

A GLOBAL STATEMENT by the World Federation of
Colleges and Polytechnics

On the Move: Advancing International Learner Mobility in Technical and Vocational Education and Training



MARCH 2026

CONTENTS

3	About WFCP
4	Acknowledgements
5	Foreword
6	Executive Summary
6	What is international learner mobility?
7	Benefits of international learner mobility
9	Agenda for action
10	1. Introduction
13	2. Benefits of participation in international mobility programmes
13	Benefits for participating learners
18	Wider benefits
20	Enhancing the evidence base
21	3. Insights from WFCP members on offering international mobility opportunities
22	Challenges faced in offering and growing international mobility opportunities
23	Making international mobility opportunities accessible to disadvantaged learners
24	Practical advice for growing international learning mobility
26	Case Studies
30	References

ABOUT WFCP

The World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics (WFCP) is a vibrant global network that brings together TVET colleges and polytechnics, along with the national and regional associations that represent them, to advance excellence, innovation, and sustainability in professional and technical education and training.

WFCP aims to be the global influencer and leading reference for TVET excellence, setting the benchmark through internationally recognized awards, thought leadership, accreditation, and impactful outreach. We champion the Sustainable Development Goals and amplify members' impact through global events, research, professional development, and recognition initiatives such as the WFCP Congress and Awards of Excellence.

WFCP helps members connect with key stakeholders across the skills ecosystem, including employers, industry, governments, and funding agencies, to share leading-edge education strategies and best practices. By strengthening these connections and accelerating peer learning, WFCP supports members to improve workforce employability outcomes and drive positive change in communities worldwide, grounded in respect, integrity, inclusion, and collaboration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Joel Mullan (Director, Analytic Learning). Huge thanks go to the many WFCP members who shared their experiences of developing and implementing international learning mobility programmes. Thanks also to Sylvia Muteshi (ATUPA), Alejandra Shaw (Duoc UC), Chua Ai Lian and Jenn Tann (Singapore Institute of Technical Education) for their contributions to the case studies; to Ellianne Feenstra who managed the project for WFCP, and to WFCP's project steering group, including Dawn Wood, Emma Meredith and Jay Deitchman.

FOREWORD

As the demand for skills grows and economies adjust to rapid change, international learner mobility is increasingly recognised as a practical tool to build capability and opportunity.

In this Global Statement, we explore the impact, value and implications of mobility for learners, labour markets and technical and vocational education and training institutions, and we set out what is needed to make mobility a realistic opportunity for far more learners.

International mobility expands horizons and strengthens skills. It builds confidence, intercultural competence and employability, and it can deepen institutional partnerships and strengthen the wider skills ecosystem. Yet access to mobility remains uneven. Too often, cost, administrative complexity, visa barriers and limited recognition of learning stand in the way. If mobility is to move from being exceptional to being expected, we must be honest about these barriers and act on them.

The purpose of this Global Statement is to add to the evidence base for technical and vocational education and training at a time of growing global demand for skills. It highlights key benefits and constraints, and it provides practical recommendations for policy makers, practitioners, funders and education leaders. This Statement is intended to be used at international, national and local levels, and it makes a clear call for sustained investment, simpler systems and an approach to mobility that puts inclusion and learner support at its centre.

Grateful thanks go to Joel Mullan for leading this work, and to all WFCP members and partners who contributed their time, insights and expertise to inform this Global Statement.



Dawn Ward
Chair, WFCP

Executive Summary

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL LEARNER MOBILITY?

International learner mobility is study, training or informal learning that takes place outside of a learner's home country. Developments in technology have also facilitated the development of 'virtual mobility', where learners have the opportunity to meet and collaborate with peers overseas without leaving the classroom. International learner mobility takes many different forms.

TYPES AND ORGANISATION OF TVET LEARNER MOBILITY PROGRAMMES



Study at a partner institution

Students spend a set period at an overseas partner institution, replacing some practical training at their home institution.

Virtual or hybrid programmes

Classroom-based online exchanges where learners collaborate with peers abroad, sometimes combined with short-term physical exchanges

Study visits or field trips

Short visits linked to course curricula, including technical visits, workshops, and cultural activities.

Work experience

Internships, placements, or volunteering abroad to gain professional skills in an international environment.

Skills competitions

Top national performers compete internationally

Youth camps

Biennial WFCP events bringing together youth to discuss TVET issues, and promote cross-cultural understanding

Organisation of Learner Mobility Programmes

College-led Partnerships

Created by individual colleges with overseas partners.

National or Supra-National Initiatives

Run by governments or supra-national bodies (e.g., Erasmus+, SEATVET).

Intermediary or Network-Based Programmes

Managed by social enterprises, commercial bodies, or education networks.

*“International mobility changes young people’s lives and perspectives;
and staff get so much out of these experiences too.”*

Burton and South Derbyshire College, UK



BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL LEARNER MOBILITY

Learners participating in TVET mobility programmes consistently report positive impacts on their:

- ✓ Professional and technical competences – the specific skills and knowledge needed for a particular occupation or field of expertise.
- ✓ Transferable skills, such as working in teams, communication, and problem solving;
- ✓ Foreign language skills;
- ✓ ‘Intercultural competences’ - the ability to communicate and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- ✓ Personal growth - such as improvements to motivation, attitude, perseverance, and self-awareness.

Participants also perceive that international mobility programmes enhance their employment prospects, and give them a competitive edge in the labour market.

There is strong alignment between the benefits of international mobility programmes, and solutions to the economic and societal challenges that many countries are grappling with. For example:

- ✓ Transferable skills are generally highly valued by employers, and will be crucial for learners in navigating the disruption to labour markets that megatrends such as industrial greening and uptake of artificial intelligence are likely to unleash.
- ✓ Countries who are struggling with how to manage social cohesion benefit from having citizens who have been given opportunities to develop their ability to live, work and communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds is valuable.

Mobility programmes also have wider benefits beyond their immediate impacts on direct participants.

- ✓ Accompanying TVET staff observe innovative approaches to teaching and learning, which they go on to use to improve teaching practices in their own institution.
- ✓ Mobility programmes can support new trading and business links between the host and destination countries.
- ✓ Mobility can increase the ‘soft power’ of host countries, by cultivating affinity for the host country among programme participants.
- ✓ Recent studies on the long-run benefits of wider international student mobility suggest that in low-and-middle-income countries, student mobility can contribute to poverty reduction.

However, TVET institutions face challenges in offering opportunities for mobility to learners. The most frequently cited barrier, reported across all countries surveyed in this research, was insufficient funding to meet the costs of international mobility programmes. Other reported challenges include difficulties in navigating administrative processes, divergence between the curricula of host and sending institutions, and lack of foreign language proficiency among students.

In some countries government support for international mobility in TVET is being critically reviewed, limited or reduced. Government-funded mobility programs have recently been closed in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

Our agenda for action outlines the critical steps that governments, TVET institutions, and other stakeholders should take to unlock the full economic potential of international mobility, and broaden access to these career-defining opportunities.

Recommendations for Governments and TVET institutions

- Provide financial support to enable disadvantaged students to undertake periods of international mobility during their studies
- Collect better data to improve understanding of the scale and impact of international mobility in TVET. The evidence base on impact could be strengthened by using existing administrative data sources to more robustly explore the relationship between programme participation, academic outcomes (such as course completion, retention and achievement) and labour market outcomes.

Recommendations for organizations that run TVET mobility programmes

- Explicitly target under-represented groups in programme eligibility and selection decisions
- Target financial support for international mobility at disadvantaged learners
- Simplify application processes, and seek to reduce the administrative burden involved in participating in mobility programmes
- Crowd in additional funding for TVET mobility programmes from organizations such as local businesses, and philanthropic foundations

Recommendations for TVET institutions

- Actively promote the benefits of participating in international mobility to learners (to encourage uptake) and to government, potential funders, and other stakeholders
- Explore lower-cost, more affordable delivery models as a gateway to longer-term mobility opportunities
- Provide pre-departure holistic support to participants to improve learner readiness. Depending on need, this could include academic preparation, language training, cultural orientation, and support with practicalities such as visas, insurance and housing.



1.

Introduction

International learning mobility has long played a significant role in enriching TVET institutions and the broader skills ecosystem. In this report, we explore the types of learning mobility most commonly offered by TVET institutions; their impact on learners (and spillover benefits for institutions, communities, governments, and societies); and the challenges faced in developing, implementing and scaling mobility programmes. We also offer an agenda for action – setting out what stakeholders can do to enhance access to mobility opportunities for learners.

This report is based on a rapid evidence review, a survey of 40 WFCP member institutions from 10 countries, and inputs from WFCP’s board. Countries represented in the survey include Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Kenya, Slovenia, Spain, USA, UK & Zimbabwe.

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL LEARNING MOBILITY IN TVET?

The European Union’s Erasmus+ (n.d.) programme provides a useful definition of ‘learning mobility’ that captures many of the key components of international mobility programmes.

“Moving physically to a country other than the country of residence... in order to undertake study, training or non-formal or informal learning. It may take the form of traineeships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges, teaching or participation in a professional development activity, and may include preparatory activities, such as training in the host language, as well as sending, receiving and follow-up activities.”

In recent years, developments in communications technology have also facilitated the development of ‘virtual mobility’, where learners have the opportunity to meet and collaborate with peers overseas without leaving their home country.

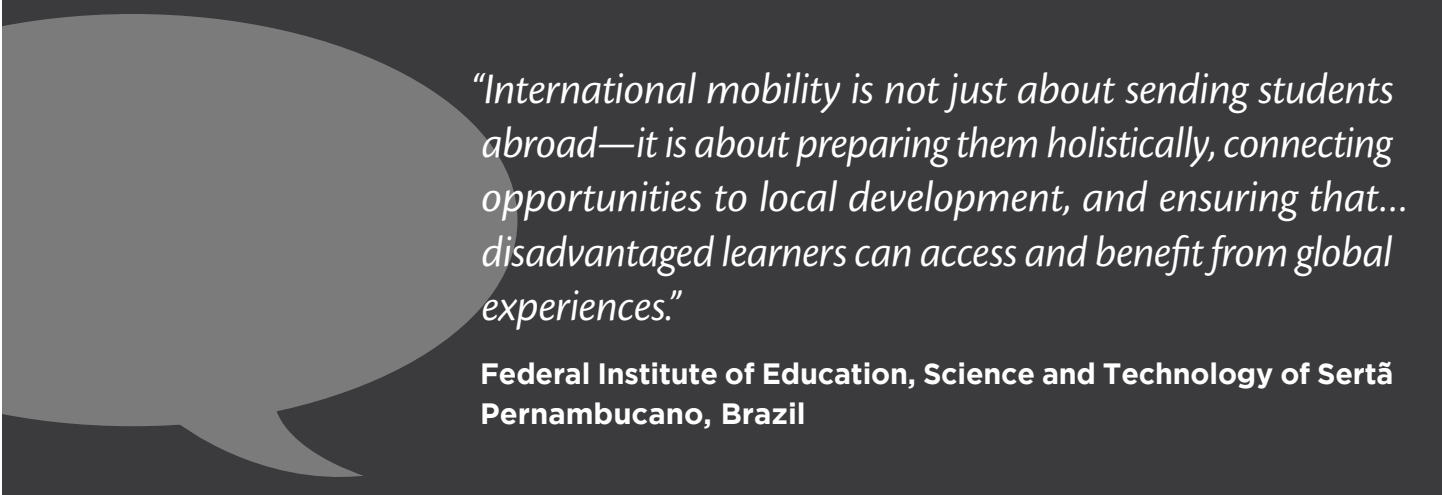
TVET institutions offer several different types of international learner mobility – a typology of the most commonly offered opportunities is set out in Table 1 below. Staff mobility, and wider internationalisation activities, are outside of the scope of this report.

TYPE OF MOBILITY	WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?
Study at a partner institution	This involves students visiting a partner TVET institution overseas for a specified amount of time, for example, for a semester. Longer term visits, conducted in term time, replace some of the practical training that learners would have received at their home institution.
Virtual mobility programmes	Virtual exchanges undertaken in the classroom, allowing learners to collaborate with peers in other countries, using video conferencing, online meetings, and chat/messaging technologies. With no travel and accommodation costs incurred, virtual mobility can make international experiences much more widely available, with only devices and an internet connection required.
International study visits & field trips	Short-term visits, often organised and led independently by college staff, that closely relate to course curricula. Itineraries for such visits can include technical visits and workshops, participation in summer schools, as well as opportunities to engage in cultural activities.
International work experience	Work placements, internships or voluntary work undertaken with an overseas organisation.
International Skills Competitions	Events where young people compete in vocational skills disciplines to demonstrate their talent on an international stage. Participants are typically selected following strong performance at national competitions. They train intensively, before competing against their peers from other countries. Recent WorldSkills competitions have been held in France, Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil.
International Youth Camps	WFCP itself promotes mobility through its International Youth Camps. Organised alongside the Federation's World Congress every two years, the events bring together youth from the host country and international guests to discuss the state of TVET from a learner perspective. Participants engage in social activities, discussions on issues facing the world, and develop a statement that is presented to the World Congress attendees. Recent camps have taken place in Canada, Jamaica, Spain, Australia and Japan.

The **length of mobility opportunities** varies widely. It is common for mobility opportunities offered in the TVET sector to be shorter than those offered in the higher education sector. This presents trade-offs. An evaluation of the UK's Turing Programme, for example, finds that participants on longer placements were most likely to report positive effects on their skills and opportunities (IFF 2024). Conversely, shorter-term mobility opportunities are likely to be accessible to a greater number of learners, especially in contexts where financial support for mobility is limited, or where personal circumstances mean it is more difficult for learners to be away for longer stretches of time. Institutions may also struggle with how to schedule longer placements alongside the rest of a learner's curriculum, and there is arguably a less well-established culture of international mobility in the TVET sector in comparison to in higher education institutions. Shorter placements may also however act as 'gateways' for learners to undertake longer periods of international mobility in the future.

There is also considerable variation in **how mobility programmes are organised**. Some are small scale programmes established by individual colleges working with overseas partners. Others are part of large programmes run by governments (such as the Turing Scheme in the UK) or supra-national organisations (such as the European Union's Erasmus+ programme or the SEATVET programme run by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization). Some opportunities are organised by intermediary organisations, such as social enterprises, or commercial entities, or through networks of educational institutions. Through working at a greater scale than individual TVET institutions, these actors can develop links with potential host organisations, handle some of the logistical matters that can be barriers to participation, and co-ordinate bids for financial support for mobility activities (CIMO, 2010).

A number of governments have recently de-prioritised and closed their national student mobility schemes. Canada's Global Skills Opportunity programme, the United States Community College Initiative Program, and New Zealand's Prime Minister's Scholarships for Asia and Latin America have all stopped awarding new funding during 2025.



“International mobility is not just about sending students abroad—it is about preparing them holistically, connecting opportunities to local development, and ensuring that... disadvantaged learners can access and benefit from global experiences.”

Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Sertão Pernambuco, Brazil

2.

Benefits of participation in international mobility programmes

BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATING LEARNERS

Our rapid evidence review identified 11 studies (evaluations, surveys, or small-scale studies) that specifically focused on the impact of participation in international mobility programmes for TVET learners.

There is a strong alignment between some of the reported benefits of participation for learners and potential solutions to some of the economic and societal challenges being faced in many countries around the world. Transferable skills, for example, are generally highly valued by employers, and will be crucial for learners in navigating the disruption to labour markets that megatrends such as industrial greening and uptake of artificial intelligence are likely to unleash. Likewise, countries that are struggling to maintain social cohesion benefit from citizens who have had opportunities to develop the ability to live, work and communicate effectively across cultures.

Across the studies, participants consistently reported the following benefits:

- **Gaining enhanced professional and technical competences**, such as ‘specialised occupational knowledge’ or ‘familiarisation with new working techniques and practices’ (Hubers, 2013). Fassel et al (2020) highlight that a third of the EU mobility programme participants they surveyed reported that they improved their competence in using the latest technologies or software, whilst two thirds reported they had gained ‘practical professional experience’.
- **Developing enhanced transferable skills** (i.e. the skills likely to be needed to navigate future personal, academic, social, and economic challenges), An evaluation of the UK’s Turing Scheme, for example, finds that 95% of VET participants report improved communication skills following completion of a mobility placement; 83% report improved presentation skills, and 92% report improved problem-solving skills (IFF, 2024). In Germany, the vast majority of VET students who had completed a placement reported having enhanced their ability to handle new tasks (69%) or work on their own (68%) (Hubers, 2013).

- **Experiencing personal growth** such as enhanced self-confidence (Hubers 2013) or autonomy, noting that for some learners the placement may be their first time away from a family environment (Krichewsky-Wegener, 2021). Fassel et al (2020)'s study of Erasmus+ VET graduates concludes that "acquiring and strengthening personal characteristics such as independence, autonomy, self-confidence, maturity and flexibility was one of the main mobility strengths identified by the participants themselves." In the UK, the Turing Programme evaluation reports that 94% of participating VET students reported improvements to their levels of motivation and perseverance and 95% reported greater self-awareness (IFF, 2024). In the United States, Wood and Raby (2021) find that 73% of participants report that their mobility experience has influenced their career choices with learners gaining a broadened appreciation of the range of professional options that are open to them.
- **Developing foreign language skills.** A small-scale study by Rajman (2019) finds that a four-week exchange period provided time for both weaker and more advanced Slovenian VET students to develop their English speaking and listening skills. The Turing Programme evaluation found that foreign language skills were particularly improved for those who had undertaken placements of more than 6 months: 83% of those visiting for 7-12 months reported confidence in communicating in the language of the host country, compared to 62% for those undertaking placements of less than 4 weeks. Even in the context of very short exchanges (1-5 days) between the Netherlands and Germany, Wilde et al (2024) report that learners benefited from "coping with an unfamiliar linguistic environment."
- **Enhanced ability to communicate and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds**, otherwise known as 'intercultural competence'. In Germany, 76% of TVET participants reported a better understanding of foreign cultures, and 67% reported 'greater tolerance vis-à-vis foreigners' (Hubers 2013). In the UK, 84% of Turing VET participants said that the programme had improved their ability to collaborate with people from different backgrounds (IFF, 2024). In the United States, Wood & Raby (2021) found that the vast majority of participants responding to a survey reported "enhanced acceptance of differences in other people, flexibility and open-mindedness, and a desire for more diverse friendships and networks." In the Netherlands and Germany, a study by Wilde et al (2019) concluded that "exchanges can play a role in tackling prejudice in both cross-border contexts."



Across most programmes examined, participants also perceived that international mobility programmes had enhanced their employment prospects.



In the UK, 4 in 5 participants believed that the Turing programme had enhanced their career and prospects, whilst nearly 7 in 10 believed it had provided them with employment opportunities that they may not have otherwise had access to (IFF, 2024).



In Canada, participants in the Global Skills Opportunity Program reported that they felt better prepared for entering the labour market” and that their international experience was “an advantage in today’s job market”. They valued the network opportunities they had been given, and thought the program has given them a “broader perspective about their career orientation” (Advisem Services Inc, 2023).



In Ukraine, Kovtun et al (2024) report that, after one year, exchange programme participants “were more likely to report improvements in their careers and changes in their professional roles.” Nearly all participants (98.6%) reported that new career opportunities had opened up for them. 96.6% report a change in role or field, whilst 82% report an increase in salary.



In Germany, 71% of survey respondents thought taking part in an international mobility programme had ‘improved their chances’ when applying for jobs (Hubers, 2013).



In the United States, Wood & Raby (2021) found that most students thought that their international experience helps with job searches, and in particular were an “asset in the job interview stage.”

CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS+, EUROPEAN UNION

Erasmus+ is a major long-running mobility programme run by the European Union. It funds mobility opportunities, such as periods of learning abroad, for both VET learners and staff. Erasmus+ has been the subject of multiple evaluations and research studies.

A meta-analysis of previous studies (ICF, 2024) found statistically significant evidence that participation in international mobility programmes improved **language skills and cultural intelligence**. On labour market outcomes, the findings from the meta-analysis were less conclusive, with 1 in 4 of the labour market outcome indicators examined showing positive statistically-significant impacts. The authors note that the research methods used in the analysed studies are diverse, and a range of other labour market factors also have a significant impact on labour market outcomes. The summary meta-analysis also does not differentiate between the HE, VET and schools strands of the programme.

The most recent evaluation of Erasmus+ (ICF, 2024) finds that:

- The vast majority of learners (at least 4 in 5) reported that their time overseas had helped them acquire or improve **transferable skills** (such as teamwork, planning and organisation, and analytic/problem solving skills) and **sector-or field-specific skills**.
- 76% of VET participants surveyed reported that mobility would improve their job prospects, whilst 85% reported a belief that employers would value the personal skills they had gained. Employers interviewed were reported to value the “language, professional, and personal skills” that participants developed.
- Participation has a positive impact on learners’ propensity to learn. VET learners participating in Erasmus+ were **more likely to complete their studies**.
- Participation positively affects participants’ attitude, personal development and motivation.

Study	Overview & Method	Professional / Technical Skills	Transferable Skills	Personal Growth	Inter-cultural skills	Language Skills	Employability
IFF (2024)	Evaluation of the Turing Programme, UK	●	●	●	●	●	●
Advisem Services Inc (2023)	Evaluation of Global Skills Opportunity Program, Canada	●	●	●	●	●	●
ICF (2025)	Evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme, EU	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fassl et al (2020)	Tracer survey of 8009 former EU mobility programme participants across 10 countries (plus 115 interviews and 26 focus groups)	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fabbris & Boetti (2019)	Survey of 1545 former Erasmus+ participants from Germany, Italy, Portugal & Spain	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hubers (2013)	Survey of 502 TVET mobility participants in Germany	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kovtun et al (2024)	Survey of 300 exchange programme participants in Ukraine	●		●	●	●	●
Wood & Raby (2021)	Survey of 88 students (plus interviews with 11 students) at Kirkwood Community College, Iowa, US.	●	●	●	●		●
Krichewsky-Wegener (2021)	Small scale study: Interviews with 12 students from Germany			●	●	●	
Rajman (2019)	Small scale study: Interviews with 7 VET students from Slovenia focussed on language competences					●	
Wilde et al (2024)	Small scale study: Interviews with teachers / leaders participating in 1-5 day exchanges in the Netherlands and Germany	●			●	●	

WIDER BENEFITS

Direct empirical evidence on the wider benefits of international mobility among TVET students is limited. However, research from wider education mobility initiatives sectors indicates that such mobility likely offers wider gains beyond the immediate effects on the students who participate.

Student mobility programmes can have spillover benefits for participating TVET institutions, and their learners. The European Commission argues that participation in VET learner mobility can be a “trigger to innovation and improving teaching methods and learning materials” in TVET institutions and can “raise the attractiveness of VET schools and qualifications” (Tore Bertheussen, 2019). Knowledge and skills gained by participants are sometimes shared on their return to their home country. Fassl et al (2020) highlight former Erasmus+ participants reporting that they shared insights from their experience with fellow learners and teachers, and for those in employment, with colleagues. The evaluation of Erasmus+ (ICF 2024) and the study of German-Dutch tandem exchanges (Wilde et al, 2024) both record accompanying teaching staff observing differences in pedagogy and learning and teaching approaches that go on to impact on their own teaching practices.

Where mobility placements involve study at an overseas partner institution, interactions between visiting students and the rest of the student body can also be a valuable learning experience, providing insights into similarities and differences across countries, and opportunities for more learners to develop their intercultural competencies. Grimsby Institute, in the UK, for example, highlights that “visiting students enhance lessons and bring an extra dimension to campus life” (British Council, 2018). In the wider literature, a large-scale study across 9 US universities highlights that learners who develop friendships with international students are more likely to develop intercultural competencies (Soria & Troisi, 2014).

There is also the potential for mobility programmes to support new trading and business links between the host and destination countries, through participants developing insights into opportunities and interlocutors in the destination country, and learning how to navigate differences in culture, language and norms that could otherwise be barriers to trade. In Canada, the Global Study Opportunity programme was, in part, intended to support efforts to diversify the country’s trade, through supporting learners to develop ‘global competences’ and through the development of new people-to-people links between Canadian youth and other young professionals (Advizem Services Inc, 2023). In the wider literature on the economic impact of international students, econometric analysis by Specht (2025) identifies a correlation between international students and



exports, and suggests that increasing international student exchange (through providing funding and support) would be “one way to encourage trade growth with developing countries”.

There is potential for international mobility to increase the ‘soft power’ of host countries, by cultivating affinity for the host country among programme participants. The soft power benefits of international study have been more systematically examined in the context of higher education scholarships. Evaluations of those programmes regularly **identify positivity towards host countries** among scholarship recipients, though research has struggled to articulate the impact that such individual affinity for host countries has at societal levels. This is sometimes compounded by a lack of baseline data on the views of participants at their outset of their study abroad (Mawer 2018, Enfield, 2019).

Recent studies on the long-run benefits of international wider student mobility suggest that in low-and-middle-income countries, mobility contributes to poverty reduction. A study by Kwak and Chankseliani (2024) finds a statistically significant negative correlation between outbound student mobility in a country and extreme poverty. A linked study explores the potential mechanisms underpinning the relationship – highlighting the role played by agency; knowledge (exposure to different systems of governance and policy); relationships, connections and networks; and civic responsibility (Chankseliani et al, 2025). A review by Wang et al (2024) highlights correlation analysis that suggests student migration has “significant and positive effects” on per capita GDP in sending countries, as well as several studies that provide examples of returning students contributing to social change and improvements to healthcare, development or peacebuilding. Whilst these findings cannot simply be extrapolated from participation in international higher education to TVET mobility programmes (especially as the duration of programmes may vary significantly), they provide an indication of the wider potential benefits that come from mobility that may not otherwise be captured by measuring only narrow immediate outcomes.

ENHANCING THE EVIDENCE BASE

There is a need to improve data on the reach and impact of international learner mobility in TVET. We do not currently have a good understanding of the scale and extent of international mobility,



particularly when mobility is carried out outside of major programmes. A study in Germany, for example, found that the number of people undertaking vocational training who undertook international mobility was 50% more than previously assumed, with 39% of all placements undertaken without any public financial support (Hubers 2013).

Looking at the impact data identified and discussed above, it is notable that all but two of the studies are focussed on learners in European countries. The studies identified rely heavily on learners' self-assessment of the programme's impact, which introduces an element of subjectivity.

RECOMMENDATION

Governments and TVET institutions should collect better data to improve understanding of the current scale and impact of international learner mobility in TVET. The evidence base on impact could be strengthened by using existing administrative data sources to more robustly explore the relationship between programme participation, academic outcomes (such as course completion, retention and achievement) and labour market outcomes.



3.

Insights from WFCP members on offering international mobility opportunities

We invited WFCP members who were active or interested in offering international mobility programmes to share insights from their practical experiences of offering opportunities to learners.

CHALLENGES FACED IN OFFERING AND GROWING INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES

WFCP members reported facing numerous challenges in offering and increasing international mobility opportunities for learners.

The most consistent barrier reported across all countries was insufficient funding to meet the costs of international mobility programmes (including flights, accommodation, visas, tuition and program fees, and scholarships to support participants to meet living costs). Financial barriers are also emphasised in the reviewed literature. In the UK, the evaluation of the Turing Programme identifies that funding has clear additionality, with only 23% of TVET participants saying they would have undertaken a placement if they had not received financial support. It concludes that “providers would struggle to enable international placements” without Turing Scheme funding (IFF, 2024). In Germany, Hubers (2013) argues that “mobility projects require core financing from the public sector in order to activate additional private funding.”

Several institutions reported challenges in navigating administrative processes – including around co-ordination across institutions, compliance with regulations and grant funding requirements, and challenges navigating immigration and visa requirements. This is again echoed in the reviewed literature. In Ukraine, Kovtun et al (2024) highlight administrative barriers including visa requirements. In the Netherlands and Germany, Wilde et al (2025) note “the scale of the bureaucracy required”, and in the Erasmus+ programme, ICF (2024) documents challenges in fitting work on international mobility into staff workloads.

Differences in curricula and equivalency offered by host and sending institutions was reported to be an issue by a small number of respondents. The literature review also highlights lack of equivalency as a constraint, with a study of mobility in Germany stating that the limited number of countries with a training system similar to its dual vocational training model “complicates internationalization attempts significantly” (Graf et al, 2017). This is particularly an issue where learners are to be given academic credit for study completed overseas. Several survey respondents highlighted that poor credit transfer systems were a barrier to delivery of international mobility programmes. The absence of credit transfer arrangements can deter some learners (particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds) from taking up longer international mobility opportunities, given that additional time spent in learning, and consequently out of the workforce, can increase the costs and opportunity costs of completing their course of study.

WFCP members in Brazil and Chile reported that lack of foreign language proficiency restricts students’ ability to access international opportunities. Whilst some were providing structured linguistic support to help students attain the language competencies needed, it remained a significant obstacle to learner participation. These barriers are again consistently raised in the reviewed literature. In Ukraine, Kovtun et al (2024) reports that “the language barrier was one of the biggest challenges during their stay abroad.” The Erasmus+ evaluation reports that 53% of staff in beneficiary organisations considered insufficient language skills to be a barrier to participants (with 39% of staff perceiving that there was a “lack of support for language development” from their institution).

MAKING INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY OPPORTUNITIES ACCESSIBLE TO DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS

Many WFCP members emphasised the need to ensure that disadvantaged learners were able to participate in international mobility opportunities. They identified several practical ways that both TVET institutions – and funders of international mobility programmes – could help to diversify participation. These include:

Increase the financial support on offer: Unsurprisingly, the most frequent suggestion was increasing the amount of funding, scholarships and financial support available, to help learners cover the costs of participation. When learners receive funding may also be a key consideration, with the evaluation of the Turing Scheme highlighting that large up-front costs are likely a barrier to disadvantaged learners, particularly if financial support is not paid until learners are already on (or even returned from) their placements. It suggests offering greater funding for the most disadvantaged and paying some funds to learners upfront (IFF, 2024).

Explicitly target under-represented groups in programme eligibility and selection decisions: Given that international mobility remains an activity only a fraction of learners get to experience, several institutions also suggested that the selection process for opportunities should specifically target under-represented groups. One respondent suggested setting participation targets for low-income students. Another noted that they had already reserved places in their programmes for learners from minority ethnic groups.

Simplify application processes: Two respondents suggested simplifying application processes, highlighting that requiring complex documentation could disproportionately affect learners with limited resources or support.

Explore lower-cost, more affordable delivery models: Several institutions highlighted that shorter-term mobility opportunities were more affordable and had the potential to act as a gateway to longer-term mobility opportunities. Two institutions also suggested virtual mobility, through online courses,

joint classes or collaborative projects, as another alternative delivery model that should be explored further. This approach is supported by Wilde et al's study of exchange between TVET institutions in the Netherlands and Germany (2025) which argues that the short duration of the exchanges "may facilitate participation by learners who might otherwise not take part."

Improve information and awareness of mobility programmes: Multiple respondents highlighted the importance of outreach and sharing information on the benefits of engaging in international mobility with disadvantaged learners. It was also suggested that providing academic credit or professional recognition for mobility programmes could help increase its perceived value.

Provide holistic support to participants: Multiple respondents also highlighted that non-financial support, including academic preparation, language training, cultural orientation, and support with practicalities such as visas, insurance and housing can help reduce apprehension that learners might have about participating in programmes. One institution also suggested pairing potential participants with peers who are alumni of previous mobility programmes.

"Learners should receive individualised support throughout all stages of mobility – from the application process, through preparation and the stay abroad, to the follow-up phase – so that every student feels guided and empowered to take part."

Šolski Center Kranj, Slovenia



PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR GROWING INTERNATIONAL LEARNING MOBILITY

WFCP members responding to the survey were asked to identify what advice they would give to their peers looking to start or grow international mobility opportunities. The advice shared includes:

Build Partnerships: Many responding institutions stressed the importance of building links with partner institutions, recommending that TVET institutions aim to identify like-minded institutions with similar programmes and characteristics to their own, as well as the capacity to host incoming students.

“Build relationships with institutions that share similar academic goals and values. Use existing networks like Commonwealth Scholarships, or TVET Africa to identify potential partners. Align mobility programmes with curriculum goals, industry needs, and learner aspirations.”

- Mwala Technical and Vocational College, Kenya

Start small: Two institutions cautioned against trying to do too much too soon. They recommended undertaking pilot programs to test and learn before expanding. This allows for processes to be tested, and operational challenges to be identified, within existing administrative capacity.

Two other member institutions also highlighted trade-offs associated with scale. One advised colleges to focus on building strong relationships with a few committed partner institutions rather than pursuing more superficial agreements with a higher number of institutions. Another institution reported that they had chosen to prioritize the quality of mobility opportunities, through expanding and strengthening their network of reliable partner schools and organisations, rather than significantly increasing the number of students and staff sent abroad.

“Start small and build gradually. Begin with pilot programs involving a limited number of students and one or two reliable partner institutions rather than attempting large-scale initiatives immediately.” - Southeastern Minas Gerais Federal Institute, Brazil



Build in preparatory programs to improve student readiness. This could include language proficiency, cultural readiness and access to practical advice from staff or international support organisations. One institution highlighted that they ran “Poliglota Club” (polyglot club), informal conversation groups in English, Spanish, and French, to help democratise access to mobility opportunities. Some institutions include parent / family engagement as part of the preparation process, providing some orientation and briefing for families so they understand the benefits of mobility and can support the learner. Other institutions report connecting learners with programme alumni, to allow them to get some idea of what the experience will be like before they depart.

Search for sponsorship and scholarship opportunities (from companies or other stakeholders) to help overcome financial barriers to participation for disadvantaged students.

Get institutional buy-in: Ensure mobility initiatives are supported by leadership, and embedded into the institution’s budgets, “not dependent on isolated projects.”

“It’s going to be difficult but it’s going to be extremely rewarding and life changing!” Instituto Federal de Rondônia, Brazil

Instituto Federal de Rondônia, Brazil

RECOMMENDATION

Governments and TVET institutions should provide financial support to disadvantaged students to enable them undertake periods of international mobility during their studies

Organisations that run TVET mobility programmes should:

- explicitly target under-represented groups in programme eligibility and selection decisions;
- consider targeting existing financial support for international mobility at disadvantaged learners;
- simplify application processes, and seek to reduce the administrative burden involved in participating in mobility programmes
- crowd in additional funding for TVET mobility programmes from organisations such as local businesses, and philanthropic foundations

TVET institutions should:

- actively promote the benefits of participating in international mobility to learners (to encourage uptake) and to government, potential funders, and other stakeholders;
- explore lower-cost, more affordable delivery models as a gateway to longer-term mobility opportunities
- provide pre-departure holistic support to participants to improve learner readiness. Depending on need, this could include academic preparation, language training, cultural orientation, and support with practicalities such as visas, insurance and housing

4. Case Studies

CASE STUDY: ZIMBABWE-CHINA POLYTECHNIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

A partnership between Harare Polytechnic and Ningbo Polytechnic has seen 90 learners travel from Zimbabwe to China for training in mechatronics and millwrighting. Learners undertake study at both participating VET institutions, as well as an industrial internship at a Chinese company.

At the end of the programme, participating learners are awarded both a National Certificate in Millwrights Works from Harare Polytechnic, and a Diploma in Mechatronics from Ningbo Polytechnic.

The collaboration, which was facilitated by the China Education Association for International Exchange and the Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa (ATUPA), is designed to give learners exposures to modern equipment and emerging technologies; develop graduates in skills aligned to Zimbabwe's industrial needs; and strengthen institutional collaboration and technical training capacity.

Key success factors for the programme, identified by ATUPA, include:

- Provision of pre-departure training sessions to help students learn basic Mandarin and understand Chinese customs
- Joint curriculum development, which saw faculty from both institutions collaborate to create a unified syllabus, ensuring academic compatibility and providing quality assurance.
- Strong coordination, administrative collaboration and consistent communication between the two partner institutions
- Support from Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, who played a key role in facilitating scholarships for participating students, and facilitating logistics such as travel arrangements, visa approvals and health protocols
- Continuous feedback and adaptation, with regular reviews and student feedback helping refine the program and address emerging issues

CASE STUDY: VIRTUAL MOBILITY AT DUOC UC, CHILE

Duoc UC is a Technical and Professional Higher Education institute operating in 19 locations across Chile. It has offered virtual mobility opportunities through the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative since 2018. COIL involves students from different countries interacting virtually to carry out a short project. Globally, COIL is notable for the scale at which it operates, with collaborations having been developed between more than 30 countries across the US, Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Oceania.

Collaborations begin with a Duoc UC instructor and an instructor from a foreign institution jointly developing a 3-to-6-week course that is delivered within one of the subjects in the curriculum. The methodology enables interaction between students and instructors from different cultures through collaborative work and discussion spaces, bringing international experiences within reach of all participants.

The number of students participating in COIL collaborations at Duoc UC, has consistently increased, with 4724 students taking part between 2021 and 2024. Partners have included institutions in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and the United States. Links with partner institutions have been established through the international network of institutions involved in the COIL Network, as well as harnessing existing links the institution already had with overseas higher education institutions.

Evaluations of the collaborations report increased levels of motivation among both learners and staff, with, for example, learners seeing first-hand the value of learning a second language. Learners also benefit from gaining a broader world-view, including sparking greater interest from some learners in participating in physical exchange programs. It was also reported that in many cases the interaction with international peers led students to gain more confidence about their own knowledge and abilities. Some students were reported to have maintained contact with their international counterparts after the program, contributing to the development of stronger professional and personal networks.

Implementing the COIL programme has involved overcoming several logistical and institutional challenges, including time zone differences and differences in the structure of the academic year.

Key success factors for the programme include:

- Faculty motivation and expertise, with the programme heavily reliant on the voluntary participation and high motivation of instructors who already possess the required language skills and appreciation for international collaboration.
- Strong institutional support, Duoc UC's Office of International Affairs provides crucial ongoing support, communication, and assistance in establishing contacts with foreign institutions.

CASE STUDY: OVERSEAS EXPOSURE PROGRAMME AT THE INSTITUTE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION, SINGAPORE

The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) is a post-secondary institution offering a diverse range of courses, from certificates to Diplomas, for students and adult learners. With an enrolment of 28,000 students across three ITE Colleges, ITE's training goes beyond practical hands-on skills training to emphasize students' holistic development through outside of classroom learning programmes and activities to develop their soft skills.

In 2024, more than 4,000 students (representing 21.3% of the graduating cohort) participated in ITE's Overseas Exposure Programme. The Programme includes:

- Overseas Industrial Attachment Programme (mostly < 1 month) – where students are attached to companies for a short-term working stint overseas. This helps them to appreciate working in different cultures and environments, and enhance their readiness to work overseas upon graduation.
- Overseas Student Exchange Programme (~ 2 weeks) – where students attend classes in overseas institutions and earn credits towards their certification.
- Overseas Service & Development Programme (~ 1-2 weeks) – where students undertake community service projects as part of being compassionate global citizens. Students also take part in overseas competitions, seminars, conferences and leadership programmes to hone their skills, competencies and character.

Student destinations span diverse regions including ASEAN nations, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, South Korea, Switzerland, and the USA, ensuring exposure to varied economic systems, technological landscapes, and cultural contexts.

ITE also hosts overseas students and delegations for study visits and exchanges, including co-working on projects, to enrich student learning.

Over the years, ITE has expanded its global footprint through strategic partnerships with more than 50 institutional partners across 16 countries, enabling it to diversify the opportunities available and benefit more students.

A notable collaboration is the Global Education Network (GEN), which comprises Box Hill Institute (Australia), Kirkwood Community College (USA), Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (Canada), and ITE. GEN regularly organises mobility programmes for students and faculty, creating a dynamic ecosystem of international exchange. Between 2023 and 2025, 93% of GEN students, including those from ITE, reported satisfaction with their international experiences, whilst 89% indicated significant increases in global awareness and intercultural competence. These enhanced competencies translate directly into stronger employment prospects, with employers valuing the global perspectives and cultural sensitivity demonstrated by ITE graduates.

In scaling up implementation of the overseas mobility programme, the main challenges experienced include coordinating diverse academic calendars across destination countries, ensuring quality learning experiences across different course programmes and curricula, managing language barriers, and ensuring financial accessibility for students from varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

Today, ITE's success in its OEP can be attributed to high priority and heavy investment by the institution to support students in OEP, highly committed and supportive overseas host partners who continue to enlarge the areas and scope of exchanges, as well as a clearly structured OEP approach ensuring programmes align with student needs and career objectives.

5.

Conclusion

Integrating opportunities for international mobility into TVET programmes can be transformative for the learners who participate, giving them the skills and capabilities they will need to thrive in a rapidly changing world. And, as this report has demonstrated, boosting mobility opportunities can also have wider economic and societal benefits.

Despite these benefits, there are substantial barriers faced by institutions that wish to offer more mobility opportunities, and learners who want to take up opportunities.

This report therefore offers a practical agenda for policymakers, institutional leaders, and other stakeholders who want to unlock the full potential of international mobility. Richer data; more financing; explicit targeting of programmes at disadvantaged students; exploration of new delivery models; and provision of holistic support to learners will all help to make these potentially life-changing experiences more accessible and more commonplace.

References

- Advisem Services Inc (2023) Midterm Evaluation of the Global Skills Opportunity Program.
- British Council (2018) Internationalisation in technical and vocational education and training: A series of Further Education case studies from across the UK.
- Chankseliani, M., Kwak, J., Hanley, N., Akkad, A., Crisostomo, M., & Wang, Z. (2025). International student mobility and poverty reduction: A qualitative study of the mechanisms of systemic change. *World Development*, 195, 107116.
- CIMO – Centre for International Mobility (2010). *Faktaa – Facts and Figures 1B/2010: Networks Help to Make Vocational Education and Training More International*. Finnish National Agency for Education.
- DuocUC (2023) COIL Methodology: Evaluation of COIL Methodology at DuocUC. (Internal Report)
- DuocUC (2024) COIL Results 2024: Implementation 2024. (Internal Report)
- Enfield, S. (2019). Evidence for soft power created via scholarship schemes. K4D Helpdesk Report. Institute of Development Studies.
- Erasmus+ (n.d.) Erasmus+ Programme Guide. European Commission. Available at: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-common-terms>
- Fabbris, L. & Boetti, L. (2019) ROI-MOB: Measuring the return on investment in VET mobility in the European Union. CLEUP.
- Fassl, A., Kirsch, M., Pachocki, M., & Zabko, O. (2020) Tracing VET graduates with foreign mobility experience: Transnational research report. Foundation for the Development of the Education System, Warsaw.
- Graf, L., Powell, J. J., Fortwengel, J., & Bernhard, N. (2017). Integrating international student mobility in work-based higher education: The case of Germany. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(2), 156-169.
- Hubers, B. (2013) 'Learning abroad: Current status and prospects of cross-border mobility'. BWP: Vocational Training in Research and Practice. *Journal of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training*. Special Edition, 2013, pp. 41-45.
- ICF (2024) Support study for the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 interim evaluation and the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 final evaluation. European Commission.
- IFF (2024) Turing Scheme: Year 1 evaluation. Research report. Department for Education.
- Krichewsky-Wegener, L. (2021). Exploring the learning potential of internships abroad in VET from a student's perspective. In C. Nägele, B.E. Stalder, & M. Weich (Eds.), *Pathways in Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning*. Proceedings of the 4th Crossing Boundaries Conference in Vocational Education and Training, Muttenz and Bern online, 8. – 9. April (pp. 206–211). European Research Network on Vocational Education and Training, VETNET, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland and Bern University of Teacher Education.
- Kovtun, O., Kovtun, O., & Krykun, V. (2024). Effectiveness of international exchange programmes in vocational education. *Professional Education: Methodology, Theory and Technologies*, 10(2), 66-77. doi: 10.69587/pemtt/2.2024.66.

- Kwak, J., & Chankseliani, M. (2024). International student mobility and poverty reduction: A cross-national analysis of low-and middle-income countries. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 128, 102458.
- Mawer, M. (2017). Magnitudes of impact: A three-level review of evidence from scholarship evaluation. In Dassin, J. R., Marsh, R. R., & Mawer, M. (Eds.). (2017). *International scholarships in higher education: Pathways to social change*. Springer. pp. 257-280.
- Rajhman, T. (2019). *Preparing students for mobility in vocational education and training* (Masters thesis, Univerza v Mariboru, Filozofska fakulteta). Available at: <https://dk.um.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=73683>
- Soria, K. M., & Troisi, J. (2014). Internationalization at home alternatives to study abroad: Implications for students' development of global, international, and intercultural competencies. *Journal of studies in international education*, 18(3), 261-280.
- Specht, L. S. (2025). International trade effects of student migration. *The Center for Growth and Opportunity*.
- Tore Bertheussen, B. (2019). 'The Future of International VET Mobility'. Presentation at the XarxaFP 20th anniversary, Barcelona, 5 February 2019. https://www.xarxafp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-future-of-International-VET-Mobility_DG-EMPL_05022019.pdf
- Wang, Z, Hanley, N, Kwak, J, Vari-Lavoisier, I, Al Hussein, M, Tyson, LS, Akkad, A & Chankseliani, M 2024, 'How do international student returnees contribute to the development of their home countries? A systematic mapping and thematic synthesis', *International Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 125, 102330, pp. 1-26.
- Wilde, S., Kremer, H., & Stelzer, J. (2025). Crossing borders, opening minds? VET tandem partnerships in a Dutch-German cross-border region. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 12(1), 20-47.
- Wood, D. & Raby, R. L. (2021) *Community College Career and Technical Education Internationalization: Diversifying Comparative and International Education*. *Annual Review of Comparative and International Education* 2021. *International Perspectives on Education and Society*, Volume 42B, 205-224