fosters the ability to identify (and question) and reflect on work practices and learning processes for everyone involved.

It will be difficult to understand fully the relationship between working and learning and that there is no universal/general model available; there are multiple connections and possibilities depending on the economic and social environment and different approaches are used to develop a framework. Different learning outcomes emerge depending on the extent and context of the mobility. If the mobility is for a short period, providing cultural and social aspects have a greater relevance; if longer periods are concerned, organisational learning or even expansive learning can take place. Further, to add a note to Søren Kristensens definition: the focus lays on placements that take place in a company or in a similar working context, such as practical (apprenticeship) training workshops, supra-company training centres or training alliances with a close link to one or several companies and therefore our definition has a strong company-based component. One can maintain that learning in the workplace is more than just "learning by doing" or experimental learning¹¹. As Lave and Wenger pointed out, the specific situation / context involves participants engaging and generating meaning and points out the need to understand knowledge and learning in context.

Built on this definition we continued the work on specific quality recommendations to support all actors involved and to assist sending / hosting organisations and sending / hosting companies to match these underlying expectations of In-company learning.

¹⁰ <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/european-platform-on-learning-mobility>

¹¹ <http://learningfromexperience.com/media/2010/08/Learning-styles-and-disciplinary-difference.pdf>