

MAPPING SKILLS GAINED ON EXCHANGE MATCHED WITH EMPLOYER'S NEEDS

A Comprehensive Competence Profile

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Preface

The ErasmusJobs Project (<http://erasmusjobs.org>) in particular the task **within intellectual output 1: A Comprehensive Competence Profile**, is devoted to defining which skills are provided by an Erasmus+ mobility abroad, mapping the skills employers seek and making a comparative analysis of the two, highlighting the concrete benefits that Erasmus+ brings for participants. Furthermore, it will produce a competence booklet, a report, and policy recommendations on how to support Erasmus+ Alumni.

To achieve these goals, the project members have done an extensive literature study titled “Skills Gained Through Erasmus+ mobility; A literature review”. The literature study will be complemented and validated with qualitative field research among employers, and students in the following document. The following with representatives from the various stakeholder groups to provide essential data for the development of the competence profile.

Additionally, a mapping between the identified skills has been developed to facilitate dialogue among the stakeholders. This mapping might serve as a benchmark measuring the different competences gained and needed to identify where are needed.

This study tries to answer what transversal competences do Erasmus+ students have, and which competences do employers need. By answering these questions, we will identify where expectations match and where they differ in order to bridge this competence gap, specifically taking a look at the Erasmus+ students’ competences.

The research will be concluded with the development of a competence booklet for students and career officers to use in their day-to-day operations. These reports and documents will form a solid base for further discussions and allow the project to increase the impact and sustainability of the developed website: “The Job Platform for the Erasmus Generation”, in order to be integrated in the competence centre.

The tangible outcomes from the ErasmusJobs project are freely available and usable without any restriction.

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Introduction

It is commonly agreed that mobility activities during studies, as well as any active engagement in student branches or other similar student associations, are of significant added value when it is time to find a job. Nevertheless, it is equally known that the labour market remains challenging for recent graduates, mainly due to their apparent lack of skills and working experience. Acknowledging this situation, the project ErasmusJobs - “Bridging the skills gap of the Erasmus Generation” tries to give answers to these questions:

- **Why are the skills gained through a mobility experience not clear?**
- **Why does this lack of recognition still exist?**

A precise initial analysis of the needs of the parties involved (students, universities, and employers) is later provided. The ErasmusJobs project seeks to identify the transversal skills of the students, the needs of employers, and map both sides with a common understanding.

As a final and global outcome, the project will produce an online platform to manage practically all the exchanges, exposing additional training and best practice materials as supporting resources. The ultimate goal is that the project develops different outcomes, suggesting solutions to overcome the obstacles for the success of mobility competences recognition.

Methodology

In this report we present the Erasmus+ skills gained, that are related to labour market needs with a mapping of skills matching.

The first chapter makes an analysis of the usual skills obtained through an Erasmus+ mobility. The analysis is based on the whole Mobility Tool+ data of former Erasmus+ students from project partner universities; which are limited to Czech Republic, Belgium, Spain and Italy. A total of 3.346 students responses of the academic year 2016/17 and 2017/18.

With the focus pointed toward the labour market, Section 3 includes an analysis of skills needed by employers based on interviews and online questionnaires of human resources and managers from different European companies. Our aim is to rank those skills considering the importance of an international experience in the job market. Finally, a matching for both skills is provided, obtaining relevant conclusions to be used by ISM stakeholders to foster Erasmus+ mobilities.

Limitations to the Research

The reader should be aware of the following limitations when drawing conclusions from the data and information included in this report:

- While the individuals are from a specified mobility population in the participation partner universities, the survey relied on a convenience sample
 - of those students filling in the beneficiary report in the Mobility Tool and A large percentage of respondents per university filled this in, but the sample is still based on self-selection.
 - employers that are connected to the European Institute for Industrial Leadership. The sampling may reflect the primary membership base of the European Institute for Industrial Leadership and may therefore not be reflective of the diversity of employer populations worldwide.
- The information captured from this survey relies solely on self-reported information and assumes the participants are providing accurate information about their experiences.
- The questions included in the survey were primarily drafted in a European context.
- Participants may have come to the survey with different interpretations of the questions, although every effort was made to provide instruction, direction, and classification for each question.
- The survey used closed questions rather than open questions due to the volume of expected responses. It is likely that there are other factors which could influence a student's decision to go abroad, or a student's experience while they are abroad, that are not captured in this report.
- The report does not seek to establish causation but instead is aiming to highlight correlations between specific target groups and their responses.
- The survey was only available in English and may therefore exclude students or employers who did not feel comfortable filling it in in another language than their own.

1 Analysis and list of common Skills gained

1.1 Introduction

This section shows what transversal competences are obtained by Erasmus+ students. From the Erasmus Impact Study (Brandenburg et al. 2015) the authors state that Erasmus+ mobility has an impact on the students' career considering the acquisition of different transversal skills that provides them with prospects for better employability. They mention multiple skills such as adaptability, flexibility, interculture attitude, motivation, openness to new experiences, confidence, proactivity, creativity and ability to solve problems among others.

In our evaluation we will consider the skills within the 5 categories defined by (Soares and Mosquera, 2019) that are skills perceived as enhancing employability:

1. **Adaptability skills**
2. **Teamwork skills**
3. **Career-orientation skills**
4. **Managerial skills**
5. **Personal skills**

In the following subsections we will provide information about the sampling of data (MobilityTool+ answers from former Erasmus+ students of partner universities), relationship among questions available and corresponding skill category, the analysis of the data and summary of the sorted list of skills gained by students while on Erasmus+ mobility. This is the first step to know how competences from Erasmus+ students translate into competences that employers need.

1.2 MobilityTool+ data

In this section we present how the MobilityTool+ data available in the project partner universities are used to know the skills obtained by Erasmus+ students.

[MobilityTool+](#) was an instrument for the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ program to report the results of funded projects and mobility of students across Europe. In particular for Erasmus+ mobilities the participant provides information on the experience. The tool automatically sends an email to each student a notification to fill a report after the end of his/her mobility period with the subject "Erasmus+ Individual participant report request". The e-mail content will include a link to <http://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey> where

each participant will fill a web questionnaire with different formats (choose one or several options, matrix questions).

The following 4 universities are partners of the ErasmusJobs project:

- Masaryk University (MSK)
- Universidad de Alcalá (UAH)
- Université de Mons (UMONS)
- Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata" (TORVERGATA)

We have collected the data from former students that joined the Erasmus+ Mobility program in the last two years 2016/17 and 2017/18, focusing our attention on the MobilityTool+ survey collected by the Erasmus Agency at the end of the visiting period. Thanks to the common survey used by all HEIs participating in the Erasmus+ program we were able to retrieve data from the Mobility Tool about former Erasmus students. In this way, we have had the possibility to study the dataset from a common point of view for different EU partner countries: Czech Republic, Belgium, Italy, and Spain. In a later subsection the questions are related to skills and competences. The students surveyed from the different universities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participation of Erasmus+ students from the different partner universities in the MobilityTool+ data

Partner University	Number of students
Masaryk University	1031
Universidad de Alcalá	448
Université de Mons	726
Università degli Studi di Roma "Tor Vergata"	1141
Total number of students	3346

1.3 Data pre-processing of MobilityTool+ answers

Table 2 presents the 30 questions that comprises the MobilityTool+ survey to be answered by former Erasmus students. There are questions closely related to transferable skills or competences, but others are directed to know the opinion of practitioners about the Erasmus+ program.

Table 2. MobilityTool+ standard questionnaire with 30 survey questions

Mobility Tool - survey questions
Think logically and draw conclusions (analytical skills)
Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills)
Plan and carry out my learning independently
Use the internet, social media and pcs , e.g. For my studies, work and personal activities
Develop an idea and put it into practice
See the value of different cultures
Cooperate in teams
Plan and organise tasks and activities
Express myself creatively
I am more confident and convinced of my abilities
I know better my strengths and weaknesses
I am more able to adapt to and act in new situations
I am more able to think and analyse information critically
I am more tolerant towards other persons' values and behaviour
I am more open-minded and curious about new challenges
I intend to participate more actively in social and political life of my community
I am more interested in knowing what happens in the world daily
I am more able to reach decisions
I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures
I am more interested in European topics
I feel more European
I am more aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, civil rights
I have increased my sector- or field-specific skills
I believe that my chances to get a new or better job have increased
I have a clearer idea about my professional career aspirations and goals
I have better opportunities for traineeships or student jobs in my home country
I am better capable of taking over work tasks with high responsibility after my stay abroad
I can easily imagine working abroad at some point in the future
I can easily imagine working in the country where I did my Erasmus+ period in the future
I would like to work in an international context

Every Erasmus student valued each question following the next scale range:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Rather disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Rather agree
5. Strongly agree

Let us process the data in order to make a fair comparison and extract conclusions general to any Erasmus+ mobility for all countries. In this way, we will obtain the average of all the answers for each university Erasmus+ students and equalise the data to the same average value.

Therefore, to obtain a mean value from the qualitative scores above, we have followed an unbiased scale (see Table 3), with a symmetric range of values from -2 to +2 assigned linearly to each one of the 1-5 answer scores to have a zero mean in the numeric data.

Table 3. Corresponding scores for the MobilityTool+ answers for a zero-mean quantitative data

Qualitative answer	Numeric score for zero-mean
Strongly disagree	-2
Rather disagree	-1
Neither agree nor disagree	0
Rather agree	1
Strongly agree	2

Then, Table 4 shows the average value for all the answers obtained for the Erasmus experience of outgoing Erasmus students for each partner university considering the -2 to +2 score grades.

Table 4. Average result for the Erasmus experience in each participant university (-2 to +2 scores)

UNIVERSITY	Average value of the Erasmus Experience
TORVERGATA	0,61
UMONS	0,46
UAH	0,59
MSK	0,26
<i>average</i>	0,48

The mean values ranged from -2 to +2 have been transformed in the more usual 0 to 10 grading scale values in Table 5.

Table 5. Average result for the Erasmus experience in each participant university (0 to 10 scale)

UNIVERSITY	Average value of the Erasmus Experience
TORVERGATA	8,04
UMONS	7,31
UAH	7,95
MSK	6,28
<i>global average</i>	7,40

Taken into account the data shown in Table 5, in general, former Erasmus+ students consider very valuable the European mobility experience. However, the range and value spans for the partner university students' answers are very different. The values shown in Table 6 represent the minimum, mean and maximum score values about the Erasmus+ experience for each partner university.

Table 6. Min-MAX values for the Erasmus experience in each participant university

UNIVERSITY	Min	Mean value of the Erasmus Experience	MAX
TORVERGATA	7,1	8,04	9,01
UMONS	6,09	7,31	8,52
UAH	6,73	7,95	9,06
MSK	4,74	6,28	7,43

The data shows the different ways European students see and value the ISM experience. For a clearer view, It is out of our scope to analyse the reason for these different satisfaction values of Erasmus mobilities Figure 1 shows the min/mean/max score values of Table 6 graphically.

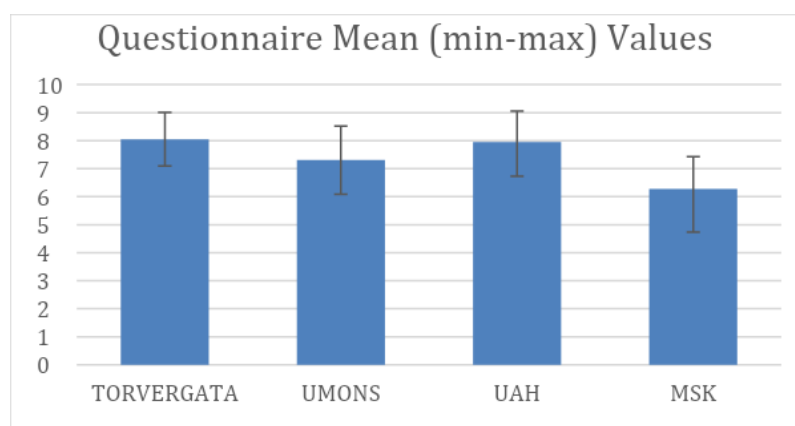


Figure 1. Data questionnaire answers from University participants: mean value and range distribution

As there are differences in the average of the questionnaire, we consider equalising the information among the partners' information. In this way, we have transformed the data results in order to have the same average value in all universities partners. Considering the joint average value (shown as 7,40 in Table 5) we have set up this reference for all the data. Next, similarly for the data span, we have equalised the span of data to uniform the information given by the students of different universities/countries.

Finally, the different values are transformed into a mean value of 7,40 considering an averaged span range from -1,23 to + 1,11 for the difference of values in answers. The raw data obtained from the

MobilityTool+ has been processed and corrected values for each student and answer are obtained by the following formula:

$$\text{corrected_value} = (\text{answer_value} - \text{global_average}) * \\ ((\text{max_min_corrected_span}) / (\text{max_min_current_span})) + \text{global_average}$$

where the *global_average* value is 7,40, the *max_min_corrected_span* is equal to $+1,11 - (-1,23) = 2.34$ and the *max_min_current_span* is obtained similarly but considering the max/min values for the current dataset of the university partner.

1.4 Data Analysis of MobilityTool+ questionnaire

As we have noted before, our goal is to identify skill improvements for Erasmus+ students after the mobility program. The experience of mobility abroad is greatly valued, but we would like to point out those aspects more highlighted. With the equalisation of the retrieved data from MobilityTool+ at the different partner universities, we have set a common reference averaged value and spanning of data for all the answers of students in order to obtain which are the skills more valued by all Erasmus+ students considered in the sampling.

Therefore, we have processed the data following the formula given before to equalise the data and obtain a 0-10 score value for each one the questions averaged for the whole dataset. In Table 7, we present ranked in descending order the different questions. The values range from maximum 6,7 to 8 scores.

Table 7. Sorted questions about Erasmus+ experience in descending order

ID	Survey question - Ranking order	Score
Q1	I am more able to adapt to and act in new situations	8,0
Q2	I am more open-minded and curious about new challenges	7,9
Q3	I know better my strengths and weaknesses	7,8
Q4	See the value of different cultures	7,8
Q5	Plan and carry out my learning independently	7,8
Q6	I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures	7,8
Q7	I am more confident and convinced of my abilities	7,7
Q8	I would like to work in an international context	7,7
Q9	Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills)	7,7
Q10	I can easily imagine working abroad at some point in the future	7,6
Q11	I believe that my chances to get a new or better job have increased	7,6
Q12	I am more able to reach decisions	7,6
Q13	I am more able to think and analyse information critically	7,6
Q14	I am more tolerant towards other persons' values and behaviour	7,5
Q15	Plan and organise tasks and activities	7,5
Q16	I have increased my sector- or field-specific skills	7,4
Q17	I am better capable of taking over work tasks w\ responsibility after my stay abroad	7,4
Q18	Think logically and draw conclusions (analytical skills)	7,3
Q19	I am more interested in knowing what happens in the world daily	7,3
Q20	Develop an idea and put it into practice	7,2
Q21	Use the internet, social media and pcs, e.g. for my studies, work and personal activities	7,2
Q22	I am more interested in European topics	7,2
Q23	Cooperate in teams	7,1
Q24	Express myself creatively	7,1
Q25	I have a clearer idea about my professional career aspirations and goals	7,0
Q26	I am more aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, equality, etc.	6,9
Q27	I have better opportunities for traineeships or student jobs in my home country	6,9
Q28	I intend to participate more actively in social and political life of my community	6,8

Q29	I can easily imagine working in the country I did my Erasmus+ period in the future	6,7
Q30	I feel more European	6,7

We can observe that in the top positions of the ranking there are questions related to the improvement of **adaptability, self-esteem, resilience**, etc:

- Q1. I am more able to adapt to and act in new situations
- Q2. I am more open-minded and curious about new challenges
- Q3. I know better my strengths and weaknesses
- Q5. Plan and carry out my learning independently
- Q7. I am more confident and convinced of my abilities
- Q9. Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills)

Other items that are top ranked in the questionnaire are much related to **internationalisation** and **intercultural skills**:

- Q4. See the value of different cultures
- Q6. I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures
- Q8. I would like to work in an international context

On the contrary, regrettably, “European citizenship” values are ranked in the last positions, which should be one of the relevant goals to be accomplished with Erasmus mobilities.

Figure 2 presents the results to the questions obtained from MobilityTool+ questionnaire sorted according to the corrected mean values, graphically zoomed with the variability span and mean data values. In addition, Figure 3 shows the data at full scale with the min and max values for each question aiming to give the reader an idea of the variability of that question for the students filling the questionnaire.

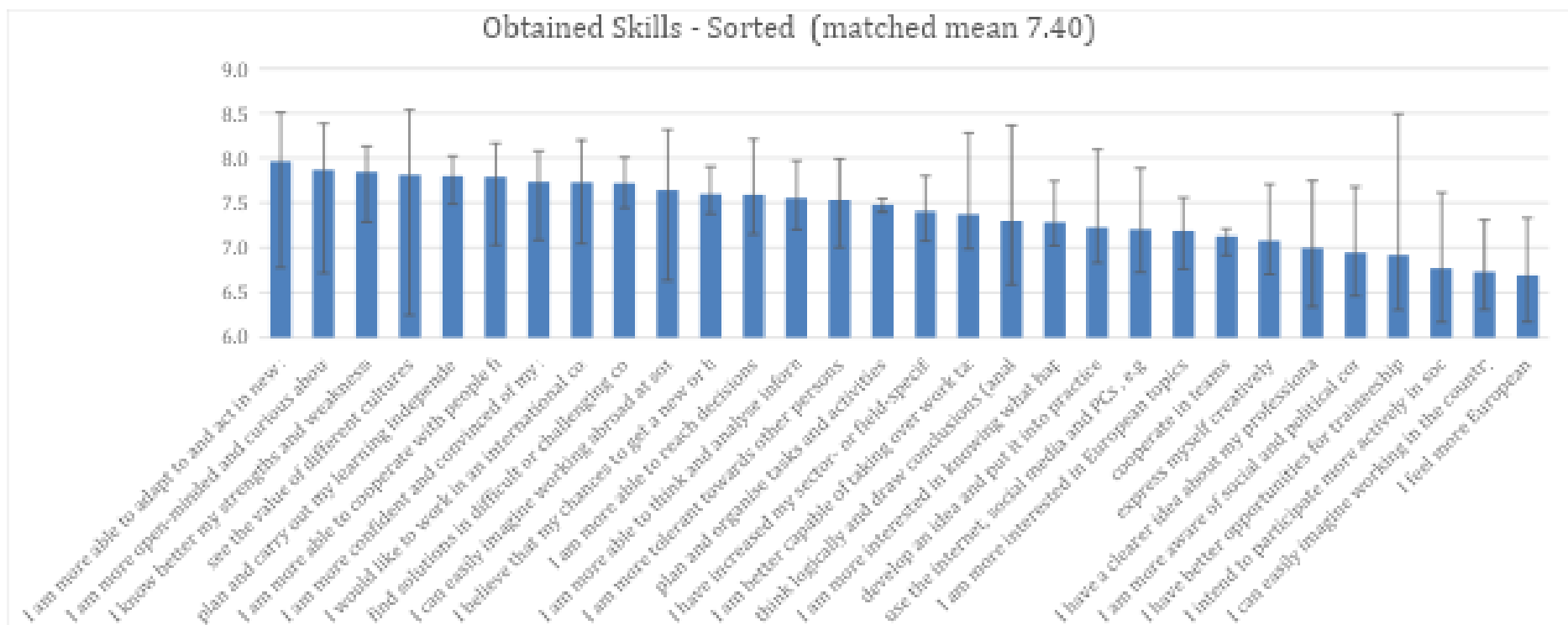


Figure 2. Sorted question results considering corrected mean values (zoomed scale and span variability)

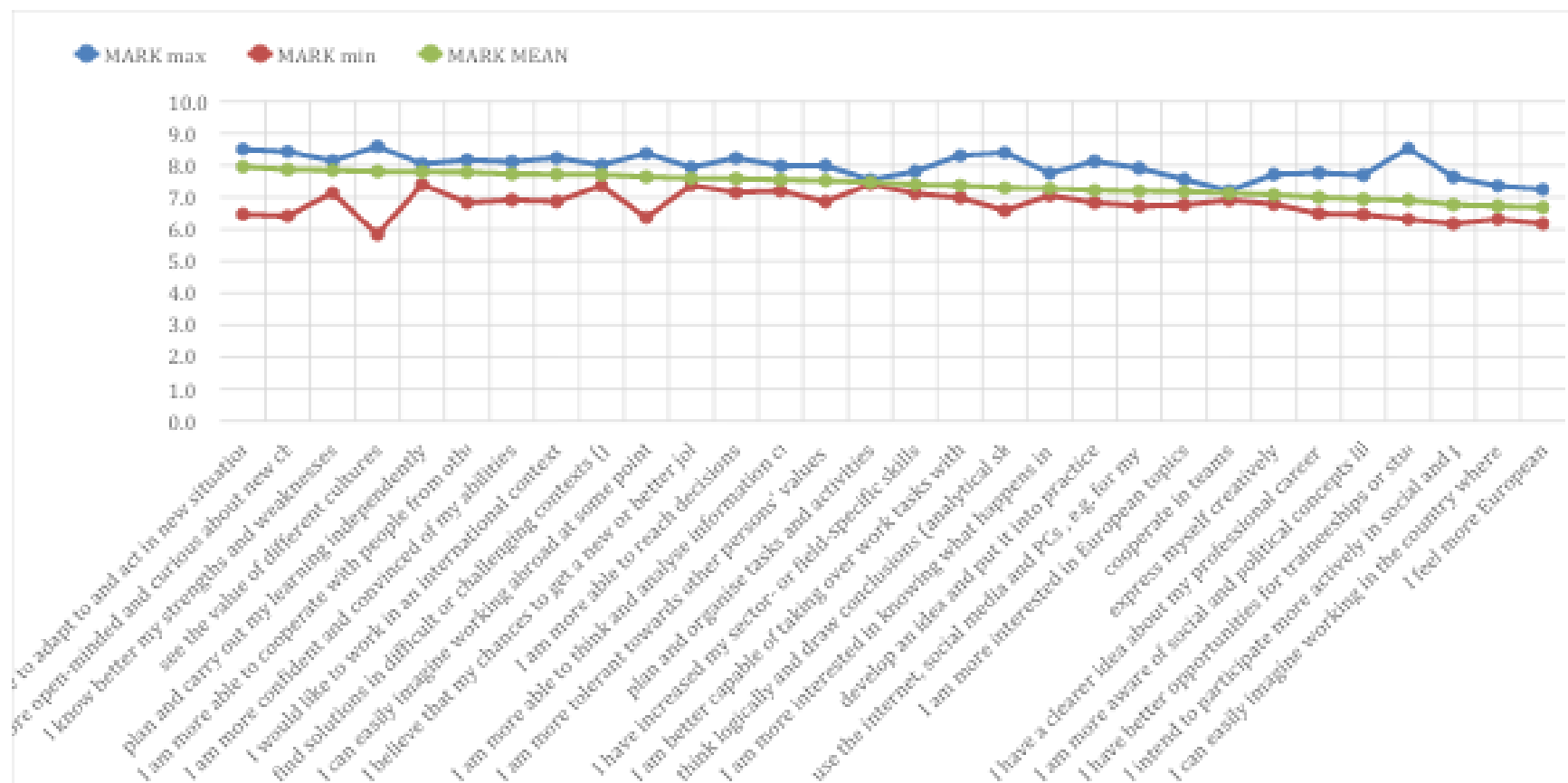


Figure 3. Figure 2. Sorted question results showing min/MAX and corrected mean values at full scale 1-10

1.5 Summary and grouping of skills gained

Looking at the answers in the questionnaires filled by former Erasmus+ students, we focus our attention on the corresponding skills that are perceived as enhancing employability, in order to seek later a better matching with the skills needed by employers, we have followed the ISM skills grouping defined in (Martínez-Usarralde et al.. 2017). They propose to create the following 5 skill clustering:

- Adaptability skills (AD)
- Teamwork skills (TW)
- Career orientation skills (CO)
- Managerial skills (MA)
- Personal skills (PE)

Following this approach, we have assigned answers to questions to the corresponding skill group. Few questions have been allocated to 2 different groups of skills. Then, Table 8 presents each survey question and the category of skills more related to it.

Table 8. Matching employability skills with survey questions from Mobility Tool

ID	Survey questions for Mobility Tool - Ranking order	AD	TW	CO	MA	PE
Q1	I am more able to adapt to and act in new situations	X				
Q2	I am more open-minded and curious about new challenges	X				
Q3	I know better my strengths and weaknesses					X
Q4	See the value of different cultures					X
Q5	Plan and carry out my learning independently					X
Q6	I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures		X			
Q7	I am more confident and convinced of my abilities					X
Q8	I would like to work in an international context		X			
Q9	Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills)			X		
Q10	I can easily imagine working abroad at some point in the future		X			
Q11	I believe that my chances to get a new or better job have increased			X		
Q12	I am more able to reach decisions				X	X
Q13	I am more able to think and analyse information critically			X	X	
Q14	I am more tolerant towards other persons' values and behaviour				X	X
Q15	Plan and organise tasks and activities				X	
Q16	I have increased my sector- or field-specific skills					X
Q17	I am better capable taking over work tasks w/ responsibility after stay abroad				X	
Q18	Think logically and draw conclusions (analytical skills)			X	X	
Q19	I am more interested in knowing what happens in the world daily					X
Q20	Develop an idea and put it into practice		X			
Q21	Use the internet, social media, pcs, e.g. for studies, work, personal activities					X
Q22	I am more interested in European topics					X
Q23	Cooperate in teams		X			
Q24	Express myself creatively					X
Q25	I have clearer idea about my professional career aspirations & goals			X		
Q26	I am more aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, etc.					X

ID	Survey questions for Mobility Tool - Ranking order	AD	TW	CO	MA	PE
Q27	I have better opportunities for traineeships or student jobs in my home country			X		
Q28	I intend to participate more actively in social and political life of my community					X
Q29	I can easily imagine working in country where I did my Erasmus+ in the future			X		
Q30	I feel more European					X

Then, for each skill category we sum up and compute the average of the different answers that are marked for that category. For example, in the AD - Adaptability skills the Q1 and Q2 survey questions are related, then the average for this skill group is 7,95, $(8,0+7,9)/2$. The improvement in the skill considered no gain for a 5.0 value, is a +59% improvement.

We can summarise that the gained skills through an Erasmus+ mobility are the following

1. Adaptability Skills (+59% gain)
2. Teamwork Skills (+50% gain)
3. Managerial Skills (+50% gain)
4. Personal Skills (+47% gain)
5. Career Orientation (+45% gain)

Figure 4 resumes the improvement in the 5 set of skills for Erasmus+ mobility.

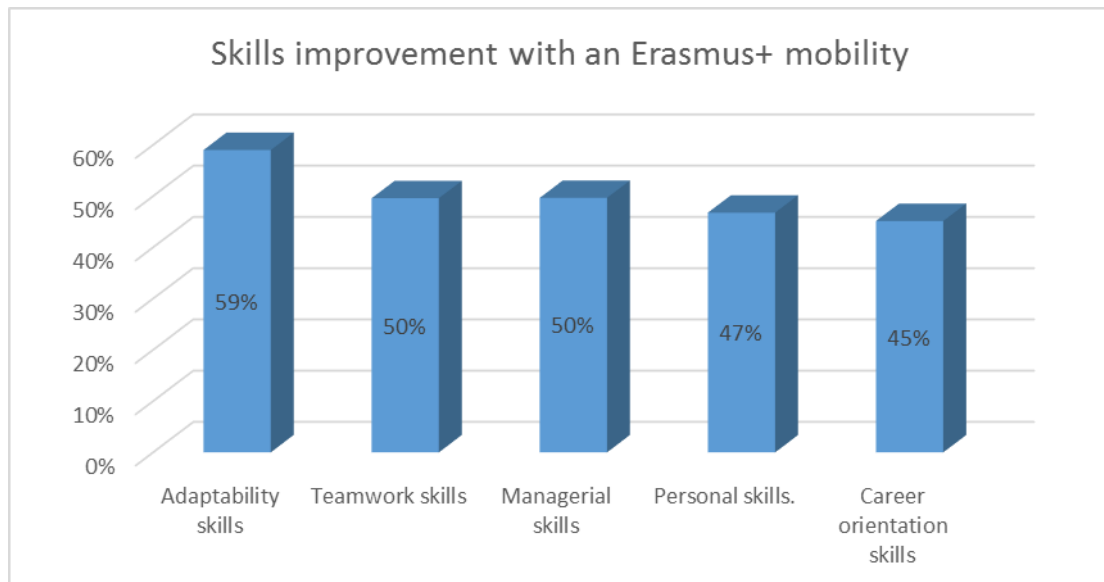


Figure 4. Skills gained in an Erasmus+ mobility

2 Analysis of skills needed by employers

The literature study provided in IO1: Literature Review: Skills gained through mobility; was complemented with a qualitative field research amongst employers in order to find out what are the main skills employers look for when hiring young graduates and whether these skills correspond to those offered by Erasmus students and any other students having participated in a mobility programme.

This field research included a survey completed by employers from companies based in Europe, of various sizes as well as different sectors of the economy. The survey was continued with interviews with HR managers from several industrial companies.

The results of this qualitative analysis will contribute to a mapping of the transversal skills sought for by employers with those gained by Erasmus+ alumni. Furthermore, it will help identify the main competences young graduates would need to develop further in order to match with employers' needs.

As one of the main stakeholders in benchmarking the skills needed with those gained by Erasmus+ students, the employers' survey will provide essential data for developing the competence profile.

2.1 Sizes and sectors of companies surveyed

A survey was conducted with 55 employers in order to understand the type of skills companies look for when they hire young recruits. The survey also sets out to explore whether the skills gained by young people through their experience abroad on a mobility programme, such as the Erasmus programme, or possibly also whether the skills gained by their active participation in student organisation, gave them an edge on their first job hire.

The survey was completed both online as well as through a series of interviews with HR managers and seniors from 55 companies of various sizes and from various sectors (see graphics below).

Approximately 70% of the responses came from small companies (with fewer than 50 employees), 13% from small and medium size companies, 17% from larger companies based in Europe (with 6% from companies with 500 to 5000 employees and 9% from large companies of over 5000 employees).

These very large companies (over 5000 employees) were mostly industrial companies with headquarters in Europe, members of the EILL (European Institute for Industrial Leadership). These represent a total of approximately 220.000 employees in Europe (see details below).

Figure 5 shows the percentages of Small, Medium and Large companies surveyed. The size of the companies was expressed by the number of employees in the companies.

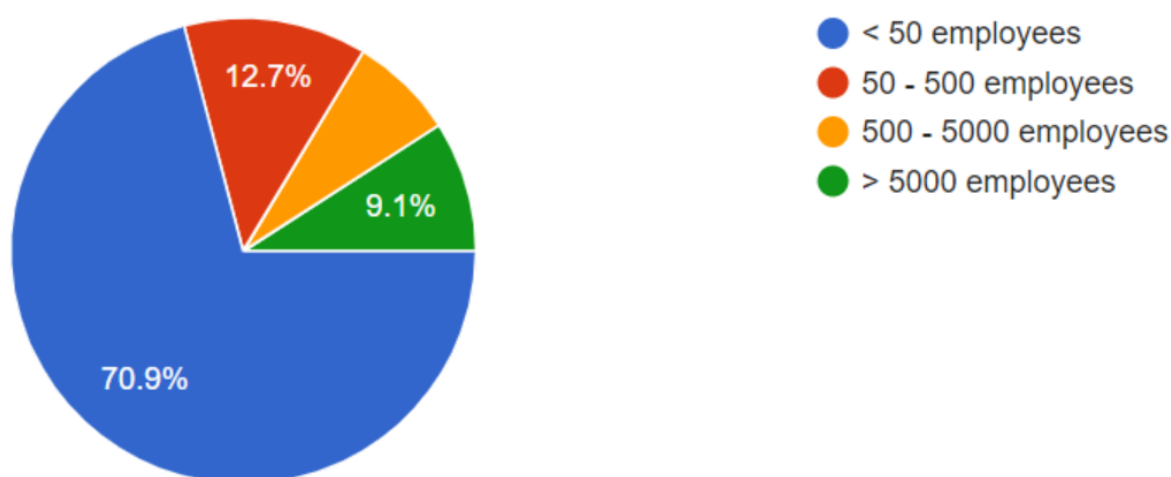


Figure 5. Type of companies participating in the survey

From the companies with >500 employees, representing 17% of the responses, the following larger companies shown in Table 9 were surveyed.

Table 9. Participant companies with >500 employees.

Companies	Number of employees (Europe)	Sector
COVESTRO	17200	plastics company, process industry
MCDERMOTT	70000	construction & maintenance engineering
NESTE	5200	oil & enregy
WORLEY	57600	construction & maintenance engineering
AIR LIQUIDE	66000	gaz company
MESSER Iberica	5500	gaz company
LHOIST	6500	construction
COVESTRO SP	370	plastics company, process industry
TOTAL	228370	

2.2 Qualitative and quantitative analysis of surveyed data of employers' needs

The survey and interviews of HR managers aimed at identifying the skills which employers look for when they hire young people.

In the first question, directly related to skills, employers were asked to name three main skills they deem most important when they hire a young recruit. This enabled them to **express spontaneously the main skills** that came to their mind, prior to risking to 'lead' them in their responses through the next question, where we asked them to rate a series of transferable skills we listed ourselves.

They were also asked an open question relating to the importance (or not) of having had an international experience, such as an Erasmus experience.

Employers were **then asked to rate skills** that we had listed, based on the mobility tool data analysed in the first chapter of this publication, with the skills Erasmus+ students believe they have gained through their Erasmus experience, as well as based on the skills identified in the EILL Entrepreneurial skills report (EILL, 2016).

The employers were asked if these transferable skills were generally considered as **common skills, or if they varied across different sectors or roles** to be fulfilled in the company.

Once information was gathered regarding the competences needed - whether being skills or attitudes - the survey tried to understand if these **had to be proven or if employers rated the potential of the candidates above their proven capabilities**.

The survey also gathered information regarding the **recruitment processes**. When asked "what are the top 3 (soft) skills you look for, when you hire new graduates?" The top three transferable skills mentioned spontaneously by employers were first of all competences related to **Adaptability, Flexibility, Agility (21,2%)** followed by **Motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive, dynamism (18,8%)** closely second as a cluster of competences with a larger focus on attitudes. Two competences made it to third place: **Communication skills (17,6%)** and **Professionalism/responsibility/commitment/Work ethic/Ability to deliver (17,6%)**. These were followed by "Creative problem solving" (12,9%) "Proactivity; Initiatives (11,8%)". "Teamworking skills / ability to collaborate" and "Language skills" (particularly English) were also

regularly mentioned. The different top skills together with their surveyed quantitative values are shown in Figure 6.

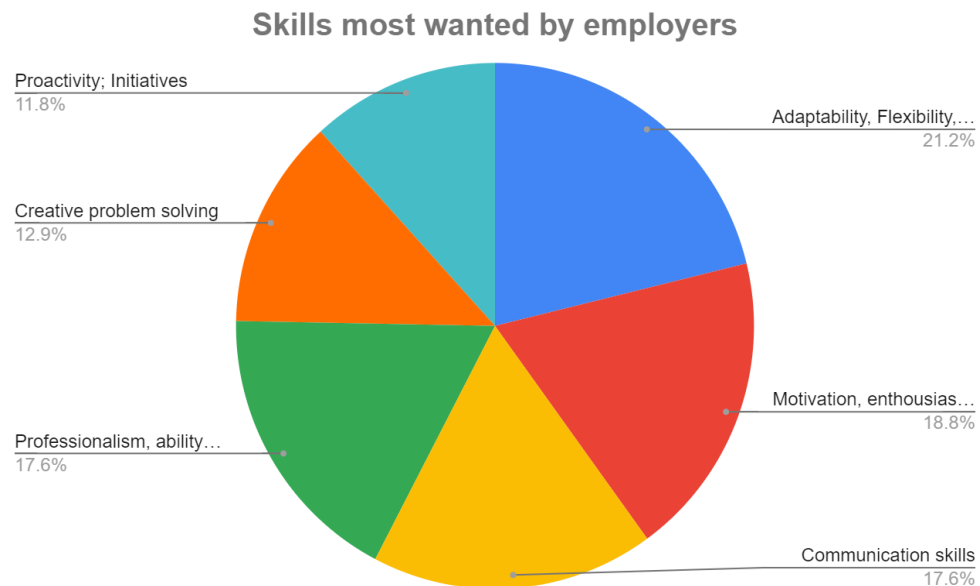


Figure 6. Skills most wanted by employers- values graphically shown as a pie chart.

2.2.1 Importance of an International experience

Before asking employers to rate a series of skills we had listed, we wanted to know what employers would say regarding the importance of an international experience, to gain their views as spontaneously as possible. When asked 'Does prior international exposure matter to you when you consider hiring the person? (e.g. Erasmus experience abroad) and if so, what skills do you believe are learnt through such experiences?'. Out of the 55 companies we surveyed, **80% considered that a prior international experience mattered**. The main skills that employers considered that are gained through an international mobility are shown in Figure 7.

Skills Employers believe are gained through International experience

(Out of the 44% of employers who have answered YES)

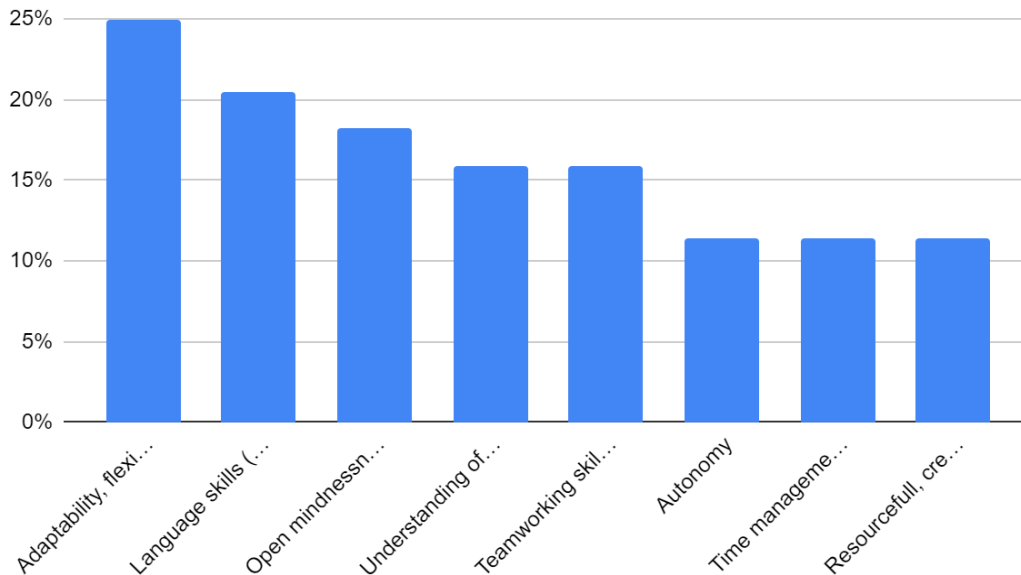


Figure 7. Skills employers believe that are gained through an international mobility

The main skills identified by employers as being gained through having had an international experience AND as being important to them are: Ability to work in multicultural environments/ working with different cultures/teamworking skills: 36%; Adaptability and flexibility: 25%; Language skills (English): 25%; Open mindedness / broader perspective / tolerance: 18%.

Employers also gave the following interesting quotes as to why an international experience can be seen important:

*'Yes, to some extent; it depends on the position. It shows the person is **open minded** and probably **ready to learn new cultures and ways of working**. Has **courage to go out of the one's comfort zone** in a sense'*
(answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

*'If we are looking to recruit potential leaders, international exposure is high on our list. It indicates a want to experience different cultures and to **not be afraid to try something out of their comfort zone**. **Adapting to different ways of working / living** is important.'* (answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

*'Working in a multicultural environment means you have to **be resourceful**, being able to **confront yourself with different cultures and mindset**. Plus, you can understand how to work in a very proactive way, learning multitasking and having the opportunity to acquire digital skills and confidence.'* (answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

*'Yes. We believe that soft skills like **ability to adapt**, team management, etc, are enhanced with international exposure.'* (answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

*'Yes. **Independent work, self-motivation**, willingness to do great things because it is important for them to learn and develop themselves.'* (answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

'It's good to learn to adapt to different situations and communities.'

'Yes, as it boosts the adaptability and growth mindset'; 'Understanding other cultures, adaptability inside the company'; (answer from a recruiter part of a smaller company)

'Yes, it does. People usually learn to be more independent and are better at taking initiative.'

*'**Language skills**, problem solving, group activities.'; 'Definitively, our network contacts are international as our target market and working environment is multicultural, and we consider this a strong value. Thus English proficiency for this market is a strong asset.'* (answer from a recruiter part of a smaller company)

9% of the companies responding had a more neutral position, while 11% did not consider an experience abroad as being important. The position of the neutral ones were best expressed as:

'Not a deal-breaker nor a deal-maker'; 'Not a priority, but might help';

'They should have more experience with change and culture.' (answer from a recruiter part of a large company)

Size of the company did not particularly impact the answers given by the respondents on this question. A vast majority of the companies surveyed answered positively to this question and saw advantages in skills gained with international experience.

These skills were mainly the '**ability to work in multicultural environments and teams**', '**adaptability**' and '**language skills**'; these correspond to some of the top-ranked skills which Erasmus students believe they have gained, as indicated in the skills matching table in the conclusions.

We also looked more closely to see if there was a difference in opinions between large corporations and smaller companies. Whilst two amongst the large companies saw merits to an international exposure particularly when it came to having the courage to go out of their comfort zone and adapting to different ways of living/working, three of them did not evaluate international experience prior to hiring as particularly important.

2.2.2 Ranking of skills

After having been asked open questions in previous questions, employers were asked to rank a series of skills we had listed, based on the survey conducted on Erasmus+ students in the first phase of this project, as well as based on the set of skills identifies as important by both employers and entrepreneurs in EILL ‘entrepreneurial skills report’. Table 10 shows the different answers with the relevance/importance of each skill valued by the employers surveyed when hiring young graduates.

Table 10. Sorted questions about Erasmus+ experience in descending order

Importance of Skills when hiring	Mandatory	Very important	Important	Not important
Open minded personality, tolerant, etc	71%	24%	0%	5%
Ability to adapt to new situations/environments	42%	53%	0%	5%
Creative problem solving, resilience and opportunism	39%	50%	11%	0%
Willingness & ability to learn from their experience	45%	39%	13%	3%
Time management & self-management	29%	55%	13%	3%
Analytical skills	21%	47%	29%	3%
Project management skills	16%	45%	34%	5%
Networking skills	18%	39%	34%	8%
Awareness of own strengths & weaknesses	8%	47%	39%	5%
Leading a Team, managing & motivating others	13%	37%	37%	13%
Influencing skills	8%	26%	50%	16%

These aggregated data responses for the importance of skills when hiring young graduates are shown in Figure 8.

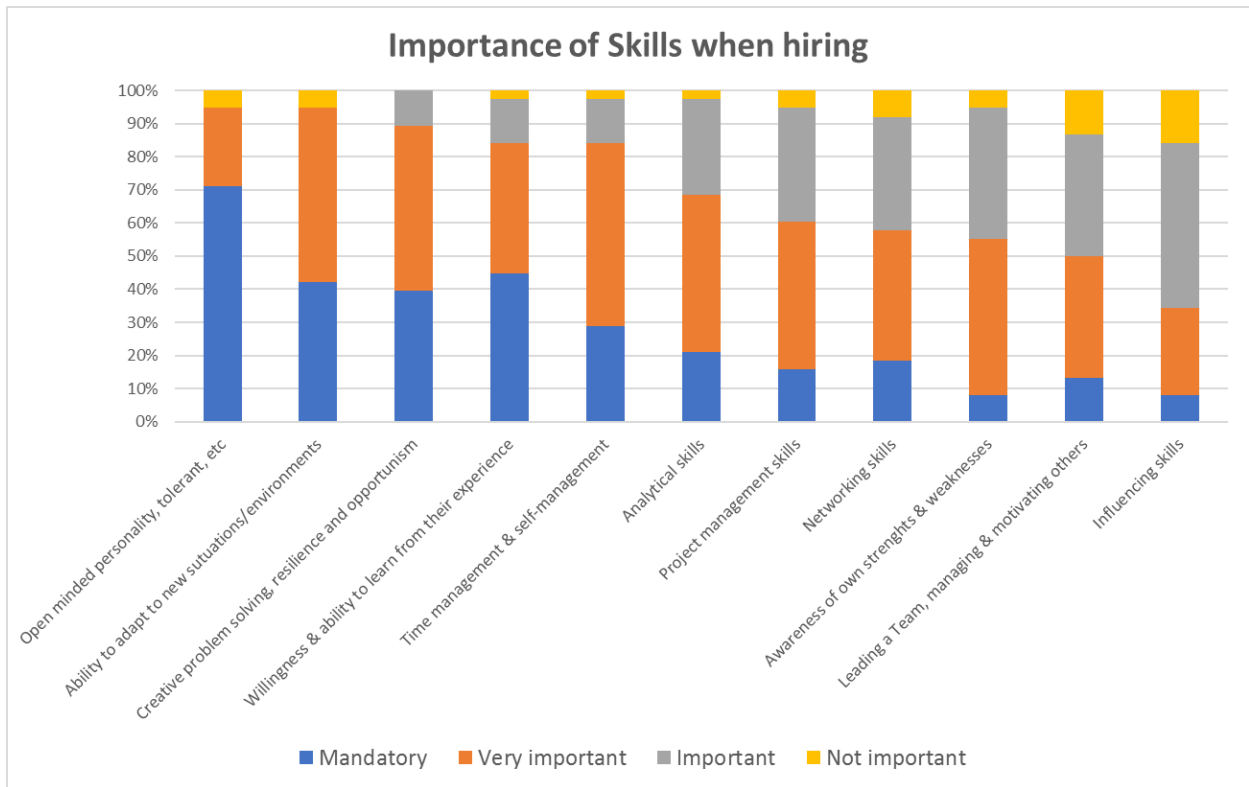


Figure 8. Aggregated data responses for the importance of skills when hiring young graduates

Once the results were collected - and in order to take into consideration the importance given to each one of the detected skills, a different weight has been assigned considering if a skill is ranked as 'mandatory' or 'important' by employers. Therefore, we have created the weighting factors shown in Table 11 to be able to rank the needed skills in accordance to the importance they were given by employers. The numeric results obtained were transformed using the weighting factor to better compare the data.

Table 11. Weighting factors to transform the survey into a quantitative analysis.

Type of skills	Weight Factor
Mandatory skills	3x
Very important skills	2x
Important skills	1x
Not important skills	0x

Figure 9 shows the sorted needed skills ranked as most important by employers. Some of these could be considered more as attitudes rather than skills. Nevertheless, they are what employers consider significant when they hire recent graduates.

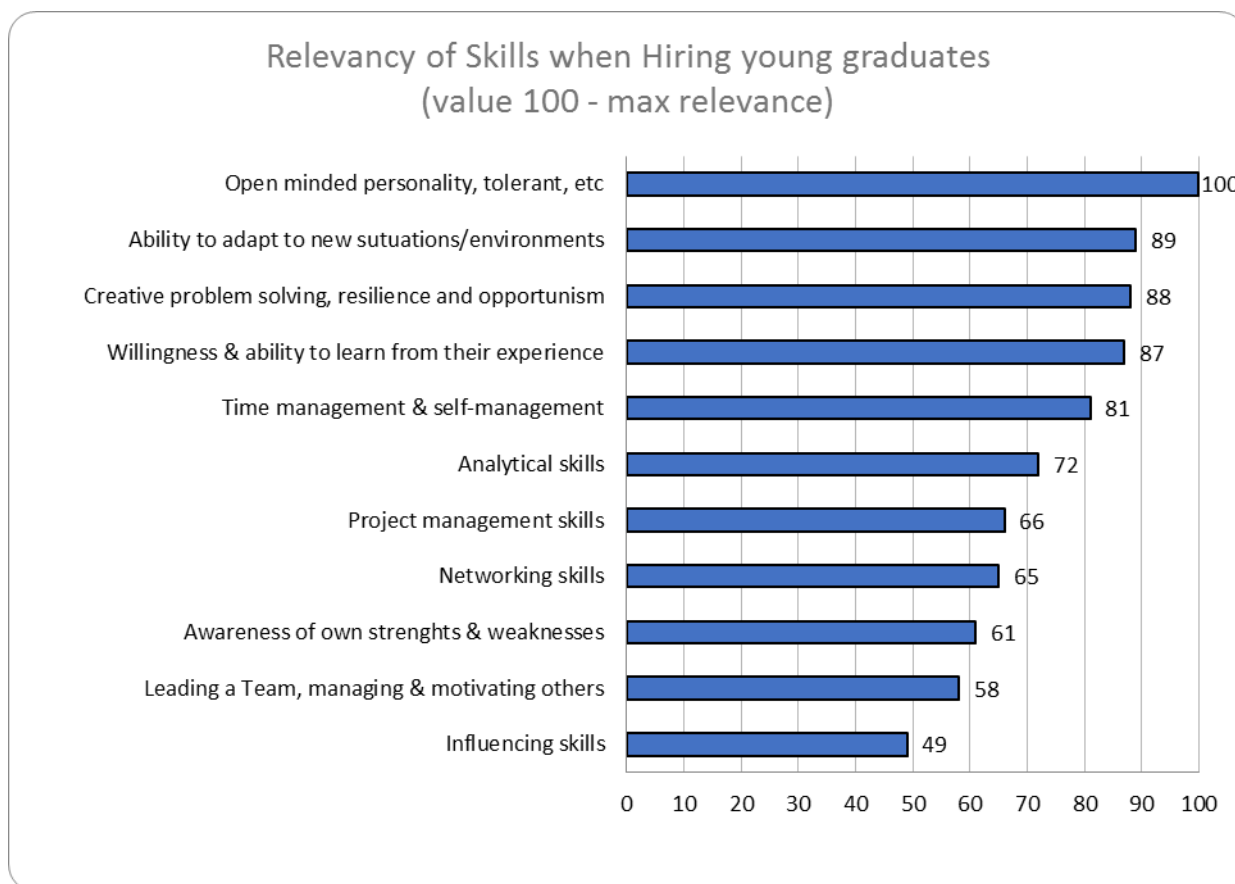


Figure 9. Sorted ranking of transferable skills needed by employers

Again, an **open-minded personality** and the **ability to adapt to new situations or environments** are amongst the most important characteristics employers look for when it comes to skills or attitudes they consider when evaluating - potential young recruits.

These also correspond to the top skills employers, who reckon that an international experience is important, valued as important skills gained through a mobility experience. ‘Adaptability’, ‘Ability to work in multicultural environments/ adapting and working with different cultures’ and ‘open-mindedness’ also came first in the previous question, examining skills gained through a mobility programme (or more generally through an international experience). ‘Creative problem solving’, the

'ability to learn from experience' and 'time and self-management' also came as very high in the skills needed by employers.

The following question: 'If skills other than those listed above are important when you recruit a young graduate, please list them / comment below' was only answered by some employers. Nevertheless, these are worth mentioning as these skills and attitudes were listed as part of the in the desk research carried out in the first phase of the project. The following competences were mentioned, generally reflecting on attitudes:

- **Respectful, ethical behaviour, honesty and empathy**
- **Responsible, commitment**
- **Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills**
- **Proactivity, initiative; 'go getter' attitude**

We also set out to examine whether the competences which employers had indicated as important when they hired young recruits were different by sector or role they were hiring for or if they were rather common. Employers were asked 'Are the type of skills you require different by sector / discipline, or are there some common skills?' A vast majority of 81% considered these competences as **common**. Also in the interviews, the soft skills are considered to be common, while hard skills can be directly more specific to sectors or disciplines. Whilst it was also mentioned that some skills set might be dependent on the job role (e.g. commercial positions or R&D), as well as dependent on hierarchical levels and or experience of the recruit.

Detected competences and skills are largely considered as common skills by companies, rather than role specific. However, if looking to hire for very specific roles, companies will be looking for competences specific for this role (e.g. chemistry degree for a chemist). Generally, someone with a scientific degree can more easily move from a scientific first role into other non-science areas (e.g. finance, marketing, procurement); the opposite is usually not true.

2.2.3 Recruitment of recent graduates

In the recruitment process, we wanted to know if employers assessed skills based on potential capabilities or proven capabilities when looking at recent graduates. Only 13% of employers surveyed requested that capability be proven prior to hiring. The majority either answered 'Both' (49%) or believed that 'Potential' (38%) capability was most important when hiring young recruits. All large employers said they hired based on 'potential' capabilities or 'potential and proven' in some cases.

During the interviews, recruiters indicated that capability is rather assessed at the start of the traineeship or the first months of employment.

“Potential and motivation is emphasised in the recruitment of a young person”.

The interviews with some of the larger corporations also showed that **potential is crucial**: they look for people who have challenged themselves outside of their norm but are **robust to new challenges**. Potential capability is seen as important in order to face uncertainty. By rotating inside the companies in different roles, companies test if the new recruit will be able to fit in the company culture (e.g. Air Liquide offers a 3 month rotating programme inside the company; McDermott has a two years rotation programme inside the company). The emphasis on Potential competences is particularly important to larger companies.

The recruitment process is usually different depending on the size of the company. Whilst small companies hire through the various channels available, including through trusted universities, alumni and student organisations; screening CVs and subsequently interviewing those they have shortlisted themselves. Larger companies such as Covestro, usually outsource the assessment through external recruitment consultants, who shortlist the best candidates. Once external recruitment consultants have shortlisted the best candidates, the ‘shortlist’ would normally go through people inside the company looking at CVs and then going through company interviews. Normally two people from the company would be assessing the candidates who have been shortlisted by recruiters to further narrow down the selection processes, after which a smaller selection of candidates would go through a multi-day assessment centre, with several people from the company assessing them. Larger companies may include a variety of psychological and cognitive assessments.

They usually look for skills to be demonstrated through some form of Behavioural Event Interview (describing events from the past that can show how they adapted), often using the STAR interview technique (Situation, Task, Action, Results). Internationalisation is not often mentioned in the specifics of the recruitment process, but employers indicate that they value international examples when asked for specific situations and examples recent graduates are expected to have overcome.

2.3 Summary about skills needed by employers

For this survey on employers’ needs, it is clear that companies require/look for people who are sensitive to and can adapt themselves to the different cultures in the different departments, functions and locations of their business.

A vast majority of the companies surveyed indicated that a prior international exposure was important to them. The main skills they believed were gained through an international experience, which they deemed important when looking at hiring young graduates are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Skills matching view from Employers' needs

Skills category group	Skills gain with ISM
Ability to work in multicultural environments/ working with different cultures/teamworking skills	36%
Adaptability and flexibility	25%
Language skills (English)	25%
Open mindedness / broader perspective / tolerance	18%

Drilling the questions down, regarding the ability to adapt to different cultures, 'culture' should be understood in the wider sense of the word, as further explained by HR managers interviewed. This is particularly valid for large companies - who seek candidates who will be able to **adapt to their 'company culture'** as well as the **various cultures of team members** they will have to work with, particularly when international positions are involved.

As explained by some of the large corporations during their interviews, when companies look for cultural sensitivity, what they need is the ability of someone to adapt themselves to the different cultures throughout the company from different functions, different departments, different sites and different locations.

Cultural sensitivity is however considered as a 'hygiene' factor. If the candidate doesn't have it, then the person doesn't go further; having that open-mindedness and ability to adapt to different cultures is very important, but additional skills need to be present.

Young recruits should additionally show **motivation & drive** and should have good **communication skills**. They should show **professionalism**, be **responsible** and **committed**, and they should be **able to deliver**. Moreover, when confronted with difficult situations, they should be able to find **creative solutions**, take **initiatives** and be **proactive**.

These are all skills and attitudes which companies highly value. It is hard for candidates to prove that they possess these capabilities, and according to our survey, companies are happy to bank on 'potential' capabilities. They will be able to assess some of these through their interviews and other assessment tools and larger companies will be able to assess these skills further when 'rotating' young recruits in different departments of their company.

The next chapter is devoted to examining and comparing all the information from students, employers and academia and provide a mapping of skill matching gained by students and they are valued by the labour market.

3 Matching top-ranked skills: needed vs gained

From the information and analysis done in section 2 about skills gained by Erasmus+ students and the data retrieved from employers shown in section 3, now we are merging here all this knowledge to provide a simple mapping with the skill matching relevant to the labour market. Below we present different relationships among available data.

Considering the category skills gained, resumed in Figure 4, and information from Table 12 with the skills needed from the perspective of employers we have combined both information taking into account the relevance value from both points of view. In this way, Table 13 shows the sorted skills group matching with their relevance in descending order. The employers' view shows the importance that employers believe that are gained in an ISM being relevant to their job offers. This value represents the cross-validation percentage of the surveyed questions that confirms both statements. In the column students' view we have included the improvement in the skills category group perceived by former Erasmus+ students. Then, the last column provides a matching score by multiplying both percentages to have an estimation value about the improvement in the mentioned category skills when applying for a job.

Table 13. Sorted skills matching score comparing views from Employers and Students

Skills category group	Employers' view	Students' view	Matched Score
Ability to work in multicultural environments / working with different cultures / teamworking skills	36%	50%	18%
Adaptability and flexibility	25%	59%	15%
Language skills	25%	47%	12%
Open mindedness / broader perspective / tolerance	18%	45%	8%

It is worth noting that the above information considers the current view that employers have and is possibly biased from the real opportunities and competences that ISM such Erasmus+ mobilities provide. This is why one goal of the project is the improvement of visibility and knowledge about soft-skills and transversal competences that Erasmus+ mobilities provide. Therefore, to have another point of view in the analysis, we have also considered the information from Figure 10 about the relevance/importance of each skill valued by the employers surveyed when hiring young graduates. In this information the ISM aspects are not considered by the employers. The different competences/skills highlighted by the employers are compared with the information from Table 7 containing the gained

skills that are also resumed in Figure 4. Then, Table 14 combines the different data, multiplying both the relevancy given by employers and the improvement seen in the corresponding skill category perceived by the students. The matching scores are shown sorted in descent order in the last column and transformed into a more meaningful range from 0 to 100 values.

Table 14. Sorted skills matching score comparing employers hiring young graduates and Erasmus+ mobilities

Skills category group	Employers relevancy	Gain on ISM (%)	Score (0-100)
Ability to adapt to new situations/environments	89	59	100
Creative problem solving, resilience and opportunism	88	59	99
Willingness & ability to learn from their experience	87	59	98
Open minded personality, tolerant, etc	100	47	90
Time management & self-management	81	47	73
Analytical skills	72	50	69
Project management skills	66	50	63
Networking skills	65	50	62
Leading a Team, managing & motivating others	58	50	55
Awareness of own strengths & weaknesses	61	47	55
Influencing skills	49	50	47

In the above Table 14 the column for skill relevance given by employers when hiring young graduates ranges 0-100, the column on ISM skills gain presents the percentual gain seen by Erasmus+ students and the last column shows the matched score, multiplying both previous data and transforming the numeric data to a 0-100 range. Thus, the 3 highest relevant skills categories are:

- Ability to adapt to new situations/environments
- Creative problem solving, resilience and opportunism
- Willingness & ability to learn from their experience

The employer's data show that they consider those skills highly relevant when hiring, (87-89) of employers agree in their importance. Besides, former Erasmus+ students consider that they have 59% of improvement in those related skills. Therefore, the matching value for those skills is assigned the maximum value, 98-100 out 100.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the employers greatly value "time management and self-management" (81) but Erasmus+ mobilities provide a low value on that category (47%) as seen by the students. Therefore, the matching value reduces to a 73 score.

Similar analysis might be done with the rest of competences and skills listed in Table 14.

Figure 11 shows the sorted matched skills according to the relevancy provided by employers when hiring young graduates and related skills gained by Erasmus+ mobilities seen by students.

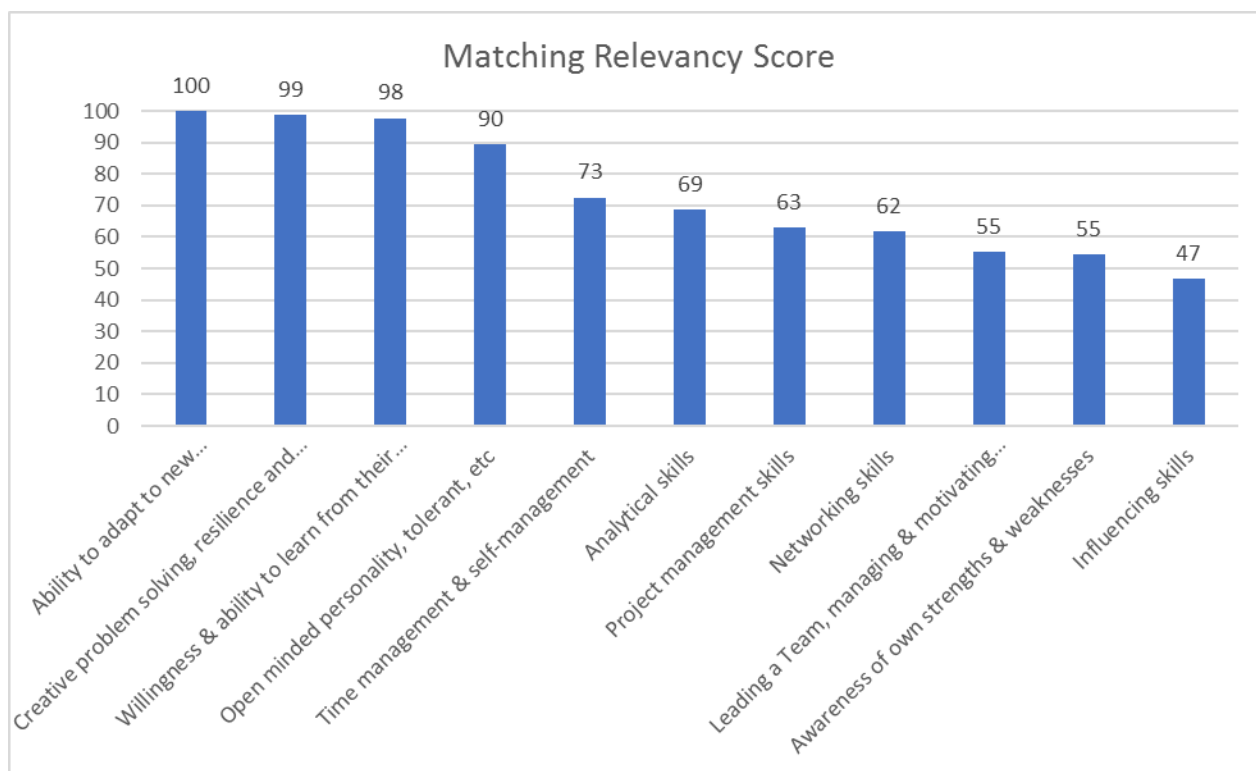


Figure 11. Matching relevancy score considering employers hiring young graduates and Erasmus+ mobilities

Finally, we provide an analysis considering directly the questions from the MobilityTool+. Each survey question is related to one of the skills categories and valued by former Erasmus+ students from partner universities. Then, each improvement seen by students is multiplied by the perspective of the employers' view with respect to the related group considering the data from section 3.3.1 Top three skills required, valued by the employers surveyed when hiring. Survey questions 10, 11, 25, 26, 27, 27, 28 and 30 were excluded from this analysis as they are personal attitudes more than a gained competence.

Table 15. Top-ranked skills groups seen from Employers

Skill Group #ID	Skills category group	Top-ranked by Employers (%)
SG1	Adaptability, Flexibility, Agility	21,2
SG2	Motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive, dynamism	18,8
SG3	Communication skills	17,6
SG4	Professionalism/responsibility/commitment/Work ethic/Ability to deliver	17,6
SG5	Creative problem solving	12,9
SG6	Proactivity; Initiatives	11,8

Then, considering the top-ranked skills from the perspective of both employees and employers that are gained through mobility (i.e. Erasmus students) Table 16 shows sorted the questions/skills most needed by employers with those gained by students having benefited from the experience that a mobility programme such as the Erasmus programme offers.

Table 16. Matching employability skills with survey questions from Mobility Tool

		Top-ranked Skills groups seen by employers						Matching Score (0-100)
		21,2%	18,8%	17,6%	17,6%	12,9%	11,8%	
Survey question - Ranking order sorted	ISM gain	SG1	SG2	SG3	SG4	SG5	SG6	
1. I am more able to adapt to and act in new situations	8,00	1,70						100
2. I am more open-minded and curious about new challenges	7,90	1,67						99
3. I know better my strengths and weaknesses	7,80		1,47					86
5. Plan and carry out my learning independently	7,80		1,47					86
20. Develop an idea and put it into practice	7,20						1,47	86
7. I am more confident and convinced of my abilities	7,70		1,45					85
4. See the value of different cultures	7,80			1,37				81
6. I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures	7,80			1,37				81
12. I am more able to reach decisions	7,60				1,34			79
14. I am more tolerant towards other persons' values and behaviour	7,50			1,32				78
15. Plan and organise tasks and activities	7,50				1,32			78
16. I have increased my sector- or field-specific skills	7,40				1,30			77
17. I am better capable of taking over work tasks with high responsibility after my stay	7,40				1,30			77
21. Use the internet, social media and pcs , e.g. For my studies, work and personal acti	7,20			1,27				75
23. Cooperate in teams	7,10			1,25				74
24. Express myself creatively	7,10			1,25				74
9. Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills)	7,70					0,99		59
13. I am more able to think and analyse information critically	7,60					0,98		58
18. Think logically and draw conclusions (analytical skills)	7,30					0,94		56
8. I would like to work in an international context	7,70						0,91	54
19. I am more interested in knowing what happens in the world daily	7,30						0,86	51
22. I am more interested in European topics	7,20						0,85	50
29. I can easily imagine working in the country where i did my Erasmus+ period in the f	6,70						0,79	47

The top part of the table clearly highlights that **the skills most sought after by employers match widely with skills usually gained by Erasmus students**. The lower part of the table shows a series of answers provided in the Erasmus MobilityTool+ survey, which are not matched as they are not skills or competences addressed by employers. Figure 11 shows the above data with the matching relevancy score considering employers hiring young graduates and Erasmus+ mobilities in a graphical way.

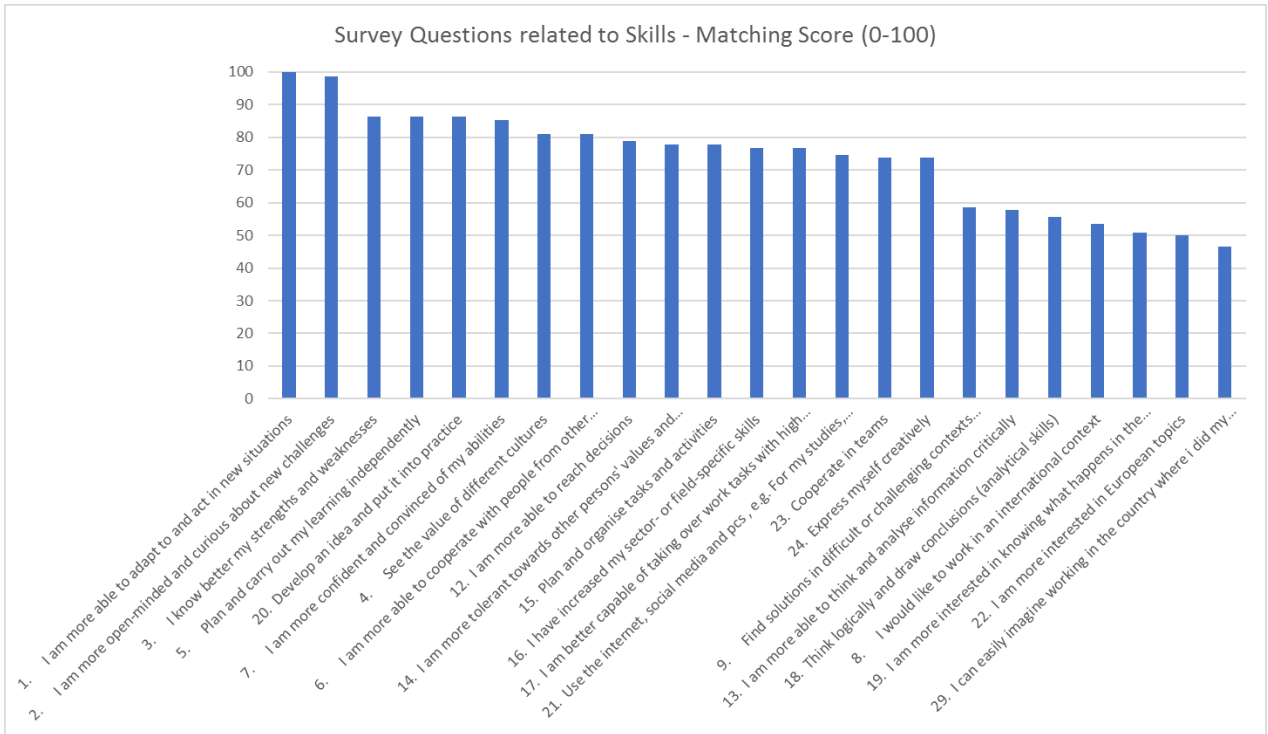


Figure 11. Matching relevancy score considering employers hiring young graduates and Erasmus+ mobilities

4 Conclusions

The skills highly ranked by employers also corroborate those underlined as part of those most in demand in a LinkedIn Survey “The Most In-Demand Hard and Soft Skills of 2020” (Anderson, 2020). Amongst these are the ‘**adaptability**’, ‘**creativity**’, ‘**collaboration**’ and ‘**emotional intelligence**’ which employers have shown they highly value. As shown in the comparative tables from chapter 3, **the skills gained by Erasmus students are amongst the most valued skills which employers look for.**

Similarly, as concluded in ‘Entrepreneurs Skills report (EUIL, 2016), young people actively involved in student organisations during their studies at university (organisations such as ESN) get the chance to practice and develop some of these skills and should be able to put these skills forward to employers as ‘potential’ skills gained.

Even though Erasmus students gain a wide breadth of transversal skills through their experience during their mobility programme - and this survey shows these skills are indeed highly valued by employers - these transversal skills and capabilities are usually very poorly presented by Erasmus alumni, and this is what this project sets out to remedy.

The results obtained in the Employers Survey and in the Erasmus MobilityTool+ survey will be tested further in the workshops planned in 2021 with the various stakeholders (employers, students and career officers) and will contribute to developing training materials for the stakeholders and provide the contents of the ErasmusJobs platform for a better employable Erasmus+ alumni.

Considering the objectives of the project, it is particularly clear that the transnational dimension is a large advantage to be considered in the labour market. Many skills considered here embed indeed a European dimension which can only be fully addressed from an international perspective.

A wide range of competences and skills are increasingly valued by employers in Europe. This comprises skills such as disciplinary knowledge, foreign languages, adaptability, flexibility, resilience, greater intercultural awareness, the ability to assess one’s own strengths and weaknesses, to make decisions and to be a problem-solver.

5 Abbreviations and terminology used

EIIL	European Institute for Industrial Leadership
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IC	Intercultural competence
ICT	information and communication technology
ISM	International student mobility
KSAs	Knowledge, skills and attitudes
TEM	Transnational educational mobility

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