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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

TOPAS Erasmus+ Project: Set-up and Requirements of Suitable Student Placement Schemes

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Abstract

Good education should provide both theoretical knowledge and practical skills tailored to the realities of a real economy. In many cases, the problem is that the theory is too strongly emphasised, while the importance of practice decreases. This applies to all levels of education, but is particularly visible at universities. The result is that students are well-prepared theoretically, but have problems after graduating with the practical use of their knowledge. Such a state is treated as a weakness of higher education and is reported as a problem by potential employers. The solution to this problem may be well-organised student internships, which should better prepare students for the real requirements of the labour market. As part of the TOPAS Erasmus + educational project, the existing ways of implementing student internships at agricultural faculties were compared and actions were taken to improve the organisation of such practices. These activities were carried out at 10 partner universities (4 from EU-countries - Germany, Poland, Romania, Great Britain and 6 from the post-soviet area - including Armenia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). It diagnosed that the main problems hindering the organisation of effective student placements in agricultural fields of study are: need to simultaneously reconcile the interests of different stakeholder groups (agribusiness companies and farmers, universities, students, state institutions), selection for internships primarily in large farms and companies, too small contact of academic staff with agricultural practice, weak willingness of academic staff to change teaching methods and study programs because of market changes, problems with data collection during internships, systemic errors in the organisation and control of student placement, insufficient motivation of students to do internships without salary. Proposals for changes in student placement requirements are: creating special funds for reimbursement of travel and student expenses during the apprenticeships, changing the supervisors' system and emphasising the importance of internships in the higher education cycle, more discussions and study visits for academic staff and students with agribusiness practitioners, introducing additions motivating employees to continuous improvement, introducing the obligation to prepare a final report along with collected data by students and conducting an exam after completing the internship.

Keywords: Agricultural management, ERASMUS+ TOPAS, higher education