

Outbound student mobility advising

Guidelines for good practice

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

What these guidelines aim to address and why	2
Understanding and defining the scope of work	4
A. Basic terminology	4
B. Key actors	5
C. Core activities	6
Key elements framing professional practice	7
A. Institutional context	7
B. 4 stages of outbound mobility	8
C. Background knowledge required for mobility advising	10
D. Minimal skills for outbound mobility advisers	11
E. Different approaches to advising	12
F. Sample checklist for a successful outbound mobility advising situation	14
G. Student-centred advising for optimal growth	15
H. Future trends in outbound student mobility advising	16
Professional ethical considerations	17
Conclusion	19
References	20
About the authors	21

WHAT THESE GUIDELINES AIM TO ADDRESS AND WHY

The sending and receiving of students on international exchange or study abroad programmes was one of the earliest and most popular ways for universities to internationalise, and remains so today. The rich learning potential of the exchange experience and its application to both global graduate employability and the development of students' intercultural sensitivity is a key driver for studying abroad. Having a wide range of study abroad opportunities and partnerships is now an essential selling point for universities seeking to attract the best students. Indeed, there is pressure in many institutions to increase student mobility numbers, to diversify the profile of those participating in mobility and to deliver an outstanding student experience.

One of the key factors influencing the quality of a study abroad experience is the provision of advice to students about the possibilities, benefits and challenges of studying abroad. An adviser is responsible for providing information, but also for guiding students through a process that can have a deep impact on their academic and personal development. A mobility experience is never without risk for the individuals or for the participating institutions or partners involved. Advisers can be faced with a variety of challenges, and may be required to play a number of different roles, balancing the needs and demands of the students as well as the sending and receiving institutions and other relevant partners. Outbound mobility advising is, therefore, a complex process.

Despite the complexity and importance of outbound mobility advising, and the large constituency of individuals engaged in this increasingly professionalised field of practice, there are limited formal training opportunities at the national or international level. To ensure that study abroad meets both the high expectations of students and the learning goals set by universities, robust processes and systems are needed, as well as trained and competent advisers.

The guidelines presented here aim to provide a practical articulation of what the job of outgoing mobility advising entails, and the expertise that is required to deal effectively and appropriately with the many complex situations that frequently arise. The starting point for this discussion is the notion that mobility advising is much more than a purely administrative task. By identifying the skills, knowledge and training needed for delivering high-quality advice, as well as providing guidance on the recruitment, induction and ongoing professional development for new mobility advisers, these guidelines support the ongoing professionalisation of outbound mobility advising.

Specifically, these guidelines aim to:

- 1. Offer support to outbound mobility advisers** in understanding and defining the scope of their work, including basic terminology, the actors involved and the main components of the work.
- 2. Introduce advisers to several key elements** that frame professional practice in the field, including matters of institutional context, the various stages of mobility, required background knowledge and minimal skills for outbound mobility advisers, and different approaches to advising.
- 3. Provide an underpinning of professional ethics** to mobility advising work – ie what is appropriate for an adviser to handle and what should be referred elsewhere.

Additionally, efforts are made in the guidelines to help sensitise advisers to the importance of self-awareness and self-care.

UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING THE SCOPE OF WORK

BASIC TERMINOLOGY

The following key terms provide a useful starting point for understanding and defining the scope of work involved in outbound mobility advising.

Outbound student mobility: Academic mobility programmes, also known as student exchange or study abroad, are opportunities for students to spend a period of time (typically one or two semesters) in another country as a student of a foreign university with little to no interruption of the progress to degree completion at the home university. Outbound student mobility focuses on the mobility experience from the perspective of the ‘sending’ institution or the student’s ‘home’ institution.

Advising: Advising is the act of informing (someone) about a fact or situation in a formal or official way. The mobility adviser gives advice to students about the opportunities, benefits, academic eligibility criteria and practical information required for outbound student mobility.

Partner universities: A partner university or a university partnership is a relationship between a university and other groups where partners agree to collaborate in order to advance common interests (Blessinger & Cozza, 2017). In student exchange collaboration, there is typically an inter-institutional agreement in place specifically for this purpose, and it usually lists the rights, responsibilities and duties that apply to the host and home institution, as well as the student participating in the exchange activity.

Credit transfer: Credit transfer is a process employed by higher education institutions to grant credit to a student for educational experiences or courses undertaken at another institution. Credit transfer has developed as an important area of national and transnational education policy, predominantly within mobility

cooperation between countries and educational sectors. The most well-known credit transfer system is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which is commonly used to transfer credits from outbound mobility.

Intercultural adaptation: Intercultural adaptation is the ability to effectively interact both with people from other cultures as well as those of one's own culture, including the ability to shift reference points appropriately and adapt behaviour to a different cultural context. Intercultural adaptation can also be understood as the ability to achieve goals through constructive interaction in an intercultural context (Deardorff, 2006).

KEY ACTORS

Responsibility for mobility advising may involve a number of different actors in an institution, including:

1. Outbound mobility advisers
2. Other staff involved in mobility advising eg international coordinators
3. Academic advisers, study advisers *etc*
4. Academics involved in outbound mobility
5. Managers of mobility activities
6. Managers and any others involved in the recruitment of mobility advisers and with responsibility for resources needed for mobility advising

CORE ACTIVITIES

Mobility advising may include a range of different activities, including:

1. Active recruitment for mobility programmes
2. Advising on practical matters eg visa requirements, accommodation, funding applications
3. Advising on the living conditions of the host country (security, living standards, health)
4. Advising on academic courses, module selection, credit transfer
5. Advice on possible digital tools used in the mobility process
6. Provision of specific information on the host country, including key cultural differences
7. Advising on intercultural adaptation and re-integration processes
8. Advising on the student's personal learning goals and motivations for study abroad/student exchange

KEY ELEMENTS FRAMING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Each institution will normally have its own internationalisation strategy, of which student exchange/study abroad can be an important feature. Institutions will normally have specific goals around issues such as:

1. Number of students they are seeking to engage in international learning opportunities
2. Number, country, location and ranking of institutions they are seeking to partner with for study abroad and other knowledge exchange and research partnerships
3. The institution's overall global presence and international strategic partnerships

All of these issues will affect your work as outbound mobility adviser and the way in which you manage existing mobility partnerships and instigate new partnerships. Your work is also influenced by the structure and culture of your institution: does it have a strong centralised approach to study abroad and exchange management, a strongly decentralised approach led by academic departments, or something in between?

As an outbound mobility adviser, you need to be aware of the way in which student exchange/study abroad is managed in your institution in order to understand the internal stakeholders and processes that you need to work with. You also need to be aware of your position as a mobility adviser in the institution: are you faculty-based, department-based, or are you working for a centralised unit that services the whole student population? How does your work and position relate to other mobility advisers in the institution?

Institutions also vary in terms of size – number of students, number of staff, number of outbound mobility students – and in terms of the resources provided for mobility advising. In smaller institutions, there might be only one person

responsible for the whole outbound mobility process. This, of course, might restrict the extent of the guidance service you can realistically provide. In larger institutions, where mobility numbers are high and there can be more staff for outgoing mobility advising, responsibility for different elements can be divided between many people. Large institutions with high numbers of mobile students might also have very limited resources, which will impact the extent and scope of mobility advising they are able to provide.

Creating and maintaining professional networks with other outbound mobility advisers is of huge benefit and will help your professional development, whether these networks are informal (with colleagues) or more formal, such as through the EAIE.

4 STAGES OF OUTBOUND MOBILITY

The outbound mobility experience can be characterised by four distinct periods, with many of their relevant features outlined below. These lists provide insight into the main responsibilities and activities of the outbound mobility adviser during each one of these stages.

1. Pre-departure (before the mobility experience begins):
 - Recruitment of students to participate in student exchange/study abroad
 - Application phase: home institution's internal application process
 - Application phase: host institution's application process
 - Providing information to students selected to participate in the outbound mobility experience about the practicalities of living abroad: eg planning of studies and credit transfer, grants and scholarships and related duties and obligations, insurance, safety and security while abroad, planning travel arrangements, applying for accommodation, language preparation, immigration issues (residence permit, visa) required related paperwork
 - Delivery of intercultural training, including information on adaptation to new living environment, to different teaching and learning cultures, and preparation for the probability of adaptation/acculturative stress

2. On arrival (as the mobile student arrives at the host institution)
 - Providing support/information in the event of adjustments to students' study plans

Outbound mobility advisers should also be aware of the duties that typically fall to the hosting institutions, including:

- Welcome by the host institution
- Introduction to university services and staff
- Campus guide and orientation on cultural and social activities
- Mentoring programmes
- Information on life inside and outside the classroom

3. During stay (while the mobile student is studying at the host institution)
 - Checking in with students regarding general adjustment, their studies, and any difficulties/challenges
 - Providing students abroad with information about what paperwork they have to complete at the host institution and how to prepare for returning to the home institution (eg course registration for the following semester)
 - Support for well-being and enhancing the student experience
 - Evaluation of stay abroad
4. Re-entry (as the mobile student returns to the home institution)
 - Providing returning students with information about the final paperwork to be completed, credit transfer processes at the home institution, reporting, and possible future opportunities for international/intercultural learning and engagement
 - Delivery of intercultural training, including dealing with possible re-adjustment stress, and skill-building for processing intercultural experiences
 - Providing students advice on how to utilise and describe the study abroad experience in order to improve their employability profiles
 - Evaluation of students' learning outcomes after mobility completion
 - Working with students as academic mobility ambassadors and in the context of alumni networks

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED FOR MOBILITY ADVISING

Data collected from professionals working in the field indicates that a knowledge base in several key areas is particularly useful to the outbound mobility adviser today. Key areas include:

- Knowledge of the academic programmes of the home and host institutions
- Knowledge of the structure, prerequisites and details of the mobility programmes
- Knowledge of the credits that can be obtained via student exchange/study abroad, and how the mobility programme will be recognised as part of the student's programme at the home institution, or whether recognised at all
- Understanding of the process of outbound mobility at each of the four classic mobility stages (outlined above)
- Practical knowledge about the partner institution (credit transfer, housing, visa support, daily life)
- Knowledge about relevant networks (at the partner institution, at the home institution)
- Country-specific knowledge about the higher education system of the host country
- Knowledge about funding schemes that support international student mobility on a regional, national and international level
- Understanding of the intercultural adaptation process throughout the student exchange/student mobility experience
- Specific cultural knowledge about the host country
- Knowledge of the impact and influence of student exchange/study abroad may have on students' skills development
- Knowledge of the home and host universities' crisis management policies and procedures
- Knowledge of the administrative system(s) used for managing outbound mobility in the institution and/or within mobility programmes (eg digital tools and systems)
- Knowledge and understanding of different digital tools that can be used in the mobility advising process

MINIMAL SKILLS FOR OUTBOUND MOBILITY ADVISERS

In addition to a basic knowledge base, input from experienced outbound mobility advisers indicates that effective outbound mobility advisers also draw on a set of fundamental skills that help to facilitate their work. These include:

- The ability and willingness to listen, empathise and understand the needs of each student
- Employing different communication styles and strategies, as appropriate, for students, partners, academics and parents
- Raising students' awareness of the impact of culture on their student exchange/study abroad experience, and preparing them for the cultural adaptation/adjustments they will likely need to undertake during the mobility period
- Developing diagnostic skills eg the ability to assess a student's level of readiness for student exchange/study abroad, including relevant language skills and appetite for risk/uncertainty
- Having relevant language skills in order to deal with students and partners and with mobility programmes
- Learning how to cope with uncertainty, and developing adaptability to new and changing situations
- Having the ability to manage oneself eg recognising personal and professional limits and taking care of one's own well-being
- Being conscious of one's own 'cultural lenses' and one's own experience with and attitude to adaptation stress, especially when advising individuals from cultural backgrounds different from one's own. The advising situation is even more complex when one is advising in a foreign country and using a foreign language to prepare for students for a third country
- Being ready and motivated to develop one's digital skills, as use of the on-line and digital tools are increasing and also becoming a compulsory part of some mobility programmes (eg Erasmus). Digital tools are developed to make the student exchange process smoother and easier to manage for your students and for you, and digitalisation is largely taken for granted by the 'digital native' generation

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO ADVISING

Outbound mobility advising involves two key dimensions:

- Administrative, informational aspects: providing relevant information in a structured way
- Educational aspects: helping students to find out what they want and how they can best achieve it

To address the purely administrative and informational aspects of mobility advising, the adviser directs the student to the relevant resources. In this prescriptive ‘traditional’ approach, mobility advising is understood as a single-directional didactic activity, where the student passively receives the information selected and provided by the adviser.

The so-called ‘developmental approach’ adds an educational perspective to mobility advising, which is then understood as a bi-directional process of interaction between adviser and student. It identifies the needs and interests of the student, and facilitates opportunities for personal growth. The aim is to empower students to make their own decisions based on their academic and personal goals (Bland, 2018; Broadbridge, 1996).

In practice, both approaches to mobility advising are constantly combined. However, contrasting the two approaches (as outlined in Table 1) may help mobility advisers to become aware of their own understanding of advising and to reflect on their role as an adviser.

Table 1. Traditional versus developmental approach to advising

Traditional approach to advising	Developmental approach to advising
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single-directional didactic activity• Provides information• Directs students to resources• Provides solutions for problems• Prescriptive: adviser holds control and power• Student is limited to adviser's choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two-way interactive process• Shared responsibility between adviser and student• Identifies needs and interests• Clarifies academic and personal goals• Facilitates opportunities for personal growth• Empowers the students to make their own decision

Source: Bland, 2018; Broadbridge, 1996

According to participant input at the 2016 EAIE Conference's Mobility Advising Feature Session, as well as feedback collected in the period February–March 2018 from 50 colleagues working in the field in Europe, mobility advisers perceive themselves more as administrators than educators, although many recognise that their role is leaning more towards the developmental approach. 'Mobility facilitator' is a term used by some and indeed mobility advising can be facilitated in different ways, including via:

- Face-to-face meetings with an individual advisee
- Face-to-face information sessions to group(s) of advisees (for example, in the form of application information sessions, outbound pre-departure and re-entry sessions *etc*)
- Online individual or group advising sessions
- Creation and/or distribution of relevant resource materials
- Peer-to-peer advising

The approaches taken to advising will depend on a range of variables, including the institutional culture and context, available resources, the perceptions held by the institution and the adviser(s) around student needs and interests, as well as advisers' preferences and capacity. Ideally, the selected approaches to advising maximise the ability to connect meaningfully with students at all stages of the mobility experience.

SAMPLE CHECKLIST FOR A SUCCESSFUL OUTBOUND MOBILITY ADVISING SITUATION

While no encounter with an advisee can be perfect in all ways, it can be helpful to reflect on a set of guiding questions that touches on the main issues that one would hope to see attended to in a 'successful' outbound mobility advising situation. Toward this end, the following offers a suggested checklist of elements to consider:

In relation to the student:

- Do I understand the needs, interests and goals of the student?
- Do I understand the background, skills, situation, level of awareness and preparation of the student (including language skills)?
- Do I understand the student's way of communicating?
- Can I communicate effectively with the student?
- Do I have the intercultural knowledge and skills to raise the student's awareness of the experience of living in another culture?

In relation to my home institution:

- Do I know the structures, rules and processes of my home institution?
- Do I have sufficient knowledge of the structure and prerequisites of the academic programmes? If not, do I have access to that knowledge?
- Am I aware of the full range of mobility-related options that are available and suitable for this student (including programmes, funding possibilities, other options)?
- Do I know which colleagues/departments I may need to refer to within my own institution?
- Do I understand what the student might be going through during different stages of the cultural adaptation process?

In relation to the host country, culture and/or institution:

- Do I know the structures, rules and processes of the mobility programme and the host institution, including language of instruction and language(s) of communication?
- Do I have sufficient knowledge of the structure and prerequisites of the academic programmes? If not, do I have access to that knowledge?
- Do I know which contact people are available at the partner institution?
- Do I have country-specific knowledge about the higher education system and living conditions of the host country?
- Do I have specific cultural knowledge of the host country? (student-professor interaction, communication styles, hierarchies, fundamental rules of behaviour, values)
- Do I know what sources/resources/people I can refer to for each country/institution if I do not know the answers myself?

STUDENT-CENTRED ADVISING FOR OPTIMAL GROWTH

The role of an outbound mobility adviser is dynamic and multidimensional, as one is required to know about many different aspects of student life, not just what happens in the classroom and in terms of programmes of study. This is one of the main reasons why many mobility advisers enjoy their work. The huge diversity of issues that mobility advisers deal with can easily make them feel they need to wear many hats: “PR, baby sitter, travel adviser and even student counsellor” is the way an one colleague has described it.

When playing these different roles, however, it is very important to keep in mind that the student should be at the centre of the process; they should be in the driver’s seat, with the mobility adviser there to provide information and support. Why? What makes student exchange a life-changing experience is the feeling of learning something new about oneself, about other people and about the world, in a way that can be very emancipatory: “I can”. Ownership of the process, therefore, has to be with the student.

But, learning from the student exchange experience requires students to be given advice and tools on how to reflect on their experience and how to describe the different competences they have developed through their experience, eg to future employers. Mobility advisers can help students to process and reflect on student exchange experiences; and particularly when things have not been especially smooth or successful, advisers can help students to understand the possible reasons for such setbacks, to enable the student to learn from them, and in this way turn an experience of challenge into a valuable and positive learning experience.

FUTURE TRENDS IN OUTBOUND STUDENT MOBILITY ADVISING

There are a number of developments in relation to academic mobility that will have a bearing on the future of outbound student mobility, and particularly the way that advisers may need to approach their work.

For example, institutions are increasingly providing intercultural training for outbound students as an integral part of their mobility preparations, to enable students to optimise the opportunity to increase their intercultural competences and sensitivity, and to help with their adaptation to host culture environment. Training also aims to help students with re-integration once they return from their mobility period. Many institutions are also now helping outbound students to develop the transversal skills acquired through student exchange/study abroad in a more systematic way, showing them how to articulate and leverage intercultural competencies in a global employment context.

The skills and knowledge necessary for efficient crisis management are something that the outbound mobility adviser are also increasingly expected to acquire. In many, especially larger institutions, clear sets of procedures for dealing with crisis situations affecting mobile students are being developed and put in place, often as a reaction to unfortunate events. Testing the suitability of the set guidelines and protocols and proactively developing them where they are not yet in existence, in light of events in the past years, is coming increasingly into the operational scope of outbound mobility advisers.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No matter what the future holds for the field, the need to set the work of outbound mobility advising into a framework of professional and ethical considerations is vital. Drawing on the field of academic advising, such considerations for outbound mobility advisers can be meaningfully outlined in relation to the individual adviser, to the advisee, to the institution, to other professionals within the institution, and to other outbound mobility advisers.

Key principles might include (Finnish Association of Study Guides, 2009; IEAVG, 1995, 2017; UKCISA, 2015):

- Maintaining confidentiality and the integrity of information about the advisee (*ie* the student)
- Giving reliable and accurate information to the advisee
- Providing equal opportunities without prejudice to people from diverse backgrounds
- Respecting the autonomy and self-determination of the advisee in his/her decision-making
- Recognising the boundaries of one's competence as an adviser and knowing when to refer an advisee to other professionals (*eg* academic adviser and/or counsellor, counselling psychologist or other student health care professional, student welfare adviser, immigration officials, legal adviser)
- Being sensitive to the educational, professional, personal and social needs of the advisee
- Maintaining one's independence and impartiality as an adviser
- Collaborating with other professionals within and outside of one's organisation

- Being aware of matters of power of and influence that come with the adviser role
- Taking care of one's own well-being and knowing one's limitations (eg developing stress management skills to maintain mental and physical health, recognising boundaries between professional life/duties and free time, making sure to understand the boundaries of one's areas of responsibility as an adviser in the organisation, reflecting on difficult situations afterwards with colleagues and one's supervisor to learn from them)
- Actively seeking to further develop professional skills

CONCLUSION

This brief guide has aimed to identify some of the core issues and considerations that sit at the heart of the process of professionalisation in the field of outbound student mobility advising. While recognising that a comprehensive treatment of these issues could be much more extensive, the idea here is to highlight an important series of fundamentals that should ideally frame good practice in this area.

Student mobility will continue to play a central role in the internationalisation of higher education in Europe for the foreseeable future. Supporting students and institutions to achieve their goals in relation to this activity, with the highest levels of professionalism, care and insight, is a significant aspiration, and one deserving of ongoing attention and support.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This publication was initially inspired by the Mobility Advising Feature Session ‘What are the crucial quality standards and principles of outbound mobility advising?’ at the 2016 EAIE Conference in Liverpool.

The session aimed to draw on the knowledge of participants to identify key criteria for quality mobility advising, and the take-home message was that guidelines were needed in order to ensure quality in outbound mobility advising.

In addition to feedback from participants at the Liverpool conference session, views and insights have since been sought from a number of professionals working in outbound mobility advising, specifically on the theme of guidelines and key competencies for effective advising.

These various elements of feedback have been incorporated into this publication by the following members of the EAIE *Mobility Advising* Steering Group:

Tiina Piipponen

International Coordinator, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences,
Mobility Advising Steering Group 2013–Present, Chair 2016–present

Claire O’Leary

Assistant Director International Student Office, University of Warwick,
Mobility Advising Steering Group 2013–present, Vice-Chair 2016–present

Adriana Pérez Encinas

Lecturer and Researcher on Business Management & Internationalization of Higher Education, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
Mobility Advising Steering Group 2016–Present

Virginia van der Ster-van der Wel

International Relations Officer, NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences

Mobility Advising Steering Group 2016–Present

Stephanie Flint Luh

Head of German Department, International Relations Manager and Intercultural Trainer/Coach, Ecole nationale supérieure de l'Electronique et de ses Applications

Mobility Advising Steering Group 2016–2018

Susanne Rößler

Exchange Coordinator, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München

Mobility Advising Steering Group 2012–2016, Vice-Chair 2014–2016

Léa Senn

Associate Director for International Education, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

Mobility Advising Steering Group 2010–2016, Chair 2014–2016

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