

KEY COMPETENCIES FOR FOSTERING BETTER INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND EMPLOYABILITY

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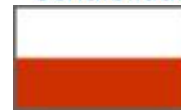
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Vocational Exchange Evaluation

Internal Project Evaluation: Vocational Experience Exchange (Students)

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During the project period there were 4 students' vocational exchange meetings promoting employability: developing personal skills and competences through a vocational stay abroad (adaptability, self-reliance, tolerance, empathy, crisis and stress management, responsibility, decision making etc.), using mobility as a tool for the acquisition of foreign and body language skills, intercultural competence, knowledge of foreign markets and working methods. Students had vocational practice in different work places: 4 in hotels (Kaunas, LT), 5 in kindergarten and primary school (Kaunas, LT and Trikala, GR), 4 – Gdansk (PL) Therma enterprise (producing heaters), 4 – in Lübeck (DE) SLM (producing 3D metal printers) and 2 in Trikala (GR) city council. Students practiced such professions as a room cleaner, kitchen assistant, primary school/kindergarten teacher assistant, electrician, mechanic, technician, manager. Visiting students in their workplace was a necessary part of teachers' participation. The evaluation of vocational practice is based on the analysis of the questionnaire prepared by participating teachers and their observations.

The Company/Institution

All the students (100%) got the permission to disseminate the experience of their vocational practice (I showed my instructor the task of this experience report and asked permission to work

out included task). Before the practice all students had some information and instructions concerning the type of organization, work peculiarities, etc. from teachers, managers and other responsible workers, although not in all cases the information was extended:

- I got information about the company/institution – 100%;
- The company/institution has been shown/introduced/explained to me – 93,8%;
- I was introduced to the workplace – 100%;
- I was introduced to colleagues/instructors at the workplace – 87,5%;
- I was given information concerning working clothes – 50%;
- I got information concerning OSH (occupational safety and health) – 68,8%;
- I got information concerning hygienic standards – 81,3%;
- I got information concerning my task – 87,5%;
- I got information concerning the duration of work and breaks – 68,8%;
- I got information concerning allowed and restricted areas – 62,5%;
- I got information concerning social and sanitary areas – 75,0%;
- I got information concerning work rules – 81,3%;

Answering the question about employee benefits (timetable, holidays, case of illness, pension scheme, dismissal protection etc.), students have pointed out flexible working hours, long holidays, good working conditions.

As special benefits of the working place they have mentioned a canteen – a few times.

The question about worker protection and accident prevention in most cases had 0 answer or „the company gives protective clothes, and first aid kits“, „they have glasses and respirators“, „they must be careful“.

Vocational practice

Some questions were about preparation for vocational practice. Not all students could answer the question: Which grade of exam at which school is necessary for the profession, you are experiencing now?

Answers to the question about special preconditions for learning the job are given in Table 1.

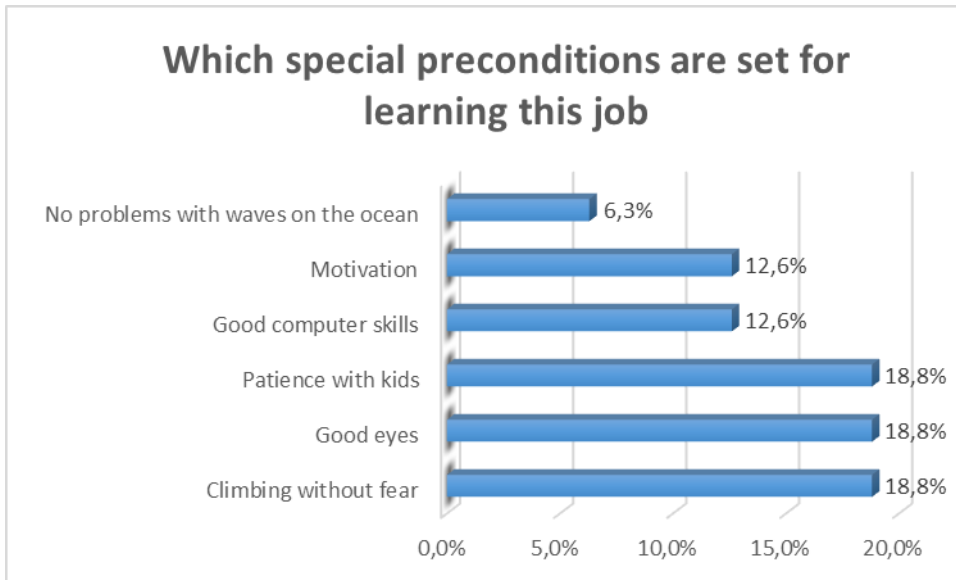


Table 1. Special preconditions for learning this job

Also, students pointed out the most important characteristics of the professions practiced.

Table 2 shows that intelligence and cognitive and some body language abilities have the highest values (75%), and the clerical abilities have the lowest value (31,3%).

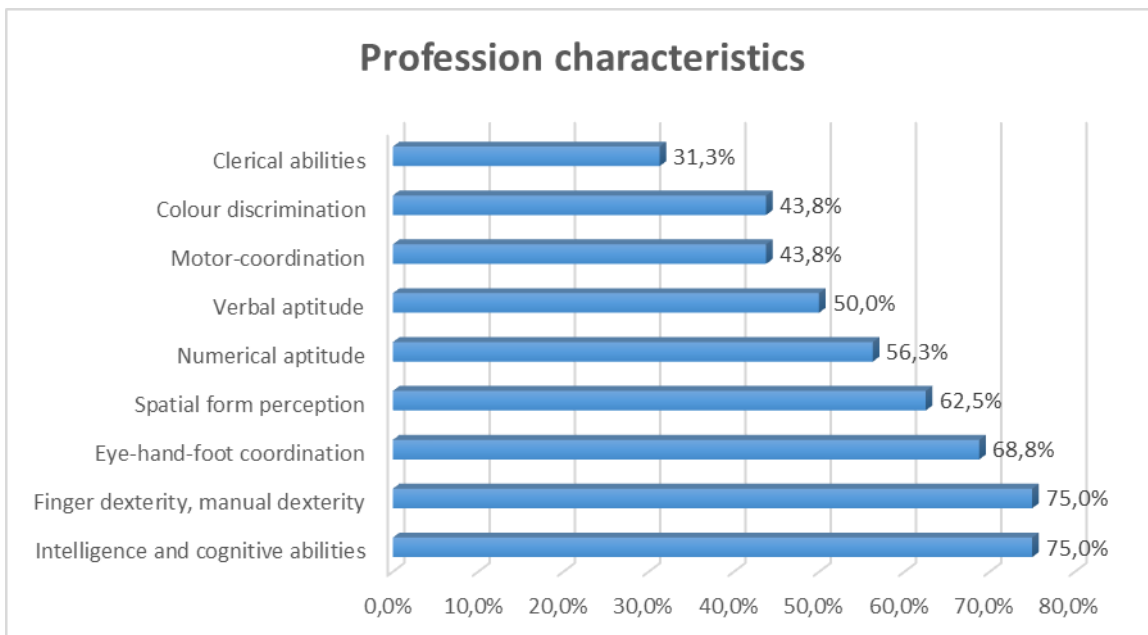


Table 2. Profession characteristics

Students have also reported, what skills are important for the job and for their personal development. They had to evaluate the skills from 1 to 10 with 1 meaning it is not important/I do not have such a skill. And 10 meaning – it is important, I have this skill. The results are provided in Table 3.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Time management in using transportation to get to work	4	10	8,19
Time management at work	2	10	7,81
Computer skills	2	10	6,75
Personal care skills including hygiene, health	4	10	8,06
Private and public behavior	1	10	7,19
Housekeeping and cooking skills	1	9	4,63
Budgeting skills	1	10	5,44
Whom to call and what to do in emergency situations	0	10	6,19
Know transportation services near home	0	10	6,12
To wear acceptable dress behavior for a variety of situations	0	10	7,63
Physical exercising routines (doing the same all day long)	0	10	6,25
Be aware of career interests and options (changing concerning the requirements)	0	10	6,13
Foreign languages	1	10	7,31
Body language	1	10	6,12

Table 3. Skills important for that job

The table shows that time management in using transportation to get to work (8,19 points) and personal care (8,06 points) are the most important/known, while housekeeping and cooking skills (4,63 points) and budgeting skills are the least important (5,44 points).

Actually, the table shows which skills are known and important and which ones are to be developed.

The survey asked students to list advantages and disadvantages of the profession practiced.

Advantages: „can print everything you want“, „you walk a lot“, „many holidays“, „not so many hours to work“, „stability“.

Disadvantages: „a small pension“, „boring, low-paid“, „difficult to learn“, „frustrating“, „health problems with breathing“, „you do not exercise your body a lot“, „it can be dangerous because of metal powder“, „small options of self-development“, „the same exact routine“.

Your future

Another block of questions was related to student's career path.

One third of students responded that their vocational practice might be relevant to their career goal (Table 4).

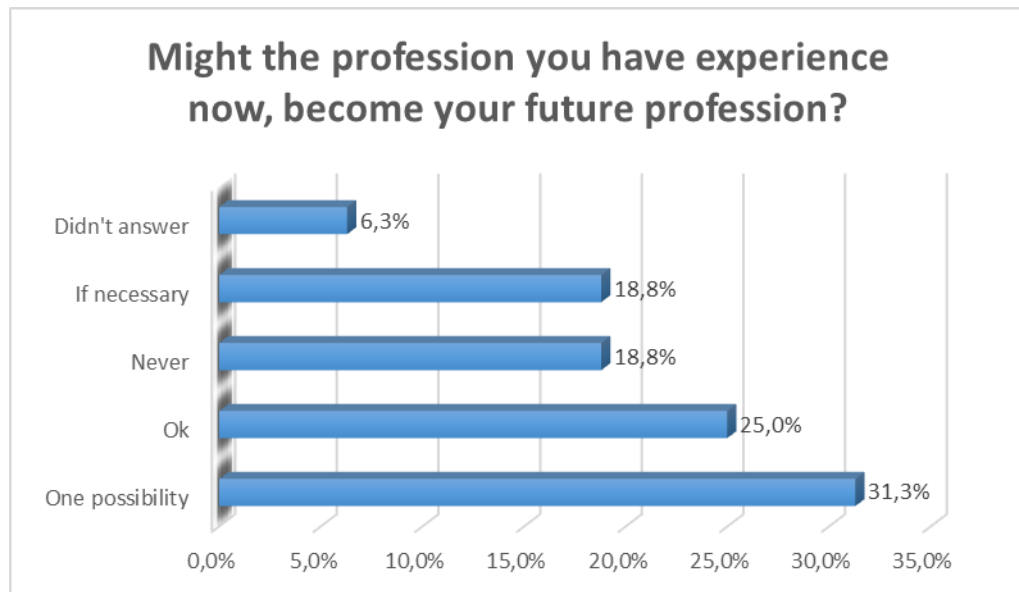


Table 4. Future profession

Students also mentioned the reason why the profession practiced is related or not related to their career goals: „because I want to become an architect “, „because I want to be a teacher in my future plans “, „I have better plans for myself“, „I have good skills to manage children, but not stress“, „I'm interested in new technologies“, „it's not for me“, „small options of self-development“.

Answering the question about working or studying in a foreign country the majority of students stated they would like to do it often (43,8%) (Table 5).

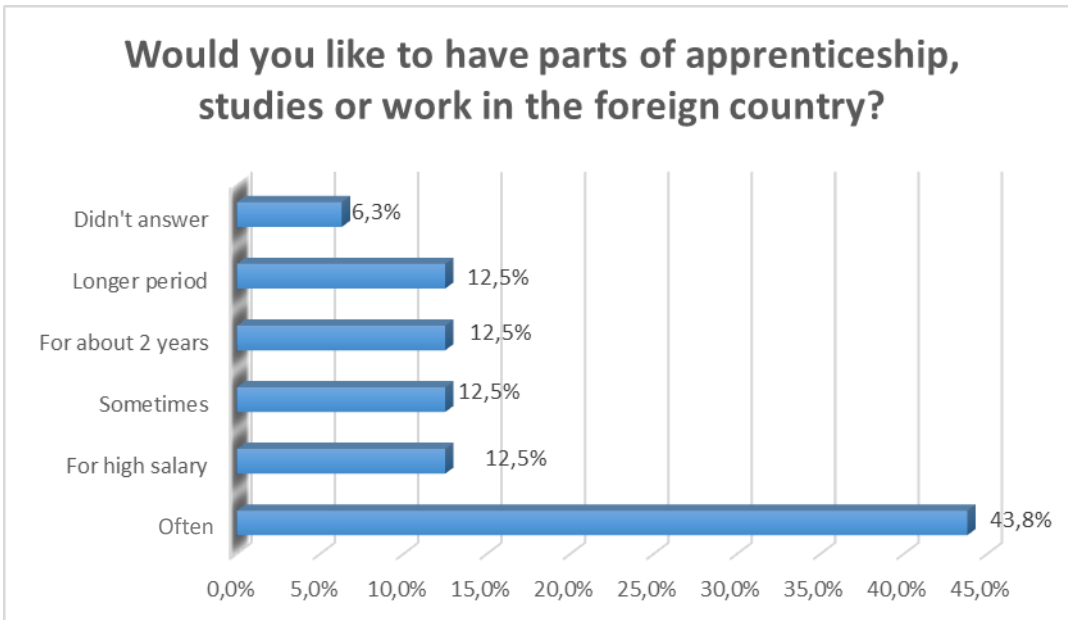


Table 5. Would you like to work in the foreign country?

The reasons for working in another country were indicated as: „yes, yes, yes, because of a wider horizon“ – 81,3%; „this has to be considered individually and detailed“ – 12,5%.

Concerning the question about future goals for a career or job (Table 6), most respondents answered that their main goal is to get a fulltime employment(62,5%), and the least important is part time employment (6,3%).

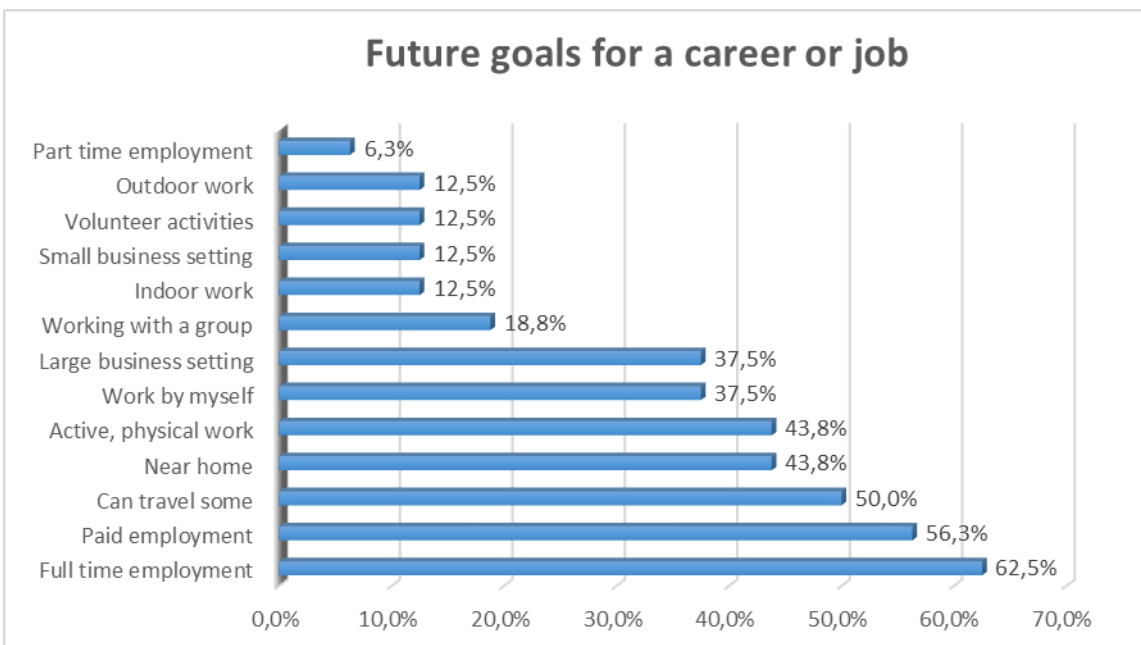


Table 6. Future goals for a career or job

Students were also asked to write down 3 professions, which are matching the requirements above, if applicable. The following professions were mentioned: architect, doctor, policeman, bank employee, teacher, CEO, engineer, computer expert, factory worker, IT specialist, designer, mechanic, waiter.

Special aspects of a vocational experience in a foreign country

Another block of questions was about different aspects of vocational experience abroad. In Table 7 we see how they managed the problem of language. The greatest part of respondents solved it successfully (75,1%): Easily (43,8%) + Almost ever (31,3%).

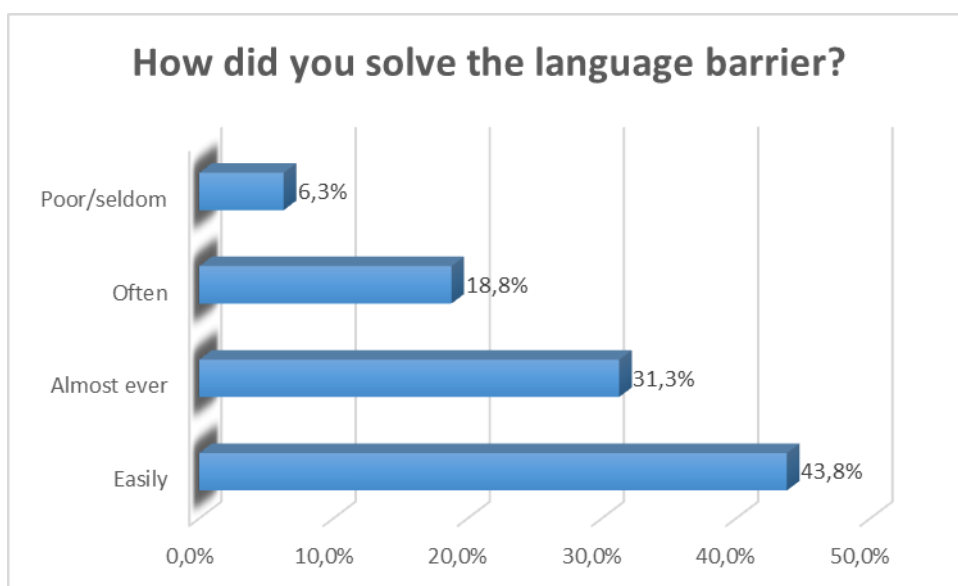


Table 7. How did students solve the language barrier?

The detailed answers:

“I talked with my exchange-partner, colleagues/instructors in English” – 87,5 %;

“my exchange partner has been translating mother tongue vs English” - 50%;

“we used nonverbal communication (signs, facial expression, fingers etc.)” – 62, 5%;

“it was almost impossible to communicate successfully” – 6, 3%.

The cooperation with exchange partner as “shadow”, in most cases was smart (62,5%).

See Table 8.

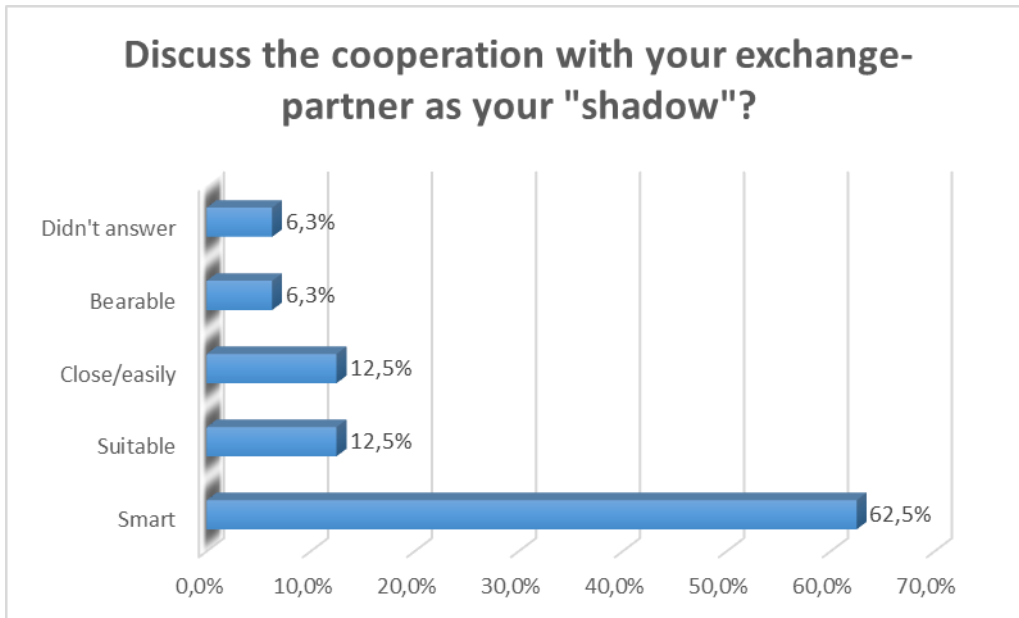


Table 8. Cooperation with exchange partner as “shadow”

It was a smart communication and cooperation without problems – 81,3%;

The partner acted like my second brain, internal twin or angel – 6,3%;

My exchange-partner had to work on other places – 37,5%;

But I felt autonomous and save in all situations by myself - 50%;

I knew how to contact my exchange-partner within minutes – 62,5%;

It was almost impossible to cooperate successfully, because my partner often disappeared or had communication in mother tongue with others – 6,3%.

Contribution or the role of the attending teachers was quite useful (56,3%).

See Table 9.

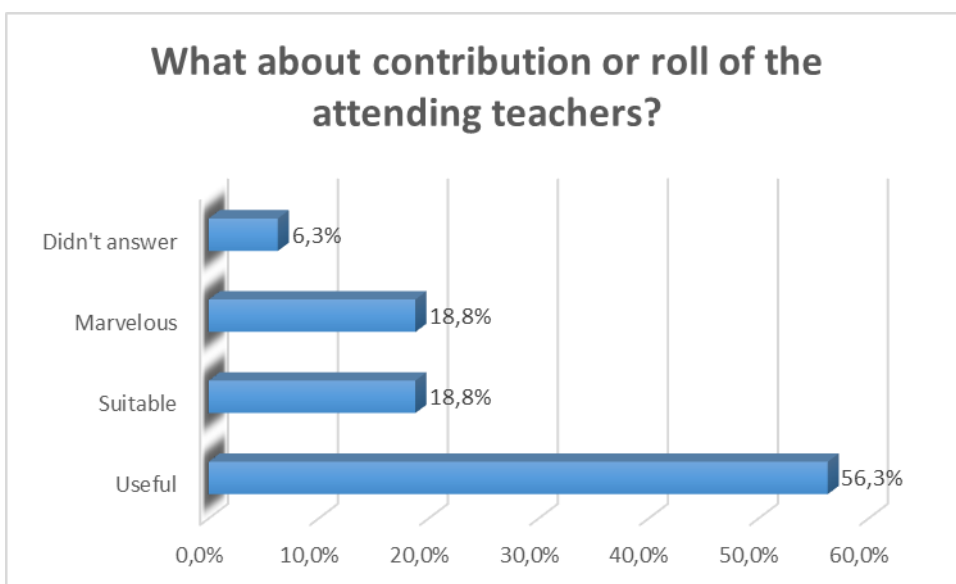


Table 9. Contribution or role of the attending teachers

Teachers had prepared us, so I did not need any further attendance of them during that week” -

75%;

teachers had been helpful sufficiently in preparation – 87,5%;

I knew, how to get in contact with the teachers when necessary – 87,5%;

teachers had to solve their own vocational experience/meetings – 62,5%;

I knew them in the background by phone or sms in case of emergency - 75%;

teachers offered help for this report – 87,5%;

teachers kept the right distance during visits. So I felt well respected – 87,5%;

teachers visits have been embarrassing, like kindergarten - 0%.

Students were also asked to describe their stay, i.e. accommodation, food and leisure activities.

Table 10 shows, that half of respondents evaluated their accommodation as holidaylike (50%).

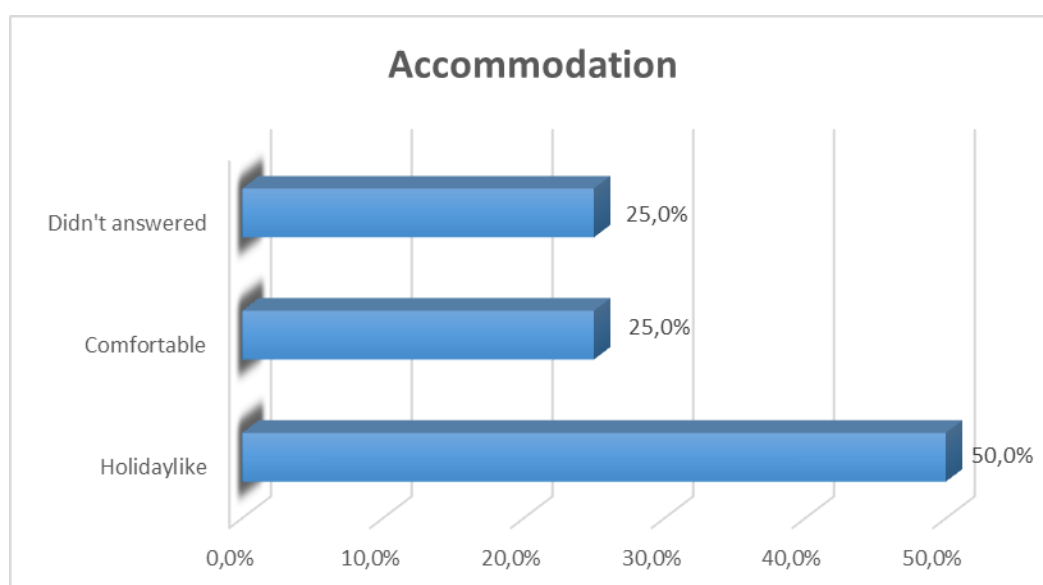


Table 10. Accommodation

I have been introduced in a suitable accommodation – 68,8%;

The accommodation was really good for sleeping well - 75%;

From my point of view accommodation seems to be an almost irrelevant aspect - 0%.

Food was wonderful (50%),

leisure activities – inspiring (56,3%)

(Tables 11-12).

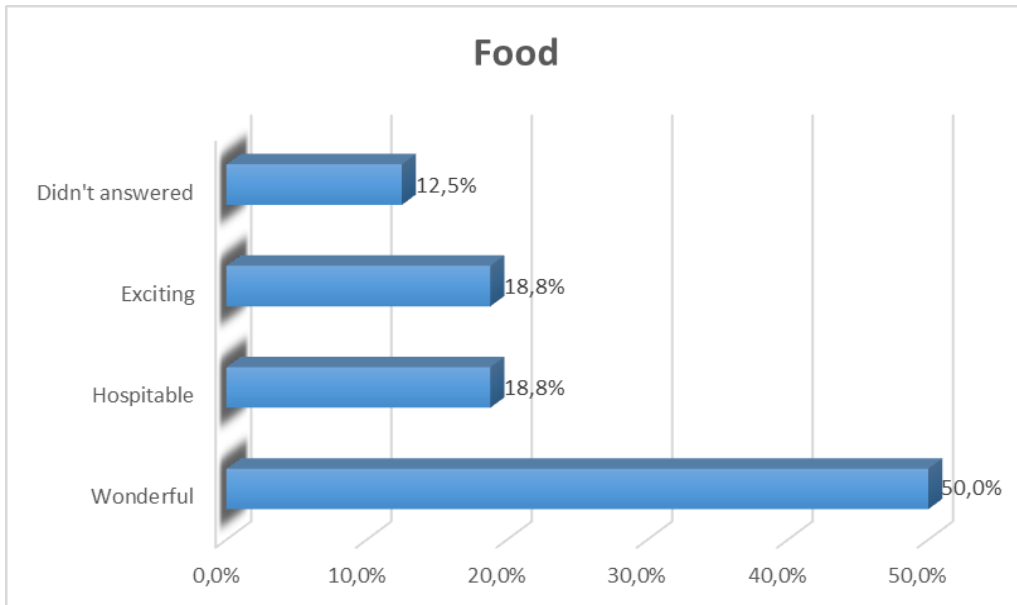


Table 11. Food

I got food, I felt familiar to – 81,3%;

I got new impressions of tasty food – 62,2%;

We have often preferred fast food from burger bars or similar – 37,5%;

From my point of view, I had interesting, sometimes strange food – 43,8%;

I feel personal problems to become familiar with strange food – 12,5%;

I'm looking forward to eating this food in a restaurant at home or cooking it myself – 56,3%.

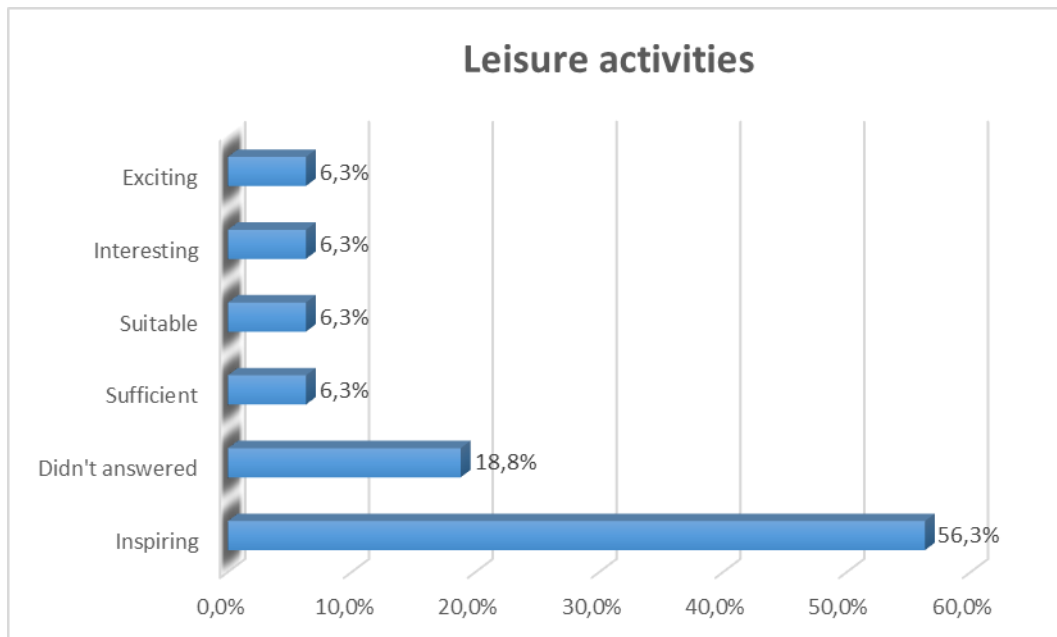


Table 12. Leisure activities

We had interesting talks in our spare time/together with parents or friends - 75%;

We had nice events in our spare time/together with parents or friends – 68,8%, for e.g. bowling, going in the nature, some architecture places, going to restaurant;

We had visits to an museum, theatre, orchestra, ballet, exhibition – 56,3%.

Summary

The survey data and further discussions support the view, shared by the vast majority of participating teachers and students, that the main goal of vocational exchange is to foster such qualities as initiative, responsibility, decision taking ability, judgment, forecasting, planning, communication skills, increase learning and understanding the culture and labour market of other EU countries.

Attention should also be drawn to suggesting these qualities as essential to the effective performance of jobs. Assistance in developing these competencies is particularly required by individuals as well as the ability to work with others, and the willingness and ability to embark on a necessary course of action without knowing all the steps to the goal in advance, but equipped with the ability to monitor what happens, learn from it, and take corrective action when necessary, use body language for successful communication at the workplace.

It follows from the survey that vocational exchange involves providing students with opportunities to clarify their values and with opportunities to practice and develop new styles of behavior, which will enable them to achieve their valued goals.

It reveals the need to concentrate on fostering those qualities rather than any specific occupational skills.

However, the survey of vocational experience could have used a wider context, discussing such questions as what competences have been fostered or failed to develop, could have given an impressionistic analysis of qualities required to perform well in the jobs entered.

One of the qualities which students may need to develop in vocational exchange might be the ability and the willingness to make one's own observations and learn without instruction.

There's no question that some students thrive outside of a classroom environment and are motivated by learning that's clearly linked to an occupation and real experiences.

However, more needs to be done by those in industry, training providers and government to provide a greater awareness at secondary school level of the opportunities available to students. We need to ensure minds are stimulated and options are given to students at an early stage in their development so they are able to make informed decisions about the various vocational routes available to them. This can be done in ways that captures young people's imaginations and provides them with excitement for the future, and vocational exchange is one of those ways.

A recommendation to policy makers could advocate that it should be compulsory for all secondary students to undertake vocational practice with instructors and teachers knowing their task.

A relevant curriculum based on the vocational needs can be developed alongside with twinning programs with outside agencies or organizations at local or international levels, and run smoothly and effectively with documents proving students' gained experience.