



ON THE MOVE

Empowering apprentices
through mobility

Framework for Fostering the Integration of Apprentices in the Host Country through Blended Activities

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Abstract:

This framework provides practical guidance for fostering the successful integration of apprentices participating in cross-border mobility programmes through blended activities. Developed within the Erasmus+ project *On the Move*, the framework aims to support vocational education and training (VET) providers, intermediary organisations, host companies and other stakeholders involved in apprenticeship mobility.

The framework is structured around three key phases of the mobility process: pre-mobility preparation, support during mobility and post-mobility follow-up. It identifies critical integration factors such as role clarity, communication routines, mentor preparation, emotional support mechanisms and stakeholder coordination. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of intermediary organisations in facilitating communication and ensuring continuity across mobility stages.

The framework was validated through behavioural simulation exercises conducted by project partners in multiple European contexts. These simulations tested how stakeholders respond to realistic mobility scenarios under time pressure and external challenges. The findings confirmed the overall robustness of the framework while identifying areas where additional operational guidance is required.

The framework is designed to be adaptable across different national contexts and VET systems and aims to support policy makers, training organisations and companies in improving the quality, sustainability and learner-centredness of apprenticeship mobility schemes.

The framework is intended to support organisations involved in apprenticeship mobility in developing more coordinated, learner-centred and sustainable mobility experiences.

Keyword List: Apprenticeship mobility, Vocational education and training (VET), Apprentice integration, Blended mobility, Intermediary organisations, Mentoring and tutoring, Learner-centred mobility, Mobility preparation, Emotional support in mobility, Stakeholder coordination, Work-based learning

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List of Abbreviations

The following table presents the acronyms used in the deliverable in alphabetical order.

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Description</i>
VET	Vocational Education and Training
IO	Intermediary Organisation
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
EU	European Union
EQF	European Qualifications Framework

1 Executive Summary

This deliverable presents a framework designed to support the successful integration of apprentices participating in cross-border mobility programmes through blended activities. Developed within the Erasmus+ project *On the Move*, the framework addresses the practical challenges faced by apprentices, vocational education and training (VET) providers, host companies and intermediary organisations during international mobility experiences.

The framework is structured around three key phases of the mobility process: pre-mobility preparation, support during mobility, and post-mobility reflection and follow-up. These phases reflect the chronological progression of apprenticeship mobility and provide guidance for stakeholders involved in preparing, supporting and evaluating apprentices' experiences in the host country.

A key focus of the framework is the clarification of stakeholder roles, particularly the coordination role of intermediary organisations and the mentoring role of host companies. The framework emphasises the importance of early preparation, clear communication channels, mentor readiness and emotional support mechanisms in ensuring positive mobility outcomes for apprentices.

The framework was refined and validated through behavioural simulation exercises conducted by project partners. These simulations reproduced realistic mobility scenarios and allowed stakeholders to test integration processes under time pressure and unexpected challenges. The findings confirmed the relevance of the framework's three-phase structure while highlighting the operational importance of preparation, communication and role clarity.

While the simulations provided valuable insights into the practical functioning of the framework, its long-term effectiveness will continue to be assessed through real mobility experiences within apprenticeship programmes. The framework is designed to be adaptable across different national contexts and VET systems and aims to support more inclusive, coordinated and learner-centred apprenticeship mobility across Europe.

1 Framework Outline – Proposed Structure

This framework has been developed under Work Package 2 (WP2) of the *On the Move* Erasmus+ project, led by the OTI Group (Cyprus). It constitutes Deliverable D2.2: Framework for Fostering the Integration of Apprentices in the Host Country through Blended Activities, and its structure reflects both the empirical data gathered during the research phase (interviews, focus groups, and desk analysis) and the strategic objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme in promoting inclusive, high-quality mobility experiences.

1.1 Purpose and Conceptual Orientation

The framework is designed to operationalise the integration process of apprentices within blended mobility environments — where physical and digital modalities coexist as complementary learning spaces. Its scientific foundation rests on three intersecting theoretical axes:

1. **Sociocultural Integration Theory**, emphasizing adaptation, belonging, and the co-construction of meaning in intercultural contexts.
2. **Blended Learning and Cognitive Presence Models**, which conceptualize how hybrid modalities influence engagement, reflection, and identity formation.
3. **Experiential and Situated Learning Theories**, positioning apprenticeships as immersive environments where skills, attitudes, and professional identities are formed through lived practice.

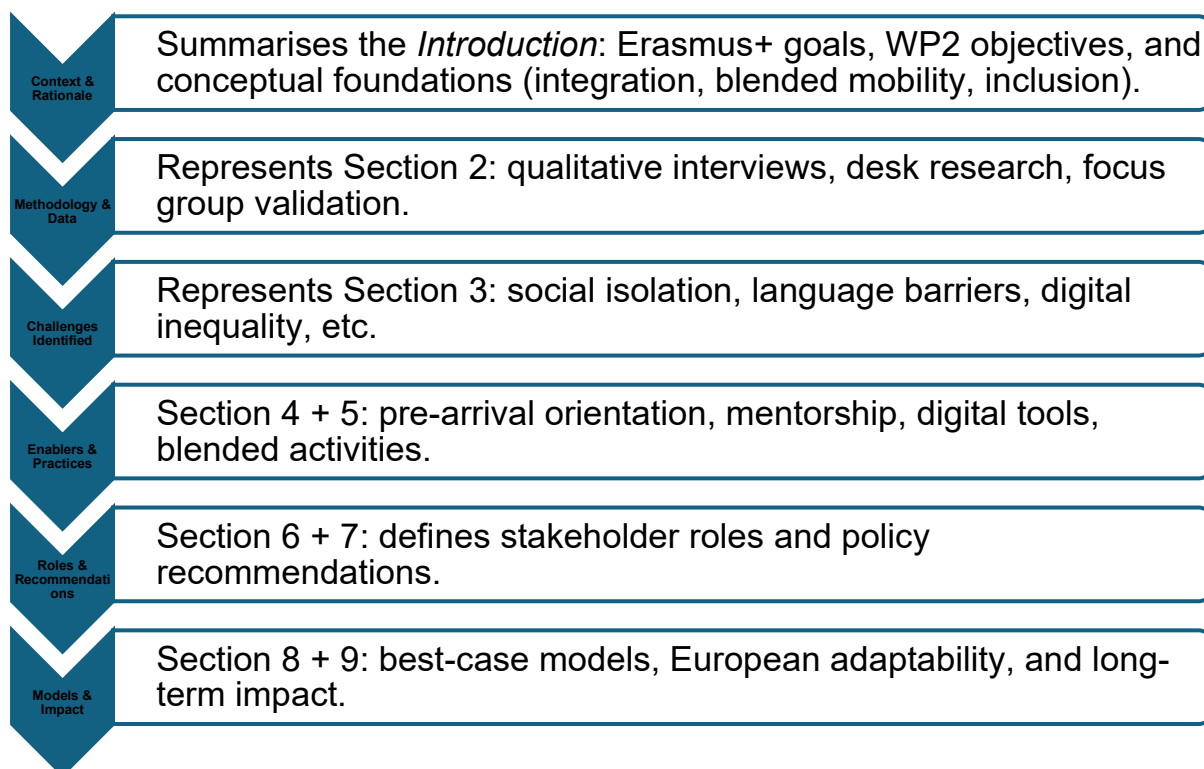
While the framework is grounded in existing research and practical experience in apprenticeship mobility, its structure was further refined through behavioural simulation validation conducted by project partners. These simulations provided a controlled environment to observe how stakeholders respond to integration challenges under realistic conditions. The insights gathered from these exercises confirmed the relevance of the framework's conceptual foundations while highlighting the operational importance of preparation, role clarity, communication structures and mentor readiness.

By synthesising these paradigms, the framework proposes an applied model of integration that is both pedagogically sound and empirically validated through field data collected in several European mobility contexts, across participating countries, contextualised against the broader European VET landscape.

1.2 Structural Logic of the Framework

The document follows a systematic and evidence-driven structure (see *Figure 1* below). Each section builds upon the preceding one to form a coherent continuum—from understanding context, to defining challenges, to prescribing actionable strategies.

Figure 1: Framework Structural Flow – From Context to Application



1. **Introduction** – Establishes the theoretical and policy rationale for the framework, situating it within Erasmus+ priorities, WP2 objectives, and the EU’s strategic agenda for digital and social inclusion.
2. **Methodology** – Details the qualitative design underpinning the framework, including the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and thematic analysis of data from multiple stakeholder types (apprentices, VET trainers, host employers, and coordinators). It highlights the triangulation between local (Cyprus) and European-level evidence.
3. **Key Challenges to Integration in Blended Mobility** – Identifies empirically derived barriers such as cultural dissonance, linguistic divides, digital inequality, and the emotional discontinuity between online and physical phases. These are presented in thematic typologies supported by direct stakeholder data.
4. **Enablers of Successful Integration** – Defines the facilitating conditions that enhance belonging, motivation, and performance. It integrates micro-level practices (mentoring, communication routines) with macro-level enablers (institutional readiness, digital infrastructure, and policy support).

5. **Blended Activities that Support Integration** – Presents an operational matrix of interventions mapped across the three mobility phases: pre-departure, during mobility, and post-return. The section proposes evidence-based blended learning activities using accessible tools and pedagogical scaffolding techniques.
6. **Roles and Responsibilities** – Outlines a multi-actor coordination model delineating the functions of apprentices, host organisations, VET providers, and mobility coordinators. The model positions integration as a shared, iterative process requiring alignment of expectations and continuous feedback loops.
7. **Recommendations** – Offers a tiered set of recommendations targeting four levels of the mobility ecosystem: (1) VET institutions, (2) host companies, (3) mobility coordinators/intermediaries, and (4) policymakers. These are derived from empirical findings and contextualised in relation to EU strategic frameworks (e.g., *European Education Area*, *Digital Education Action Plan*).
8. **Best Case Scenarios (Focus Group Models)** – Presents composite models co-created during the Cyprus focus group sessions, depicting “ideal” integration pathways for apprentices in blended mobility. Each model will be accompanied by a diagrammatic timeline illustrating digital and physical touchpoints.
9. **Conclusion** – Synthesizes insights into a transferable European model, reaffirming that integration within blended apprenticeships is not incidental but the result of intentional design, guided mentorship, and digitally mediated inclusion strategies.

Intended Use and Transferability

The framework is designed for **practitioners, policymakers, and researchers** seeking to enhance the inclusivity and pedagogical quality of transnational apprenticeships. While its empirical base originates in Cyprus, and across participating countries, the structural design and theoretical underpinnings ensure its adaptability across European VET contexts with differing levels of digital and institutional maturity.

It aims to serve as both:

- A **strategic instrument** for Erasmus+ implementers developing blended mobility schemes; and
- A **scientific reference model** contributing to the discourse on post-pandemic apprenticeship integration and hybrid learning ecosystems.

Table 1: Correspondence Between Framework Sections and Erasmus+ WP2 Objectives

Framework Section	Key Focus / Content	Corresponding WP2 Objective
1. Introduction	Establishes the conceptual foundation for integration in blended mobility; situates the framework within Erasmus+ and European VET policy.	WP2 Objective 1: Define the purpose and scope of integration within blended apprenticeship models.

2. Methodology	Describes qualitative research design, data sources (interviews, literature review, focus group), and triangulation process.	WP2 Objective 2: Develop a robust evidence base through empirical research on integration experiences.
3. Key Challenges to Integration	Identifies barriers to inclusion (social isolation, language, digital inequality, weak onboarding).	WP2 Objective 3: Analyse integration barriers and contextual differences across VET systems.
4. Enablers of Successful Integration	Presents empirically validated conditions that promote belonging, continuity, and inclusion.	WP2 Objective 4: Identify effective mechanisms and good practices that foster integration.
5. Blended Activities that Support Integration	Operationalises integration enablers into pre/during/post mobility activities using digital and social tools.	WP2 Objective 5: Translate findings into practical activity models adaptable to European contexts.
6. Roles and Responsibilities	Defines roles of apprentices, hosts, VET providers, and coordinators; introduces the multi-actor integration model.	WP2 Objective 6: Clarify stakeholder responsibilities for ensuring consistent integration quality.
7. Recommendations	Offers strategic and policy-level actions for VET institutions, hosts, coordinators, and policymakers.	WP2 Objective 7: Formulate actionable recommendations for programme and policy design.
8. Best Case Scenarios (Focus Group)	Presents validated models (Sequential and Parallel Integration) illustrating optimal implementation.	WP2 Objective 8: Synthesise evidence into demonstrative integration models.
9. Conclusion	Summarises the framework's transferability and contribution to EU policy on blended apprenticeships.	WP2 Objective 9: Disseminate and promote the integration model for European adoption.

2 Introduction

2.1 1.1 Purpose of the Framework

This framework provides a structured, evidence-informed model for fostering the integration of apprentices in host countries through blended activities. Developed under *Work Package 2 (WP2)* of the Erasmus+ project *On the Move*, it synthesises empirical findings from interviews and focus groups conducted by OTI Group (Cyprus) with apprentices, VET staff, host employers, and mobility coordinators. It builds upon European research in vocational education, social inclusion, and digital transition to define a replicable methodology that strengthens apprentices' sense of belonging, professional engagement, and continuity of learning across both virtual and physical environments.

The framework is grounded in sociocultural and constructivist theories of integration (Vygotsky, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991), which emphasise that learning and adaptation occur through participation in authentic social practices. In the context of transnational apprenticeships, integration extends beyond cognitive learning outcomes to encompass affective, cultural, and social dimensions. Therefore, the framework operationalises integration not merely as adaptation, but as bidirectional participation — where apprentices and host environments co-construct meaning, trust, and professional identity.

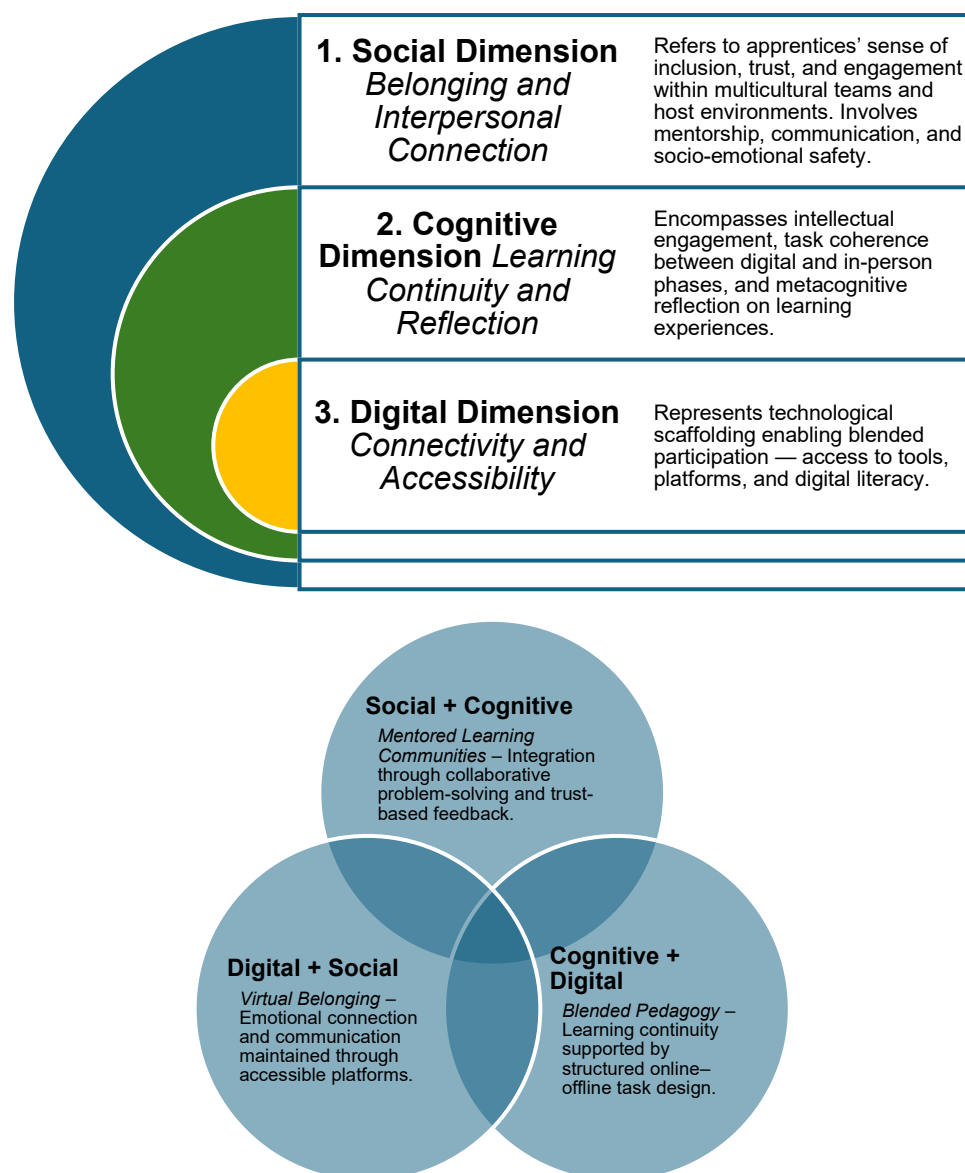
The document aims to:

- Translate qualitative field data from Cyprus and across participating countries and comparative European sources into a conceptual and operational model;
- Provide evidence-based strategies that enable VET providers and host organisations to design inclusive blended mobility programmes; and
- Offer a policy-relevant tool that supports alignment with Erasmus+ objectives, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027).

In order to validate the proposed framework, partner organisations conducted behavioural simulation exercises designed to reproduce realistic apprenticeship mobility scenarios. The simulations involved stakeholders such as apprentices, host companies, VET providers, intermediary organisations and community actors operating under time pressure and crisis conditions. Observations collected through structured validation matrices and behavioural observation sheets provided empirical insights into how integration processes function in practice. The results of these simulations confirmed the relevance of the framework's core principles while identifying areas where additional operational guidance is required.

While the framework is grounded in existing research and practical experience in apprenticeship mobility, its structure was further refined through behavioural simulation validation conducted by project partners. These simulations provided a controlled environment to observe how stakeholders respond to integration challenges under realistic conditions. The insights gathered from these exercises confirmed the relevance of the framework's conceptual foundations while highlighting the operational importance of preparation, role clarity, communication structures and mentor readiness.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Integration in Blended Apprenticeships – Social, Cognitive, and Digital Dimensions



2.2 Why Integration Is Crucial in Blended Apprenticeship Settings

Integration is a defining determinant of apprenticeship success, affecting learner retention, skill transferability, and long-term employability. In traditional mobilities, integration is largely shaped through physical immersion — direct interaction with colleagues, mentors, and community life. In blended mobility, however, the integration trajectory becomes fragmented across spatial and temporal boundaries. Apprentices navigate a dual ecology: the *digital space*, where orientation,

reflection, and communication occur; and the *physical workplace*, where experiential learning and social embedding take place.

Empirical findings across participating countries confirm this complexity. Apprentices and coordinators repeatedly emphasised that while digital onboarding can reduce anxiety and improve preparedness, a lack of structured relational support during online phases leads to feelings of disconnection and emotional distance. Host organisations and VET coordinators likewise noted that integration failures often stem not from technical barriers but from insufficient scaffolding of interpersonal and cultural interaction. Therefore, the framework treats integration as a continuous process, requiring deliberate design before, during, and after the mobility period.

From a pedagogical standpoint, effective integration in blended contexts reinforces three essential forms of presence (Garrison et al., 2000):

1. **Social Presence** – creating authentic connection and trust despite spatial separation;
2. **Cognitive Presence** – maintaining engagement in reflective and applied learning; and
3. **Teaching / Mentoring Presence** – providing structured, empathetic guidance across modalities.

These presences serve as the **mediating mechanisms** between digital preparation and physical apprenticeship experience. Without them, the blended model risks reproducing inequities — particularly for apprentices with limited digital literacy, linguistic proficiency, or socio-economic resources.

Table 2: Comparison of Integration Dynamics in Physical vs Blended Apprenticeships

Dimension	Traditional Physical Apprenticeship	Blended Apprenticeship Mobility
Mode of Interaction	Face-to-face, immersive, spontaneous communication.	Hybrid – mix of digital and physical contact requiring structured coordination.
Social Belonging	Formed naturally through shared work and social routines.	Must be intentionally fostered through online communities and mentorship.
Learning Continuity	Continuous, on-site experiential learning.	Distributed between digital preparation, remote reflection, and physical application.
Mentorship Structure	Informal, proximity-based guidance.	Scheduled digital mentoring and reflective feedback loops.
Communication Dynamics	Multimodal, reliant on non-verbal cues.	Text and video dominant; requires clarity, empathy, and intercultural awareness.
Feedback Mechanisms	Real-time verbal feedback.	Combination of live calls, digital journals, and platform-based evaluations.

Cultural Integration	Immediate immersion; adaptation through daily interaction.	Requires cultural pre-briefing, online introductions, and hybrid exchanges.
Accessibility	Limited by travel costs, visa barriers, and physical mobility.	Broader access via hybrid participation; risk of digital exclusion persists.
Emotional Support	Derived from informal peer and mentor networks.	Requires formalised online check-ins and mental wellbeing monitoring.
Sustainability & Scalability	Resource-intensive and geographically fixed.	Environmentally and economically sustainable; scalable through digital expansion.

2.3 Connection to Erasmus+ Goals and WP2 Objectives

The Erasmus+ Programme positions mobility as a vehicle for inclusion, employability, and European identity formation. Within this vision, *On the Move* seeks to modernise mobility through blended formats that preserve intercultural depth while enhancing accessibility and sustainability. WP2, led by OTI Group, specifically focuses on integration mechanisms ensuring that apprentices participating in hybrid models do not experience diminished belonging or recognition compared with traditional mobilities.

This framework aligns directly with the WP2 objectives:

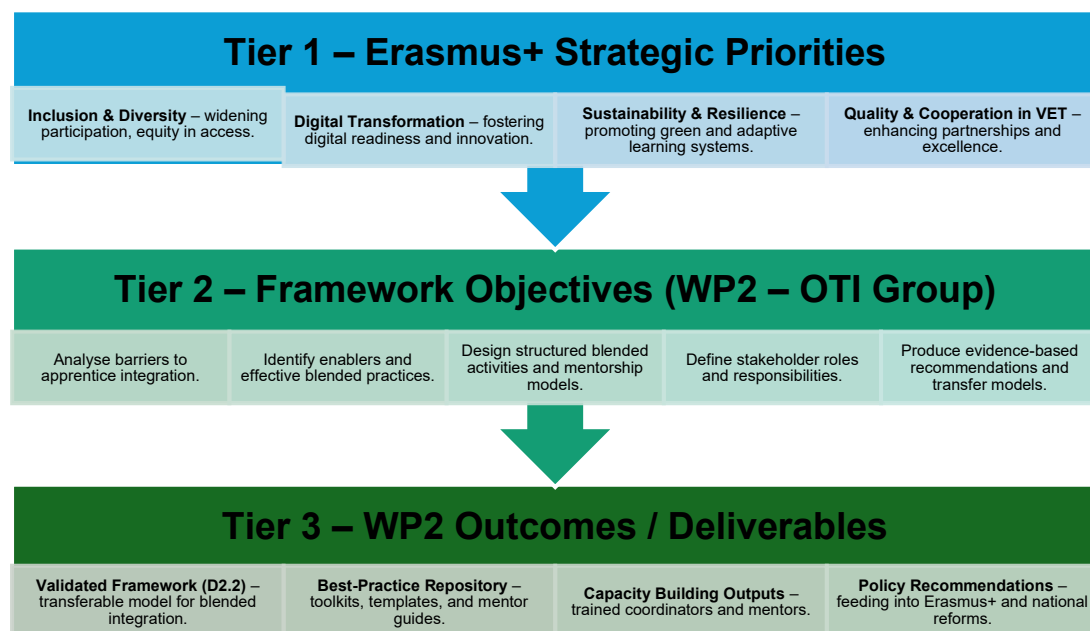
1. To analyse integration barriers in blended apprenticeships across diverse sectors (hospitality, ICT, education, and crafts);
2. To identify effective practices and enabling conditions derived from empirical data and focus-group validation; and
3. To propose a transferable European framework connecting digital pedagogy with psychosocial integration and institutional collaboration.

Furthermore, it contributes to the wider European policy landscape by:

- Supporting the *Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training (2020)*, which calls for flexible, learner-centred pathways and digital readiness;
- Complementing the *European Education Area 2030* objective of fostering transnational learning ecosystems; and
- Advancing the *Digital Education Action Plan* by embedding digital inclusion and ethical use of technology in mobility design.

In doing so, this framework bridges practice, policy, and theory, providing a scientifically grounded model for inclusive, digitally enabled apprenticeships. It asserts that integration is not a peripheral concern but the core determinant of quality in the evolving European mobility paradigm.

Figure 3: Alignment of Framework Objectives with Erasmus+ and WP2 Outcomes



3 Methodology

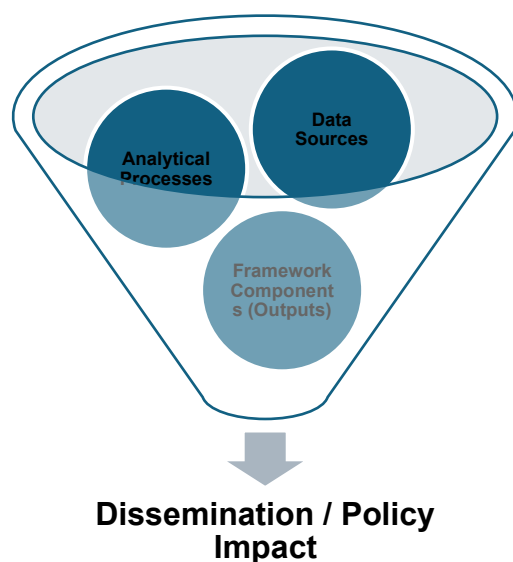
3.1 Research Design

The methodological approach adopted for the development of this framework is qualitative, interpretivist, and exploratory, reflecting the project's focus on understanding the *lived experiences* of apprentices and stakeholders within blended apprenticeship environments. Rather than testing predefined hypotheses, the study sought to identify emergent patterns, practices, and contextual variables shaping the process of integration in the host country — particularly within Cyprus as a microcosm of broader European dynamics.

The research design combines empirical inquiry and documentary analysis, ensuring triangulation across multiple evidence sources. Triangulation was essential for achieving credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) — core principles of qualitative trustworthiness. Each data source informed a distinct analytical layer:

- **Interviews** captured experiential and institutional perspectives;
- **Desk research and literature review** situated findings within established academic and policy frameworks; and
- **Focus group validation** (Cyprus) tested the applicability and coherence of the proposed framework through participatory dialogue among practitioners.

Figure 4: Methodological Triangulation Model – Data Sources and Analytical Flow



3.2 Data Sources

The framework draws upon seven primary interviews conducted in several European mobility contexts between 1–7 August 2025, supplemented by three additional sets of parallel interviews from the other WP2 frameworks (*Blended Mobility, Capacity Building, and Qualifications*). While the primary

evidence base focuses on *integration*, the cross-framework data provided contextual reinforcement on institutional capacity, digital readiness, and coordination mechanisms — enabling comparative depth and thematic coherence across WP2 deliverables.

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

A total of **seven semi-structured interviews** were carried out by the OTI Group research team, encompassing a balanced range of actors across the VET ecosystem:

Stakeholder Group	Role / Function	Example Participants
Apprentices	Past, current, and prospective participants	Sofia (Spain), Elias (Cyprus), Natalia (Bulgaria)
VET Trainers & Coordinators	Erasmus+ project managers, trainers	Andreas, Christina
Host Organisations	Employers, HR managers, mentors	Maria (Hotel HR), Demetris (Digital Agency)

Interviews lasted between 40–60 minutes each and were conducted via MS Teams or Zoom, ensuring accessibility for geographically dispersed participants. All interviews were recorded with informed consent and transcribed for thematic analysis. The inclusion of diverse sectors — hospitality, ICT, tourism, and education — provided a heterogeneous sample, enhancing representativeness across vocational contexts.

Key findings from these interviews highlight a spectrum of integration experiences:

- Apprentices valued pre-departure digital orientation but required stronger social anchoring mechanisms during mobility phases.
- Hosts and VET trainers recognised that integration depended more on structured mentorship and emotional support than on technical skill alignment.
- Coordinators emphasised the need for clearer frameworks, digital scaffolds, and inclusion toolkits, particularly for first-time or disadvantaged apprentices.

3.2.2 Desk Research and Literature Review

The desk research stage synthesised EU and national-level sources, including:

- European Commission (2020) *Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience*;
- *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027* (European Commission, 2021);
- Key academic works on blended learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), social integration (Berry, 1997; Ward et al., 2001), and apprenticeships in transnational contexts (Cedefop, 2022).

This literature served to anchor empirical findings within theoretical and policy foundations, linking micro-level experiences from Cyprus to macro-level European objectives.

Table 3: Mapping of Data Sources to Analytical Objectives

Data Source	Primary Analytical Objective	Analytical Techniques Applied	Framework Components Informed
Semi-Structured Interviews (n=7, Cyprus)	Capture first-hand experiences of apprentices, VET staff, host companies, and coordinators; identify integration barriers, enablers, and perceptions of blended mobility.	Thematic coding, inductive analysis, cross-case comparison.	Sections 3 (Challenges), 4 (Enablers), 5 (Blended Activities), 6 (Roles).
Desk Research and Literature Review	Situate empirical findings within academic, policy, and theoretical contexts; identify European priorities and transferable principles.	Document analysis, content synthesis, conceptual mapping.	Sections 1 (Introduction), 2 (Methodology), 7 (Recommendations), 9 (Conclusion).
Focus Group Validation (Cyprus)	Test and refine framework components; co-design “best case” models integrating digital and physical phases.	Participatory validation, model prototyping, consensus mapping.	Section 8 (Best Case Scenarios), 9 (Conclusion).
Cross-Framework Comparison (Blended Mobility, Capacity Building, Qualifications)	Enhance thematic triangulation and ensure consistency across WP2 deliverables.	Matrix analysis and comparative coding.	Sections 3–7 (Integrated synthesis).

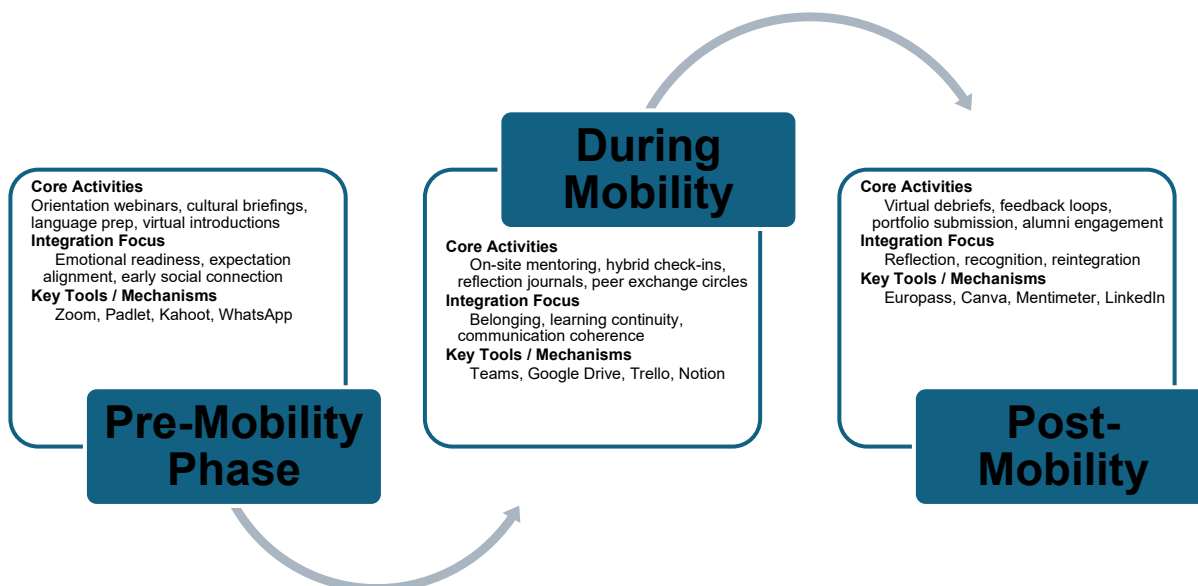
3.3 Analytical Approach

The qualitative data were analysed through thematic coding following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis. Codes were first generated inductively from the transcripts and subsequently categorised under overarching dimensions such as *sense of belonging*, *digital adaptation*, *host readiness*, and *mentorship dynamics*. Cross-case comparison allowed the team to identify recurring integration challenges and enabling conditions across stakeholder groups.

A matrix analysis was also applied to cross-reference findings from the integration interviews with insights from the Blended Mobility, Capacity Building, and Qualifications frameworks. This enabled pattern triangulation — ensuring that proposed solutions were consistent with broader systemic findings, such as institutional digital preparedness and coordinator competency profiles.

Finally, the synthesis stage produced an evidence-informed conceptual model, representing integration as a *temporal continuum* (pre-departure → active mobility → post-return) with overlapping social, digital, and pedagogical layers.

Figure 5: Three-Phase Integration Continuum – Pre, During, and Post Mobility



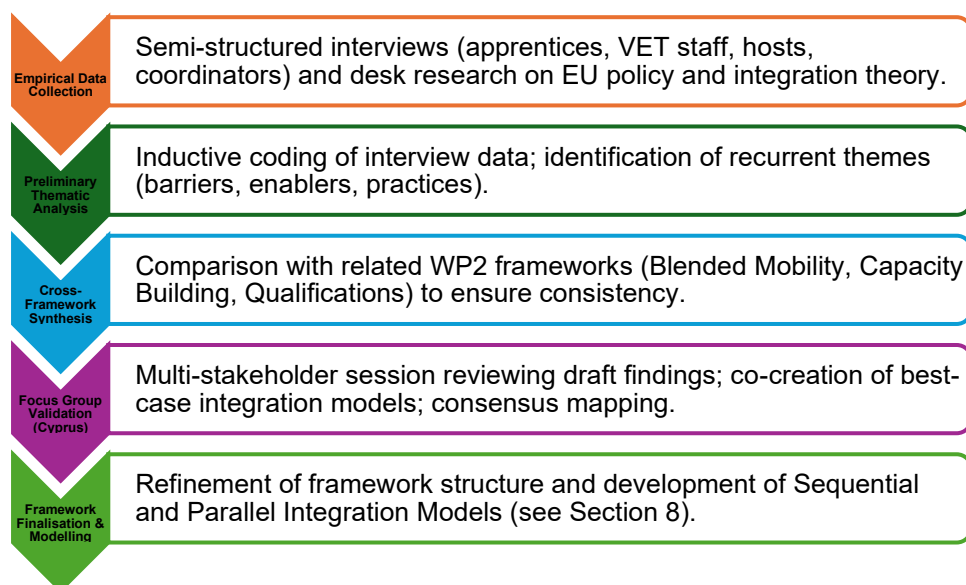
3.4 Focus Group Validation Phase

As part of the validation process for this framework, focus group discussions were organised to gather feedback from key stakeholders involved in apprenticeship mobility. Participants included representatives of apprentices, host employers, VET providers and intermediary organisations who contributed their perspectives on the feasibility, clarity and applicability of the proposed integration model.

The focus group sessions provided an opportunity for stakeholders to review the framework and discuss how its proposed phases and support mechanisms align with real mobility experiences. Participants were also invited to collaboratively describe ideal integration scenarios, reflecting best practices in the preparation, support and follow-up of apprentices during cross-border mobility.

These discussions served as a participatory verification mechanism, ensuring that the framework reflects not only empirical findings but also the practical realities faced by organisations supporting apprenticeship mobility. Insights gathered during the focus group sessions contributed to the refinement of the framework and informed the development of visual models, timelines and recommended practices for embedding blended integration approaches into institutional mobility policies.

Figure 6: Validation Workflow – From Field Data to Framework Model



3.5 Scope and Limitations

While the dataset is nationally focused on Cyprus, it captures cross-cultural mobility experiences involving participants from multiple EU member states (Spain, Bulgaria, Greece, and Cyprus). The analytical generalisation strategy (Yin, 2018) allows for extrapolation of principles rather than statistical inference. Consequently, the framework's validity rests on conceptual transferability rather than population generalisability, in line with qualitative research paradigms.

This methodological configuration ensures that the framework is both empirically grounded and adaptable across EU contexts, offering a robust scientific foundation for the subsequent sections on integration challenges, enablers, and policy recommendations.

4 Key Challenges to Integration in Blended Mobility

The transition from traditional to blended apprenticeship models has introduced new complexities in how apprentices integrate into host environments. The qualitative evidence collected in several European mobility contexts — supported by cross-framework insights from VET coordinators, employers, and apprentices — reveals that integration is not merely a question of logistics or pedagogy, but a multidimensional process shaped by cultural, social, technological, and emotional dynamics.

This section identifies five overarching categories of challenges that collectively determine the quality and sustainability of integration in blended mobility contexts.

Table 4: Typology of Integration Challenges in Blended Apprenticeships

Challenge Category	Underlying Factors	Observed Effects on Integration
Cultural and Social Isolation	Limited initial contact with host colleagues; cultural unfamiliarity; lack of social rituals during online phases.	Emotional withdrawal, reduced motivation, delayed sense of belonging.
Language and Communication Barriers	Linguistic asymmetry between apprentices and host mentors; limited vocabulary for technical tasks; missing non-verbal cues in digital spaces.	Misunderstandings, frustration, slower adaptation, reduced participation in team dialogue.
Disconnection During Remote Phases	Fragmented scheduling between virtual and on-site activities; inconsistent mentor contact; unclear task alignment.	Loss of engagement, diminished accountability, weakened learning continuity.
Unequal Digital Access and Support	Variable digital literacy among staff; limited access to devices or reliable Wi-Fi; lack of platform training.	Exclusion from online components; difficulty maintaining communication; increased learner anxiety.
Lack of Structured Onboarding and Mentorship	Informal or ad-hoc introduction processes; insufficient mentor training; lack of onboarding templates.	Confusion about expectations; delayed task integration; lower early retention rates.
Emotional Fatigue and Burnout	Overlap of digital and physical demands; absence of mental health monitoring; insufficient downtime.	Decline in motivation and wellbeing; potential dropout during longer mobilities.
Institutional Fragmentation	Weak coordination between VET providers, intermediaries, and hosts; lack of shared evaluation tools.	Redundancy, miscommunication, and inconsistent feedback loops.

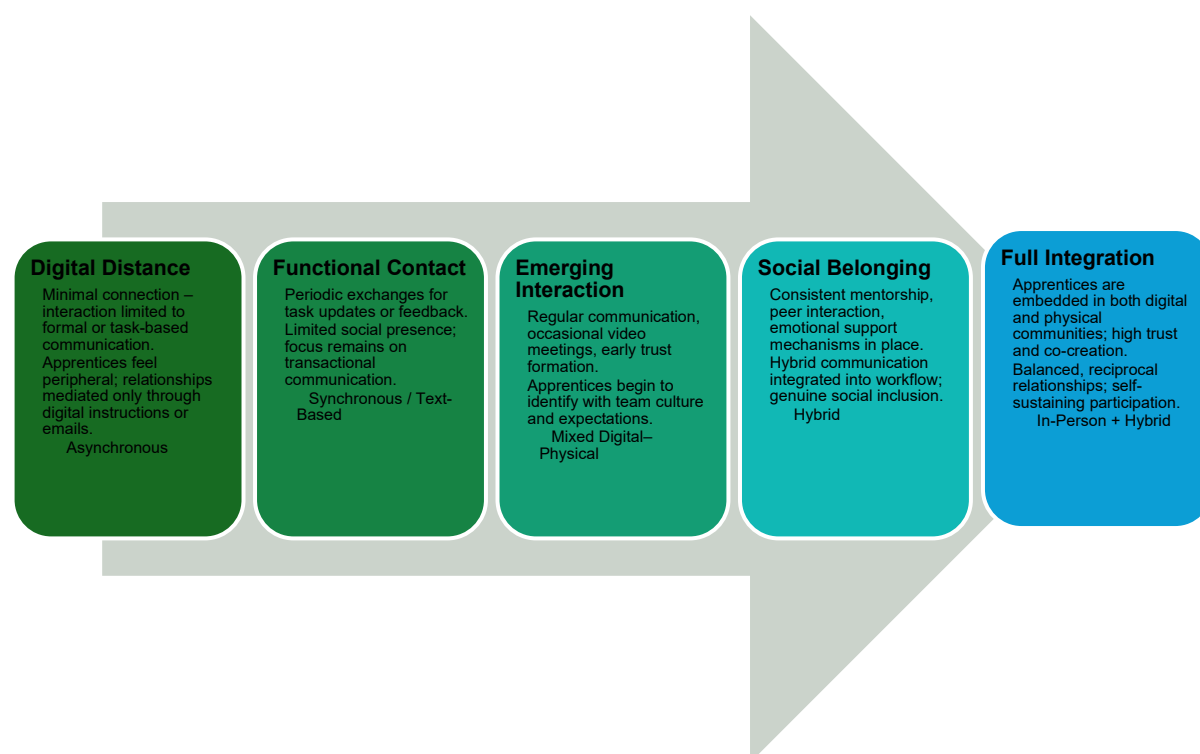
4.1 Cultural and Social Isolation

Cultural and social isolation emerged as the most recurrent and emotionally impactful challenge across all stakeholder groups. Apprentices arriving in host countries often experience initial alienation due to unfamiliar social norms, linguistic barriers, and limited contact networks. In blended settings, this isolation is amplified when part of the integration process occurs online, depriving learners of the informal social cues that facilitate adaptation.

Empirical evidence from the Cyprus interviews shows that apprentices valued digital preparation but reported that social belonging developed only after sustained physical immersion. Trainers and employers confirmed that interpersonal rapport and informal mentorship — essential for social learning and identity formation — are difficult to replicate in digital spaces.

Moreover, in cases where apprentices remained remote for significant phases, the absence of spontaneous peer interaction led to fragmented socialization, lower motivation, and a weakened sense of belonging. This aligns with the *social presence theory* (Short, Williams & Christie, 1976), which posits that perceived interpersonal connection is a prerequisite for authentic communication and trust in mediated environments.

Figure 7: Interaction Gradient – From Digital Distance to Social Integration



4.2 Language and Communication Barriers

Language proficiency and intercultural communication skills were identified as critical predictors of successful integration. Both apprentices and host organisations reported challenges in expressing expectations, providing feedback, and sustaining motivation when linguistic asymmetries existed.

Apprentices in hospitality and ICT sectors described feelings of marginalization during initial weeks due to limited conversational fluency and technical vocabulary gaps. Employers noted that misunderstandings around task instructions and safety protocols occasionally disrupted workflow. Trainers further observed that digital communication tools — though helpful — can exacerbate misunderstandings when emotional tone and context are lost in translation.

This finding resonates with research on *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 1997), emphasizing that integration requires not only language proficiency but also pragmatic awareness and empathy. The lack of multilingual onboarding resources or real-time translation tools across some institutions contributed to an uneven communication landscape, particularly for first-time apprentices abroad.

Table 5: Reported Communication Barriers and Proposed Mitigation Strategies

Communication Barrier	Underlying Cause / Context	Mitigation Strategy / Recommended Practice
Limited Language Proficiency	Apprentices or mentors lack shared working language proficiency; use of technical jargon in host sector (e.g., hospitality, ICT).	Introduce pre-mobility language micro-modules ; provide bilingual glossaries and simple phrasebooks; encourage visual communication aids.
Loss of Non-Verbal Cues in Online Settings	Remote interaction removes contextual gestures and tone; emotional nuance lost in text-based exchanges.	Use video-based communication (Zoom/Teams) for mentoring; train mentors in “digital empathy” and intercultural awareness.
Asynchronous Feedback Delays	Time-zone differences or digital scheduling gaps disrupt timely feedback cycles.	Implement structured feedback calendars and use shared platforms (e.g., Google Docs comments, Trello updates) with clear turnaround times.
Technical Terminology Misalignment	Apprentices interpret professional terms differently from hosts, particularly across languages or VET systems.	Integrate visual task sheets and sectoral lexicons in digital onboarding; cross-check understanding in early hybrid sessions.
Over-Reliance on Written Communication	Hosts default to email or chat for efficiency; reduces relational engagement.	Combine written updates with weekly video check-ins or voice notes; apply a “one-channel-for-feedback, one-for-social” rule (e.g., Teams + WhatsApp).
Mentor-Apprentice Hierarchical Distance	Cultural norms discourage apprentices from asking clarifying questions.	Establish psychological safety norms in orientation; mentors use inclusive phrases (“How do you feel about this task?”).

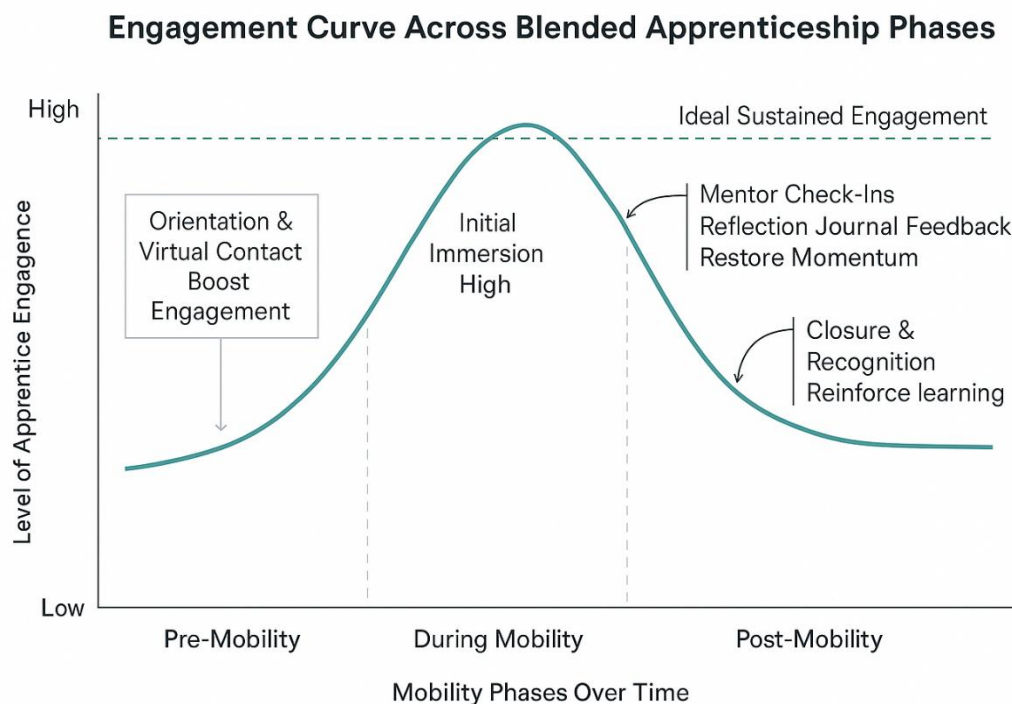
Intercultural Misinterpretations	Different humour, tone, or feedback styles cause tension or discomfort.	Include intercultural competence modules (Byram, 1997); integrate reflection tasks in journals for cultural self-awareness.
Inconsistent Use of Communication Platforms	Apprentices and hosts switch tools (e.g., WhatsApp, email, LMS) without coordination.	Define a communication protocol during pre-mobility phase specifying tools for official vs. informal exchanges.
Information Overload or Fragmentation	Excessive digital messaging without centralisation leads to confusion.	Use shared dashboards or centralised repositories (e.g., Google Drive folders, Trello boards) for all key documents and updates.

4.3 Disconnection During Remote Phases

The hybrid configuration of blended apprenticeships introduces a structural risk of temporal and emotional disconnection during remote periods. Apprentices often transition between synchronous physical engagement and asynchronous online tasks, which can fragment their sense of progression and weaken motivation.

Interview data from current apprentices highlight that engagement declines when digital tasks are perceived as peripheral or when contact with mentors diminishes during online phases. Employers similarly noted challenges in monitoring productivity and providing feedback in remote settings, especially when digital literacy levels vary among staff.

From a pedagogical perspective, this challenge reflects a gap in what Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) termed *teaching presence* — the structured facilitation necessary to maintain continuity of learning across modalities. Without explicit communication protocols, feedback cycles, and reflective mechanisms, apprentices perceive the blended experience as two separate realities rather than a cohesive continuum.

Figure 8: Engagement Curve Across Blended Apprenticeship Phases

4.4 Unequal Digital Access and Support

Digital inequality constitutes both a technical and social barrier to equitable integration. Although most organisations involved in the study had adopted basic digital tools (e.g., Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Drive), disparities in hardware availability, internet connectivity, and user competence persisted.

Apprentices from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds reported difficulty accessing stable internet connections or suitable workspaces for online components, while some host companies lacked dedicated digital mentoring systems. Coordinators also noted inconsistent digital literacy among older staff, creating bottlenecks in blended communication and supervision.

This challenge intersects with the EU's *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)*, which identifies digital inclusion as a cornerstone of modern education systems. From a policy standpoint, digital inequity risks reinforcing social exclusion — precisely the issue Erasmus+ aims to counteract.

Ensuring digital parity is therefore not a peripheral concern but a core integration prerequisite. Apprentices cannot fully participate in hybrid models unless both individuals and host environments are digitally equipped and supported.

Table 6: Digital Readiness Disparities Among Stakeholder Types

Stakeholder Type	Strengths / Existing Capacities	Limitations / Gaps	Level of Digital Readiness
Apprentices	High adaptability and familiarity with mobile devices and social media; willing to use informal tools (WhatsApp, Padlet, Canva).	Uneven access to stable internet or laptops; limited digital professionalism; difficulty using institutional platforms.	Moderate
Host Companies	Increasing digitalisation of workflows (hospitality management systems, project dashboards); familiarity with video meetings.	Digital literacy varies among older staff; limited capacity for digital mentoring; insufficient bandwidth in some workplaces.	Moderate to High
VET Providers	Access to institutional learning management systems (LMS); growing expertise in e-learning due to pandemic adaptation.	Need for continuous upskilling in digital pedagogy; inconsistent platform interoperability; limited tech support budgets.	High
Mobility Coordinators / Intermediaries	Strong organisational and administrative IT skills; use of communication tools (Teams, Trello, Google Forms).	Heavy workload limits ability to innovate; reliance on multiple disconnected tools; weak monitoring dashboards for blended engagement.	Moderate
Apprentice Mentors (within hosts)	Experienced in coaching and interpersonal communication.	Lack of structured digital mentoring training; minimal experience using reflection tools or online journals.	Low to Moderate
Policy-Level or Project Administrators	Increasing familiarity with digital reporting platforms (Erasmus+ tools, Europass, EWP).	Systems fragmented; limited understanding of digital pedagogy implications for integration.	Moderate

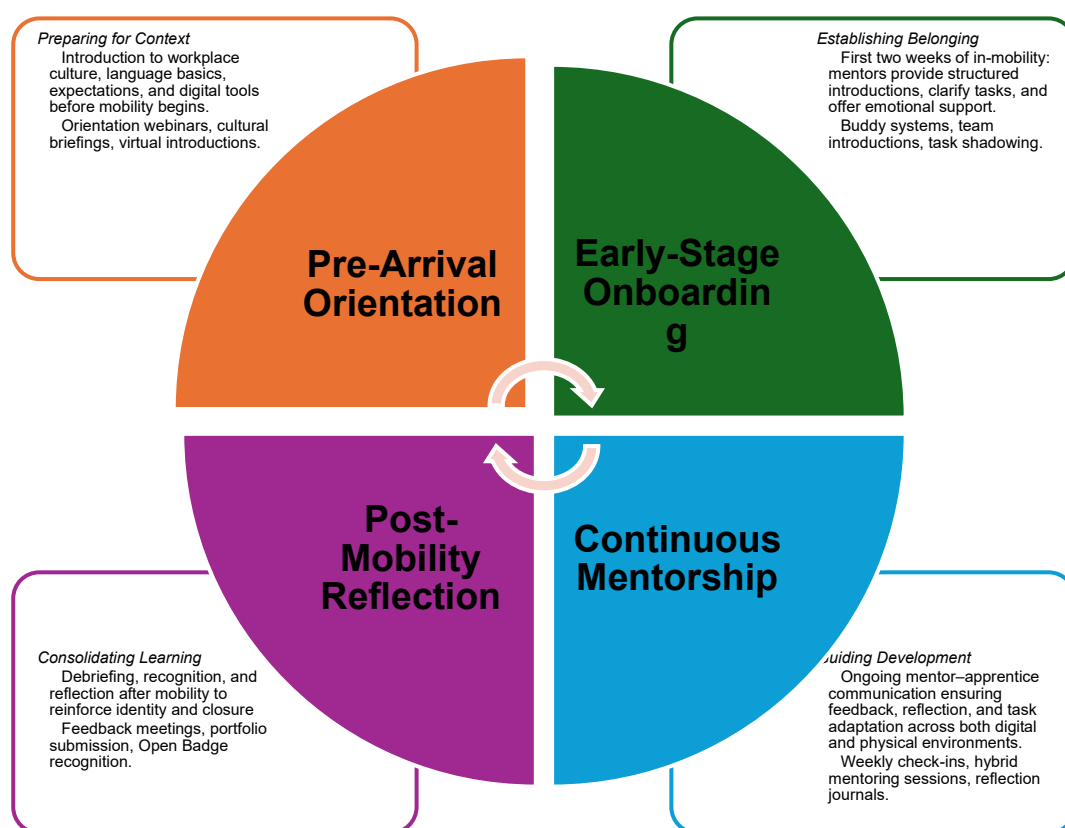
4.5 Lack of Structured Onboarding and Mentorship

Across nearly all interviews, stakeholders described onboarding processes as informal, inconsistent, or dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional design. Apprentices often arrived without a clear understanding of workplace norms, digital platforms, or communication expectations. VET trainers confirmed that systematic orientation frameworks are largely absent, particularly when mobilities are short-term or involve multiple hosts.

Host employers, while supportive, frequently cited time constraints and resource limitations as barriers to providing sustained mentorship. Coordinators expressed a need for standardised templates, digital toolkits, and mentor training to harmonise onboarding across institutions.

The absence of structured onboarding weakens early-stage integration — the phase where apprentices' confidence, belonging, and task clarity are formed. This is consistent with Tinto's (1993) *Model of Student Integration*, which links early institutional engagement to long-term retention and success. In blended mobility, this principle extends beyond physical induction to include virtual orientation, continuous mentorship, and reflective closure activities.

Figure 9: Mentorship and Onboarding Continuum – From Orientation to Reflection

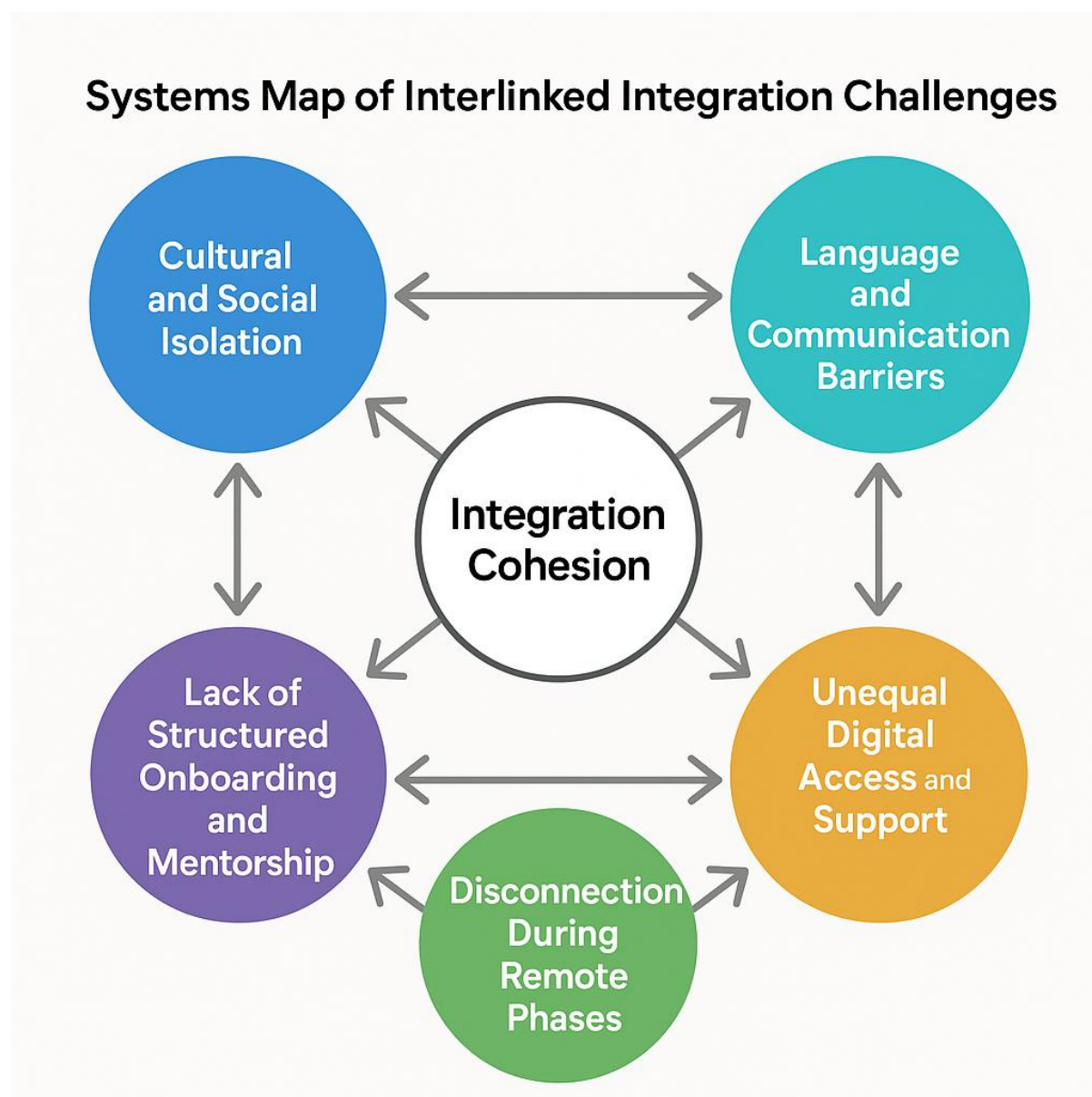


4.6 Interconnected Nature of Challenges

While each of the above challenges can be analytically separated, in practice they are mutually reinforcing. Cultural isolation intensifies when language barriers limit communication; digital inequality amplifies disconnection during remote phases; and weak onboarding undermines all other enablers of belonging.

This interdependence underscores the need for a systemic integration model, wherein social, linguistic, digital, and pedagogical factors are addressed concurrently rather than sequentially. The next section — *Enablers of Successful Integration* — responds directly to these challenges by identifying empirically validated practices and mechanisms that mitigate fragmentation and promote continuity.

Diagram 2: Systems Map of Interlinked Integration Challenges



5 Evidence Base

The Integration Framework is grounded in a cross-country evidence base collected by all partners in the On the Move consortium. Data sources include national desk research reports, literature reviews, institutional documentation, and interviews and creative focus groups conducted across seven countries: Cyprus, Greece, Denmark, Iceland, Bulgaria, Spain and Italy. This section summarises the main themes emerging from interviews with intermediary organisations (IOs), VET providers, coordinators, and mobility practitioners in all participating countries.

5.1 Roles and responsibilities of intermediary organisations and coordinators

Across countries, interviews consistently described intermediary organisations and mobility coordinators as *connectors* between learners, VET providers, and host companies. Their responsibilities typically include:

- Identifying, screening and preparing apprentices for mobility
- Matching learners with suitable host companies
- Supporting contract procedures, logistics and travel arrangements
- Providing induction, mentoring, and cross-cultural support
- Monitoring progress, addressing challenges, and ensuring welfare
- Facilitating after-care activities and follow-up upon return

In some countries (e.g. Iceland, Greece, Bulgaria), IOs are involved in **every stage** of the mobility cycle — from application and eligibility checks to post-mobility reporting and evaluation. In the Nordic region, responsibilities are distributed across VET schools, sectoral bodies and specialised mobility centres, with coordinators often assuming both administrative and pedagogical roles.

5.2 Competences required for high-quality integration support

Across all seven countries, interviewees highlighted three core competence areas needed for supporting apprentice integration in blended mobility:

1. **Programme, system and regulatory knowledge**
Coordinators must understand European mobility rules, national VET systems, qualification pathways, and sector-specific requirements. This knowledge is essential for aligning tasks, preventing mismatches, and ensuring a smooth learner experience.
2. **Intercultural, social and emotional competences**
Empathy, active listening, multicultural awareness, and conflict mediation were consistently identified as fundamental. Coordinators emphasised the importance of building trust, supporting vulnerable learners, and navigating the emotional and cultural dimensions of mobility.
3. **Digital competences and blended coordination skills**
All countries reported increased reliance on digital platforms for onboarding,

communication, monitoring and documentation. Iceland reported legally mandated use of digital logbooks; Nordic partners noted the need to translate lived experience into structured digital tools; Greek and Bulgarian partners emphasised the role of online communication and support in ensuring accessibility.

Together, these competences shape the capacity of organisations to deliver cohesive, blended support that links online and onsite experiences.

5.3 Challenges affecting apprentice integration in blended mobility

Despite national differences, several common challenges emerged across interviews:

- **Language barriers and cross-cultural adaptation**, especially during the early stages of mobility
- **Digital access gaps** and learner disengagement during sustained online activities
- **Limited recognition of blended mobility** or rigid national systems that favour traditional placements
- **Difficulty securing suitable host companies**, particularly for long-term apprenticeships or in specialised fields
- **Uneven mentoring quality**, often due to a lack of training for workplace supervisors
- **Administrative complexity and workload**, especially for organisations managing multiple sending flows
- **Regional inequalities**, gender imbalance in certain trades, and limited support structures in rural areas

These challenges impact both continuity and integration, particularly when online and onsite phases are not well coordinated.

5.4 Enablers of successful integration

Interviewees across countries also identified clear enablers that support high-quality, inclusive and well-integrated mobility experiences:

- **Structured pre-departure preparation**, ideally delivered online (orientation, language, cultural readiness)
- **Consistent mentoring and monitoring**, combining online check-ins and workplace supervision
- **Financial support mechanisms**, which reduce barriers for learners with fewer opportunities
- **Flexible mobility formats**, such as shorter but more frequent physical stays integrated with online components
- **Digital tools and logbooks**, enabling coordination, task alignment, and reflection

- **Strong inter-organisational networks**, which support better matching and smoother communication
- **After-care and follow-up services**, including portfolio building, debriefing and professional networking

Across all countries, practitioners stressed that integration is **not a single activity**, but the result of a structured sequence of support measures before, during and after mobility.

5.5 Summary

The cross-country findings confirm that apprentices' successful integration in the host country is shaped by **a combination of well-designed blended activities, strong mentorship, clear communication, and accessible support structures**. Despite national differences, the needs and challenges identified across the seven countries are highly aligned, underscoring the relevance and transferability of the Integration Framework developed in this project.

6 Enablers of Successful Integration

While blended mobility introduces structural and psychosocial challenges, the interviews conducted in several European mobility contexts and the wider WP2 evidence collectively demonstrate that these barriers are not insurmountable. Successful integration arises when apprenticeships are **deliberately designed as socio-technical systems** — balancing human connection, digital accessibility, and pedagogical structure.

The following enablers represent the *empirically validated conditions* that facilitate inclusion, belonging, and continuity of learning across blended apprenticeship cycles. Each is grounded in participant testimony, supported by established theoretical models, and aligned with Erasmus+ policy priorities on quality mobility and digital inclusion.

Table 7: Summary of Integration Enablers and Corresponding Theoretical Foundations

Integration Enabler	Core Mechanism / Rationale	Theoretical Foundation(s)
Pre-Arrival Virtual Orientation	Builds emotional readiness, expectation clarity, and early social connection before mobility starts.	<i>Sociocultural Learning Theory</i> (Vygotsky, 1978); <i>Experiential Learning</i> (Kolb, 1984).
Structured Mentorship and Communication Protocols	Maintains teaching presence, continuity, and psychosocial support during digital and in-person phases.	<i>Community of Inquiry Model</i> (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000); <i>Zone of Proximal Development</i> (Vygotsky, 1978).
Use of Accessible Digital Tools	Enables inclusion by removing technological barriers; enhances engagement through familiar, low-threshold platforms.	<i>Universal Design for Learning</i> (CAST, 2018); <i>Connectivism</i> (Siemens, 2005).
Clear Task Design and Online–Offline Coherence	Ensures alignment between virtual and practical tasks, sustaining motivation and cognitive flow.	<i>Constructive Alignment</i> (Biggs, 1996); <i>Cognitive Load Theory</i> (Sweller, 1988).
Social Connection Strategies	Establishes belonging and peer-to-peer learning across modalities.	<i>Communities of Practice</i> (Lave & Wenger, 1991); <i>Social Presence Theory</i> (Short, Williams & Christie, 1976).
Reflection and Feedback Loops	Encourages metacognition and continuous improvement, linking experience to learning outcomes.	<i>Experiential Learning Cycle</i> (Kolb, 1984); <i>Reflective Practice</i> (Schön, 1983).
Inclusive Digital Literacy Development	Reduces inequality by enhancing both staff and apprentice digital competencies.	<i>Digital Competence Framework for Citizens</i> (DigComp, EC 2022); <i>Equity Pedagogy</i> (Banks, 2016).

Cross-Phase Continuity (Pre–During–Post)	Maintains cognitive and social engagement across the entire mobility lifecycle.	<i>Holistic Learning Continuum</i> (Jarvis, 2006); <i>Transformative Learning Theory</i> (Mezirow, 1997).
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6.1 Pre-Arrival Virtual Orientation

Early-stage preparation — conducted digitally before departure — emerged as one of the most powerful enablers of integration. Apprentices who received pre-arrival orientation reported significantly lower anxiety, clearer expectations, and faster social adjustment during their first weeks abroad.

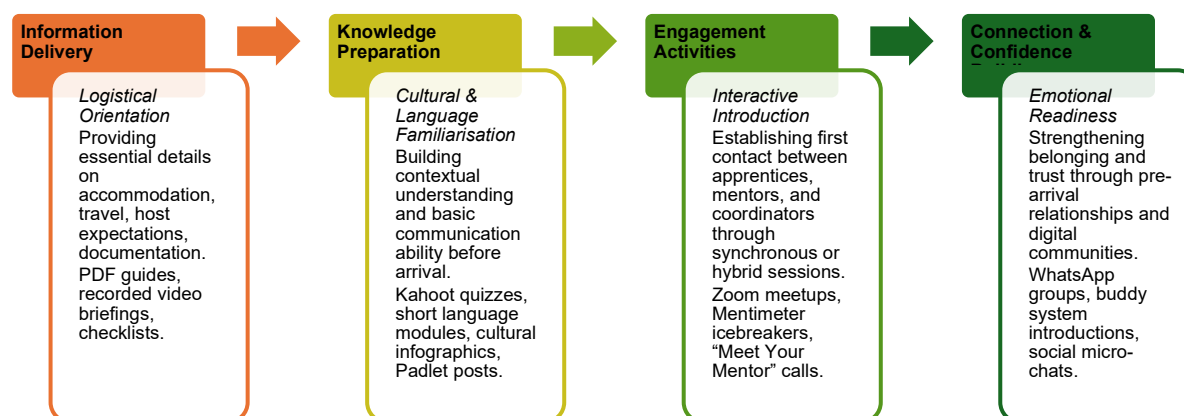
These virtual sessions often included:

- **Language familiarisation**, using simple conversational modules and sector-specific vocabulary;
- **Cultural briefings**, introducing national work ethics, local customs, and daily life logistics;
- **Practical guidance**, such as housing, transport, and administrative documentation; and
- **Digital introductions** to mentors or peers through short video calls or group chats.

The pedagogical rationale mirrors *Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle* (1984), wherein pre-mobility orientation forms the *concrete experience* stage that grounds later reflection and application. By simulating key aspects of the host environment, apprentices develop anticipatory awareness that reduces cognitive overload upon arrival.

Focus group insights further indicate that pre-arrival orientation is particularly valuable for apprentices from vulnerable or NEET backgrounds, providing a psychologically safe entry point to mobility participation. In these cases, virtual induction sessions served as a confidence-building **bridge** between aspiration and physical relocation.

Figure 10: Pre-Mobility Orientation Framework – From Information to Connection



6.2 Structured Mentorship and Communication Protocols

The presence of a designated mentor or mobility coordinator — particularly during remote phases — is a decisive determinant of integration quality. In blended contexts, mentorship transcends supervision; it becomes a mechanism for sustaining social and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000).

Data from Cyprus revealed that apprentices who benefited from regular digital check-ins, weekly feedback sessions, or mentor-facilitated reflection logs experienced higher engagement and emotional stability during online phases. Conversely, those lacking structured contact often reported motivational decline and disconnection.

Successful organisations implemented clear communication routines, such as:

- Weekly online review meetings (Zoom/Teams) to monitor progress;
- Shared workspaces for asynchronous updates (Google Docs, Trello);
- Informal "open hours" for questions and emotional support via WhatsApp; and
- Mentor reflection journals to track learner adaptation over time.

These practices align with *Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development* (1978), where mentorship scaffolds learning just beyond the apprentice's current ability. Within blended models, structured mentorship restores continuity and social cohesion otherwise disrupted by physical separation.

Table 8: Sample Mentorship Protocol – Frequency, Format, and Objectives

Phase / Period	Frequency & Format	Main Focus / Objectives	Responsible Person(s)
Pre-Mobility (4–6 weeks before arrival)	1–2 virtual meetings (Zoom/Teams) + asynchronous communication (email/WhatsApp).	- Introduce mentor and apprentice.- Clarify expectations, roles, and communication tools.- Discuss personal learning goals and workplace culture.	Host Mentor & VET Coordinator.
Week 1 of Mobility	2 structured in-person or hybrid sessions (30–45 min).	- Workplace orientation.- Review tasks and safety procedures.- Identify immediate support needs.- Establish weekly check-in schedule.	Host Mentor.
Weeks 2–4	Weekly 30-min hybrid check-ins (video call or face-to-face).	- Provide feedback on adaptation and progress.- Support integration into team dynamics.- Address any social or emotional issues.	Host Mentor (with optional VET follow-up).
Mid-Mobility (Weeks 5–6)	1 formal review session (60 min hybrid) + written summary.	- Evaluate learning outcomes and challenges.- Revisit objectives.- Identify new development goals.	Host Mentor & VET Coordinator.
End of Mobility (Final Week)	1 closing meeting (hybrid).	- Reflect on learning experience.- Document achievements and skills gained.- Discuss next steps (e.g., portfolio, Open Badge).	Host Mentor & Apprentice.
Post-Mobility (1–2 weeks after return)	1 digital follow-up meeting (Zoom).	- Conduct debriefing and self-assessment.- Gather feedback on mentorship process.- Reinforce alumni network participation.	VET Coordinator.

6.3 Use of Accessible Digital Tools

Digital platforms function as the connective tissue of blended integration. However, accessibility — rather than technological sophistication — determines success. The empirical evidence shows that simple, familiar tools such as WhatsApp, Google Drive, and Padlet were consistently more effective than complex learning management systems.

Participants from both the Integration and Blended Mobility frameworks emphasized that low-barrier platforms enable spontaneous communication, visual collaboration, and shared reflection without imposing technical strain. For example:

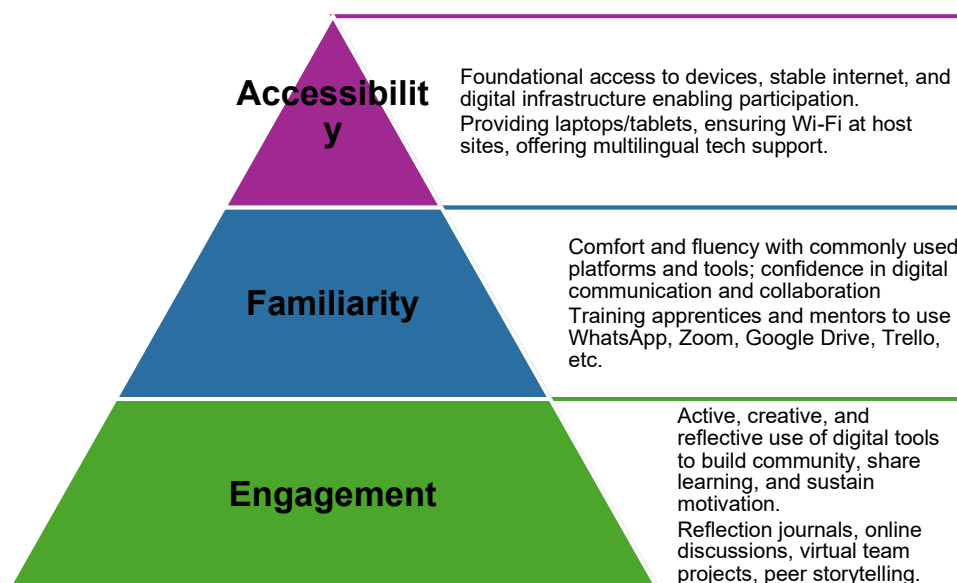
- VET trainers used Padlet for visual journals and feedback loops;

- Employers relied on WhatsApp for real-time updates and wellbeing checks;
- Apprentices preferred Google Drive for sharing photos, reports, and progress evidence.

This simplicity fosters digital inclusion — especially important when apprentices possess uneven digital literacy or limited equipment. It also reflects the principle of *Universal Design for Learning* (CAST, 2018), ensuring that learning environments remain accessible to the widest possible range of participants.

Furthermore, accessible tools contribute to institutional resilience: when digital communication is frictionless, cross-border coordination becomes scalable, and crises (e.g., travel delays, lockdowns) can be managed without pedagogical disruption.

Figure 11: Digital Inclusion Pyramid – Accessibility, Familiarity, Engagement



6.4 Clear Task Design and Online–Offline Coherence

A recurring enabler across the interviews was **coherence in task design** — ensuring that online and physical activities form a continuous learning narrative rather than disjointed phases. Apprentices and mentors reported higher satisfaction when remote tasks directly supported onsite learning objectives.

Effective task design practices included:

- **Sequential mapping** of digital modules to physical tasks (e.g., online hygiene training → kitchen practice in hospitality);
- **Integrated assessment frameworks**, where reflections or digital portfolios were evaluated alongside practical performance; and
- **Cross-modal consistency**, maintaining the same communication channels, terminology, and learning outcomes across digital and onsite stages.

This alignment embodies the concept of *constructive alignment* (Biggs, 1996), ensuring that intended learning outcomes, activities, and assessments remain synchronised. When coherence is achieved,

apprentices perceive the blended journey as a unified professional learning trajectory, thereby strengthening cognitive and emotional integration.

Conversely, misaligned task structures — such as unrelated online assignments or disconnected reporting systems — were cited as key factors undermining motivation and perceived relevance. Host mentors stressed that clarity of sequencing (what happens when and why) is crucial for maintaining trust and accountability.

Table 9: Sample Task Alignment Matrix – Online Preparation, Physical Practice, Reflection

Learning Objective	Online Preparation Activities	Physical Practice / On-Site Application	Reflection & Assessment Activities	Tools / Platforms Used
1. Develop sector-specific vocabulary and communication skills.	Language micro-modules, terminology flashcards, role-play videos.	Use learned phrases in customer interactions or team meetings.	Weekly language reflection journal.	Kahoot, Quizlet, Padlet.
2. Apply safety and procedural knowledge in workplace settings.	Watch digital safety tutorials; complete short compliance quiz.	Demonstrate safe equipment use under mentor supervision.	Mentor checklist and self-evaluation.	YouTube, Google Forms.
3. Strengthen teamwork and collaboration in hybrid settings.	Participate in virtual team-building challenge pre-departure.	Engage in on-site group project with local peers.	Peer evaluation and mentor debrief.	Zoom, Trello, Miro.
4. Enhance problem-solving and creativity within job context.	Analyse case studies online; submit proposed solutions.	Implement ideas in practical context (e.g., service improvement task).	Reflective vlog on outcomes and lessons learned.	Notion, Canva, Google Drive.
5. Demonstrate intercultural awareness and adaptability.	Attend online cultural briefing; discuss scenarios in Padlet forum.	Collaborate with diverse colleagues on day-to-day operations.	End-of-mobility reflection report and group debrief.	Padlet, Teams, Mentimeter.
6. Document and present learning achievements.	Prepare online progress portfolio and upload weekly updates.	Gather visual evidence (photos, certificates, outputs).	Compile final digital portfolio for evaluation.	Google Drive, Europass ePortfolio.

6.5 Social Connection Strategies

Integration is ultimately a relational phenomenon, and thus requires intentional social architecture. Across multiple interviews, apprentices and hosts described the transformative effect of simple but structured human connections, especially during the early stages of mobility.

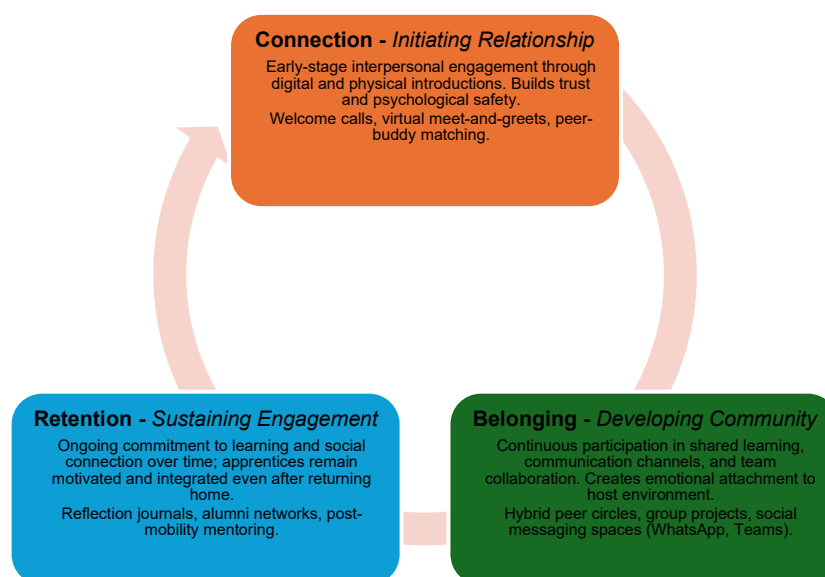
Effective social connection strategies included:

- **Welcome calls or digital meet-and-greets** before arrival, allowing apprentices to visualise their mentors and peers;
- **Peer-buddy systems**, pairing incoming learners with local or returning apprentices for informal guidance;
- **Hybrid community spaces**, such as WhatsApp groups, social media pages, or online cafés, to sustain informal dialogue; and
- **Virtual reflection circles**, where apprentices share experiences with others across host sites.

These interventions address the psychosocial layer of integration, reducing feelings of anonymity and reinforcing collective identity — essential for motivation and wellbeing. Theoretically, such practices align with *Communities of Practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where learning is embedded in participation and shared meaning.

The inclusion of peer and mentor interaction spaces also responds to evidence of emotional dips and loneliness reported during early remote phases. Employers who integrated digital socialisation into onboarding (e.g., group calls, virtual tours) noted faster adaptation and stronger loyalty among apprentices.

Figure 12: Social Integration Cycle – Connection, Belonging, Retention



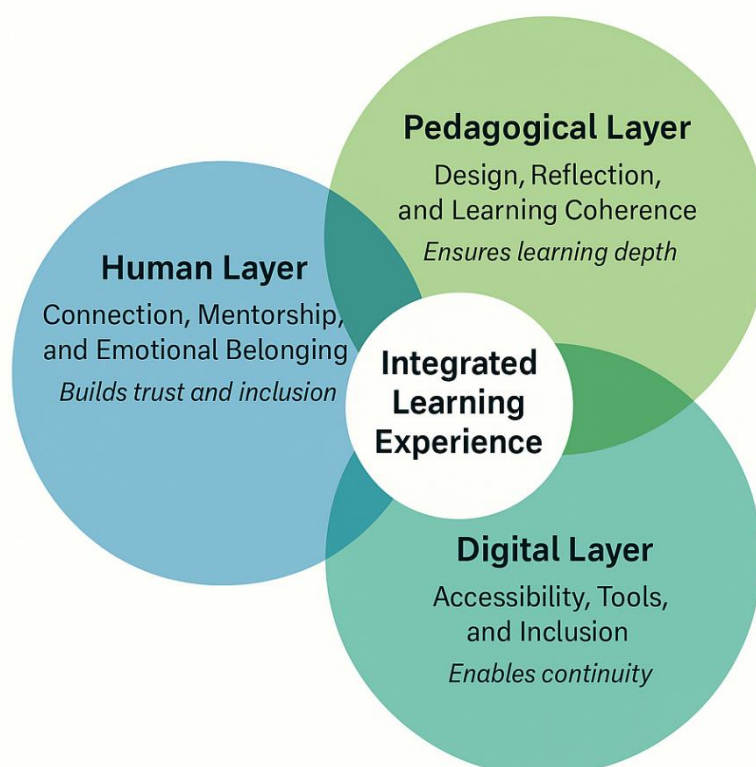
6.6 Synergistic Function of Enablers

The impact of each enabler is magnified when implemented as part of a coordinated integration strategy. For instance, pre-arrival orientation lays the foundation for trust, structured mentorship maintains engagement, and social connection mechanisms ensure emotional continuity. Digital

inclusion and coherent task design then serve as the infrastructural supports binding these human processes together.

The evidence thus points toward an ecosystemic model of integration, where success depends not on isolated interventions but on the interplay of social, cognitive, and technological dimensions.

Diagram 3: Ecosystem Model of Integration Enablers – Human, Digital, Pedagogical Layers



These enablers form the empirical and conceptual bridge between *identifying challenges* (Section 3) and *designing interventions* (Section 5). The next section, Blended Activities that Support Integration, operationalises these principles into concrete actions, offering examples of adaptable, evidence-based activities deployable before, during, and after mobility periods across European VET contexts.

7 Blended Activities that Support Integration

7.1 Overview

Blended activities constitute the *operational mechanisms* through which integration principles are enacted in mobility programmes. They translate abstract enablers - such as mentorship, coherence, and social connection — into tangible learning practices spanning the full apprenticeship lifecycle: *before, during, and after* mobility.

The activities identified in this section are drawn from empirical data collected by OTI Group in Cyprus (2025) and validated through cross-analysis of parallel WP2 frameworks (*Blended Mobility, Capacity Building, Qualifications*). They are designed to be adaptable, scalable, and aligned with Erasmus+ quality standards for inclusion, digital readiness, and sustainable mobility.

Table 10: Overview of Blended Integration Activities by Phase and Learning Outcome

Mobility Phase	Activity Type	Mode (Online / Hybrid / Physical)	Learning / Integration Outcome	Suggested Tools / Platforms
Before Mobility	Orientation Webinar (language, expectations, logistics).	Online	Builds emotional readiness and clear understanding of host culture and roles.	Zoom, Mentimeter, Canva.
	Cultural Icebreaker or Virtual Tour.	Online	Enhances cultural curiosity and reduces anxiety about new environment.	Padlet, YouTube, Google Earth.
	Digital Peer Introduction (buddy match).	Online / Hybrid	Establishes early peer networks and trust.	WhatsApp, Teams, Discord.
	Language Micro-Course.	Online	Strengthens communication and confidence.	Duolingo, Quizlet, Kahoot.
During Mobility	Weekly Hybrid Mentor Check-Ins.	Hybrid	Maintains learning continuity and emotional support.	Teams, Google Meet.
	Collaborative Group Project.	Hybrid	Builds teamwork and intercultural problem-solving skills.	Trello, Miro, Google Docs.
	Reflection Journal (digital).	Online / Hybrid	Reinforces metacognitive awareness and integration progress tracking.	Notion, Padlet, Google Forms.

	Workplace Challenge Task.	Physical	Promotes practical application of knowledge in authentic contexts.	On-site supervision, printed checklist.
After Mobility	Virtual Debrief / Feedback Session.	Online	Consolidates learning and provides closure and recognition.	Zoom, Mentimeter, Forms.
	Portfolio Compilation.	Online	Enables long-term visibility of acquired competences.	Europass ePortfolio, Canva.
	Alumni Networking Event.	Online / Physical	Encourages ongoing engagement and peer mentoring post-mobility.	LinkedIn, Teams, WhatsApp group.

Each activity model integrates:

- A **pedagogical purpose** (why it matters);
- **Digital and social tools** to support implementation;
- **Expected outcomes** related to integration, belonging, and professional development; and
- **Assessment or reflection mechanisms** to ensure continuity and accountability.

7.2 Before Mobility: Orientation, Familiarisation, and Emotional Readiness

Findings from the behavioural simulations conducted by project partners highlighted that most integration challenges originate in the pre-mobility phase. In several scenarios, insufficient preparation, unclear expectations and limited communication between stakeholders created difficulties once the apprentice arrived in the host country. These observations confirm that effective preparation is essential not only for logistical arrangements but also for emotional readiness, role clarity and early communication between apprentices, host organisations and coordinating actors.

Objective:

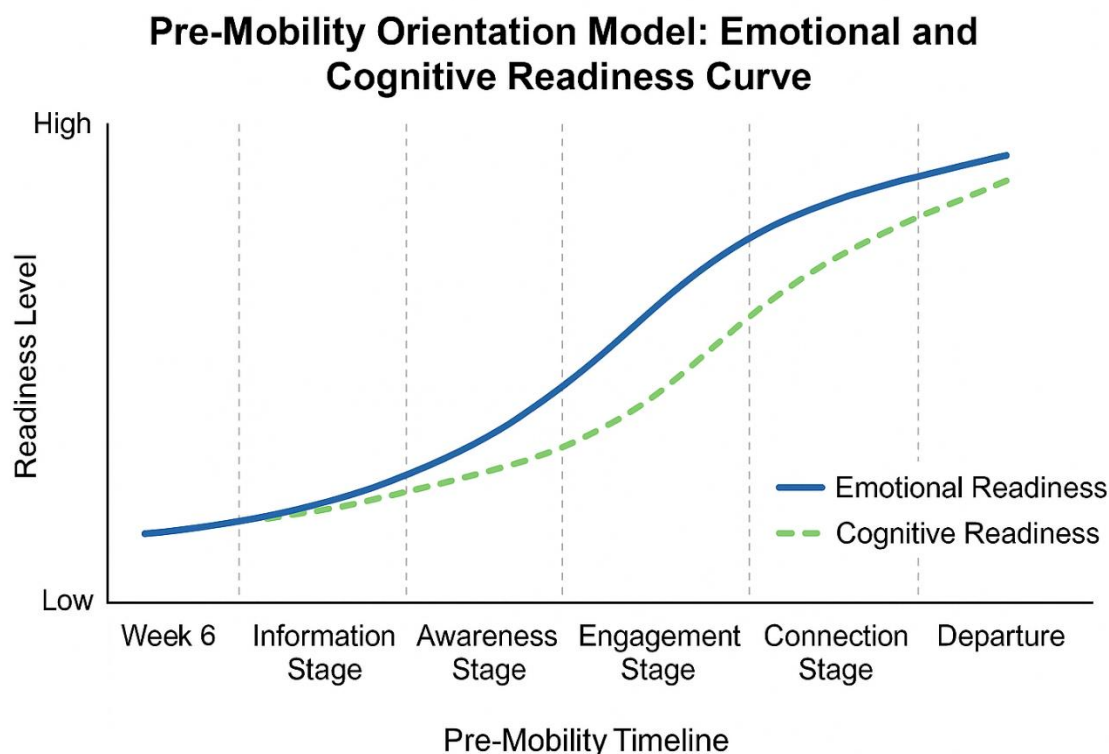
To reduce uncertainty, build initial connections, and establish a shared cultural and operational foundation prior to departure.

Key Activities:

1. **Orientation Webinars** – Conducted via *Zoom* or *Microsoft Teams*, these synchronous sessions provide essential information about the host country, accommodation, logistics, and workplace culture. Facilitated by both the sending VET provider and host organisation, they serve to align expectations and clarify administrative procedures.

- *Pedagogical value:* Reduces anxiety, builds trust, and promotes self-efficacy through early engagement.
 - *Tools:* Zoom, Google Slides, Jamboard, Canva.
2. **Cultural Briefings and Language Micro-Modules** – Delivered asynchronously via *Padlet* or *Moodle*, these include short cultural quizzes, local language basics, and visual guides on etiquette and workplace norms.
- *Pedagogical value:* Strengthens intercultural competence and communicative confidence, aligning with Byram’s (1997) *Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence*.
 - *Tools:* Padlet, Kahoot, YouTube playlists, Canva infographics.
3. **Digital Icebreakers** – Informal “getting to know you” sessions connecting apprentices, mentors, and peers before mobility. These may include photo introductions, short self-presentations, or collaborative online games.
- *Pedagogical value:* Initiates the formation of social presence, a critical predictor of belonging in virtual communities (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).
 - *Tools:* Mentimeter, Miro, Kahoot, WhatsApp group creation.
4. **Host Virtual Tour and Role Presentation** – Host organisations can provide short pre-recorded or live virtual tours of the workplace, introducing key staff and daily routines.
- *Pedagogical value:* Establishes context familiarity and anticipatory confidence, particularly effective for apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - *Tools:* Smartphone video, YouTube unlisted links, virtual whiteboards.

Figure 13: Pre-Mobility Orientation Model – Emotional and Cognitive Readiness Curve



7.3 During Mobility: Continuity, Reflection, and Connection

Findings from the behavioural simulations conducted by project partners highlighted that most integration challenges originate in the pre-mobility phase. In several scenarios, insufficient preparation, unclear expectations and limited communication between stakeholders created difficulties once the apprentice arrived in the host country. These observations confirm that effective preparation is essential not only for logistical arrangements but also for emotional readiness, role clarity and early communication between apprentices, host organisations and coordinating actors.

Objective:

To maintain engagement, ensure ongoing support, and enable reflective integration of digital and physical learning experiences.

Key Activities:

1. **Online Reflection Journals** – Apprentices maintain weekly digital journals or vlogs documenting their experiences, challenges, and learning progress. Mentors and coordinators provide asynchronous feedback.
 - *Pedagogical value:* Encourages metacognition and reflexive learning (Kolb, 1984); strengthens the apprentice–mentor dialogue.
 - *Tools:* Google Docs, Padlet, Notion, WordPress, or institution-hosted LMS.

2. **Hybrid Team Check-Ins** – Regular virtual meetings involving apprentices, mentors, and VET coordinators, held concurrently with on-site mentoring sessions.
 - *Pedagogical value:* Reinforces *teaching presence* and accountability; bridges communication between digital and physical spheres.
 - *Tools:* Microsoft Teams, Zoom, shared dashboards (Trello, Miro).
3. **Peer Exchange Circles** – Small group sessions connecting apprentices hosted in different companies or regions. These function as digital peer-learning communities, promoting social and emotional integration.
 - *Pedagogical value:* Fosters *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991); mitigates isolation by sustaining shared reflection.
 - *Tools:* Slack channels, Discord groups, WhatsApp.
4. **On-Site and Online Coherence Projects** – Apprentices complete integrated tasks linking remote learning to hands-on practice. For example, hospitality apprentices may design digital promotional materials while applying customer service techniques in person.
 - *Pedagogical value:* Realises *constructive alignment* (Biggs, 1996); demonstrates skill transfer between modalities.
 - *Tools:* Canva, Google Workspace, GitHub (for ICT), or Padlet portfolios.
5. **Emotional Wellbeing Check-Ins** – Optional but highly recommended short surveys or one-on-one chats to identify stress, adaptation issues, or digital fatigue.
 - *Pedagogical value:* Addresses psychosocial sustainability of mobility; aligns with Erasmus+ inclusion principles.
 - *Tools:* Google Forms, Mentimeter polls, WhatsApp voice messages.

Table 11: During Mobility Activity Matrix – Stakeholder Roles and Interaction Frequency

Interaction Type	Stakeholders Involved	Frequency / Timing	Purpose / Objective	Preferred Mode / Tool
Mentorship Check-In	Apprentice ↔ Host Mentor	Weekly (30–45 min)	Monitor adaptation, discuss progress, and resolve practical or social issues.	Teams, WhatsApp, In-person.
Apprentice Reflection Submission	Apprentice ↔ VET Trainer	Biweekly	Document learning experiences; encourage metacognition and self-evaluation.	Google Forms, Padlet, Notion.
Coordinator Progress Review	Host Mentor ↔ Mobility Coordinator	Monthly	Ensure alignment between training plan and learning objectives;	Email summary +

			troubleshoot emerging issues.	hybrid meeting.
Peer Exchange / Group Session	Apprentices (in same or different hosts)	Every 2 weeks	Build social belonging and exchange cross-cultural experiences.	Zoom, Discord, WhatsApp group.
Technical / Task Guidance	Apprentice ↔ Technical Supervisor	As needed (on-demand)	Clarify technical skills or workplace tasks; ensure safety and task precision.	In-person, LMS, Teams chat.
Wellbeing and Inclusion Check	Coordinator ↔ Apprentice	Mid-phase and end-phase	Identify stress, burnout, or social isolation; provide wellbeing resources.	Teams video call, Email.
Assessment Feedback Meeting	VET Trainer ↔ Host Mentor ↔ Apprentice	Midpoint and final week	Joint evaluation of progress, skill development, and integration.	Hybrid meeting, shared documents.
Alumni / Peer Mentoring Interaction	Apprentice ↔ Former Mobility Participant	Optional (once per month)	Encourage continuity of experience and mutual support.	WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Teams.

Empirical**Evidence:**

Apprentices interviewed in several European mobility contexts described these mechanisms as “the difference between feeling monitored and feeling supported.” Regular digital touchpoints sustained motivation, while reflective journals enhanced learners’ ability to connect theory, emotion, and practice.

7.4 After Mobility: Consolidation, Evaluation, and Reintegration

Validation simulations conducted by the project partners highlighted that the post-mobility phase is often underdeveloped in practice. In many cases, apprentices complete their mobility period and return home without structured opportunities to reflect on their experiences or share lessons learned. The simulations demonstrated that systematic post-mobility reflection is essential for consolidating learning outcomes, identifying areas for improvement and strengthening future mobility programmes.

Objective:

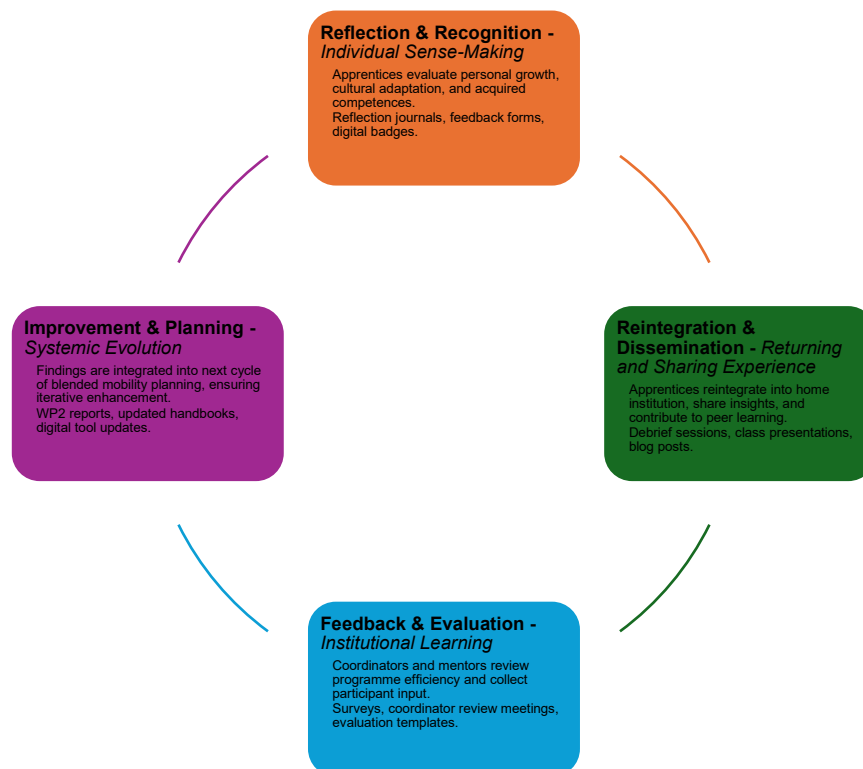
To preserve learning outcomes, ensure recognition, and maintain post-return professional engagement.

Key Activities:

1. **Virtual Debrief Sessions** – Conducted within one week of return, these structured meetings allow apprentices to share experiences, reflect on challenges, and identify transferable skills.

- *Pedagogical value:* Facilitates transition from experience to knowledge (reflection stage of Kolb's cycle); supports closure and recognition.
 - *Tools:* Zoom breakout rooms, Mentimeter for shared reflections.
2. **Feedback Loops and Collaborative Evaluation** – Host companies, mentors, and VET coordinators jointly evaluate apprentice performance using shared online forms. Apprentices provide reciprocal feedback on host practices and blended structures.
- *Pedagogical value:* Promotes *dialogic assessment* (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and continuous quality improvement.
 - *Tools:* Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, shared document dashboards.
3. **Online Portfolio Submission and Digital Credentials** – Apprentices compile digital evidence of their work — reports, media, certificates — and submit via shared cloud platforms. Integration with **Europass** or **Open Badge** systems ensures formal recognition of blended achievements.
- *Pedagogical value:* Reinforces self-assessment, reflection, and visibility of learning outcomes in European qualification frameworks.
 - *Tools:* Europass ePortfolio, Open Badge Factory, Google Drive, Canva for visual design.
4. **Post-Mobility Networking and Alumni Communities** – Apprentices are invited to join online alumni networks where they can mentor future participants or access job-related opportunities.
- *Pedagogical value:* Extends integration beyond the mobility period, creating sustained professional identity and social capital.
 - *Tools:* LinkedIn groups, Facebook communities, Slack channels.

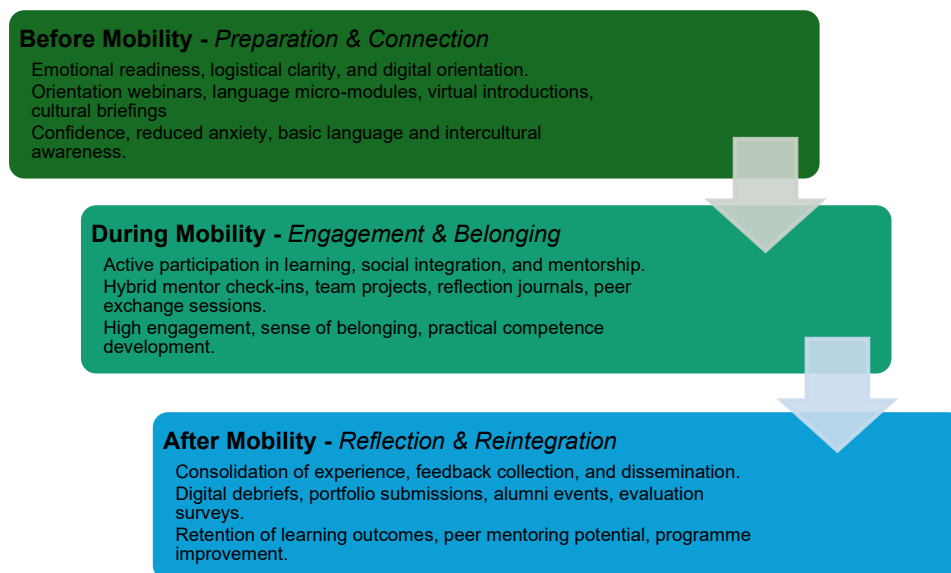
Figure 14: Post-Mobility Reintegration and Feedback Loop Model



7.5 Pedagogical Integration Across Phases

These activities form a continuous pedagogical chain linking pre-mobility readiness, in-mobility engagement, and post-mobility reflection. When viewed holistically, they constitute an *Integration Continuum* — a structured pathway ensuring that apprentices remain cognitively and emotionally connected to their learning journey throughout the entire lifecycle of blended mobility.

This continuum reinforces Erasmus+ commitments to quality assurance, inclusion, and sustainability. It also supports the WP2 objective of transforming blended mobility from a logistical necessity into a pedagogically enriched opportunity for deeper integration and lifelong learning.

Diagram 4: Blended Integration Continuum – Before, During, and After Mobility Phases

The next section — **6. Roles and Responsibilities** — will translate these activity models into a governance structure, defining the specific functions and accountability mechanisms of apprentices, host organisations, VET providers, and coordinators within an integrated blended mobility ecosystem.

8 Roles and Responsibilities

8.1 Overview

Effective integration in blended apprenticeship mobility depends on the collective functioning of an ecosystem of actors — each with distinct yet complementary responsibilities. Findings from the Cyprus interviews, supported by comparative evidence from the *Blended Mobility*, *Capacity Building*, and *Qualifications* frameworks, reveal that integration outcomes correlate strongly with the clarity, coordination, and reciprocity of stakeholder roles.

The behavioural simulations conducted during the validation phase confirmed that successful integration depends heavily on clear role distribution among stakeholders involved in apprenticeship mobility. When responsibilities are unclear, coordination difficulties and communication delays may occur, particularly during unexpected situations. The simulations highlighted the importance of clearly defining the responsibilities of VET providers, host organisations, intermediary actors and mentors in order to ensure effective cooperation and timely support for apprentices.

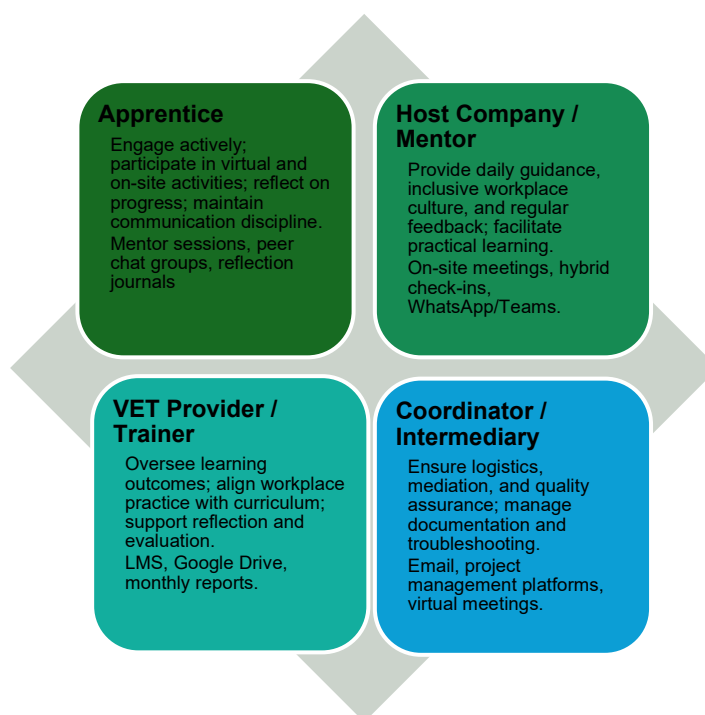
Validation simulations also indicated that intermediary organisations frequently act as coordination hubs between stakeholders. For this reason, clear communication channels and shared responsibilities are essential to prevent excessive operational pressure on a single coordinating actor.

The framework thus conceptualises integration as a distributed process, where agency and accountability are shared among four primary actors:

1. The **Apprentice**, as active learner and co-designer of their integration pathway;
2. The **Host Company**, as the immediate social and professional environment enabling belonging;
3. The **VET Provider**, as the institutional guarantor of learning continuity and inclusion; and
4. The **Coordinator or Intermediary**, as the connective agent ensuring systemic alignment and quality assurance.

Each actor contributes to the *Integration Continuum* (see Figure 15), ensuring coherence between digital and physical phases and between learning and working spaces.

Figure 15: Stakeholder Interaction Model in Blended Mobility – A Four-Actor Integration System



8.2 The Apprentice

Core

Function:

To engage proactively with the blended apprenticeship process, demonstrating agency, adaptability, and reflective awareness.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Pre-Mobility Preparation:**
Complete pre-arrival orientations, cultural briefings, and language tasks to ensure readiness for intercultural adaptation. Apprentices interviewed in several European mobility contexts highlighted that virtual preparation directly improved confidence and early integration.
- **Active Engagement During Mobility:**
Participate consistently in both on-site and digital components, maintaining open communication with mentors and coordinators.
- **Reflective Practice:**
Maintain learning journals, digital portfolios, and feedback submissions to consolidate experiential learning.
- **Peer and Community Participation:**
Engage with online peer circles and buddy systems to foster collective belonging and exchange of experience.

Ethical

Dimension:

Apprentices should recognise that integration is a reciprocal process — not passive adaptation but

active contribution to the intercultural learning community. This aligns with *Transformative Learning Theory* (Mezirow, 1997), which frames agency as central to meaningful change.

Table 12: Apprentice Responsibilities by Phase – Pre, During, Post Mobility

Responsibility Area	Phase	Apprentice Responsibilities
Preparation and Orientation	Pre-Mobility	- Attend all orientation webinars and information sessions.- Review cultural, logistical, and workplace materials provided by VET and host.- Complete digital literacy and language preparation modules.- Establish communication channels with mentor and coordinator.
Communication and Engagement	During Mobility	- Maintain regular contact with host mentor and coordinator.- Participate in scheduled check-ins and group sessions.- Use designated communication tools responsibly (Teams, WhatsApp, email).- Inform mentors promptly of any issues affecting work or wellbeing.
Learning and Skill Development	During Mobility	- Apply learning objectives in workplace context.- Take initiative in assigned tasks and seek feedback.- Document learning outcomes through reflection logs and digital portfolios.- Engage in collaborative problem-solving and peer support.
Reflection and Documentation	Post-Mobility	- Complete reflection report and self-assessment form.- Participate in virtual debrief sessions.- Finalise digital portfolio (Europass / Open Badge).- Share experiences with peers or next cohort to contribute to programme improvement.
Social and Cultural Participation	All Phases	- Respect host country culture and organisational norms.- Demonstrate openness, adaptability, and intercultural awareness.- Uphold Erasmus+ values of inclusion, equity, and cooperation.
Digital Ethics and Conduct	All Phases	- Use digital tools ethically and responsibly.- Protect privacy and data integrity during online collaboration.- Report inappropriate digital behaviour to mentors or coordinators.

8.3 The Host Company

Core Function:

To provide a structured, inclusive, and pedagogically informed environment that supports both professional and socio-emotional integration.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Structured Mentorship:**
Assign a dedicated mentor or supervisor trained in blended communication practices and intercultural sensitivity.
- **Inclusive Work Environment:**
Promote equity, respect, and psychological safety by acknowledging cultural diversity and offering early-stage accommodation support where possible.
- **Digital Facilitation:**
Ensure access to online communication tools, workspace connectivity, and inclusion in hybrid meetings or virtual tasks.
- **Continuous Feedback:**
Participate in mid-term and final evaluation processes using shared digital templates to ensure transparency and accountability.

Cyprus-based host organisations reported that early relationship-building, pre-arrival contact, and simple digital mentoring (e.g., WhatsApp communication) were decisive in preventing isolation and turnover.

Institutional**Alignment:**

Host responsibilities resonate with the *European Quality Charter for Mobility* (EC, 2006), which emphasises preparation, mentoring, and recognition as prerequisites for high-quality mobility experiences.

Figure 16: Host Mentorship Cycle – Orientation, Guidance, Feedback, Reflection



8.4 The VET Provider

Core

Function:

To act as the pedagogical anchor of the mobility process, ensuring curricular alignment, learner protection, and the integration of experiential outcomes into formal qualifications.

Key Responsibilities:

- Design and Monitoring:**
Embed blended mobility components into curricula using constructive alignment principles. Establish monitoring systems (e.g., reflection journals, digital attendance logs) to track learner progress.
- Learner Support:**
Provide psychosocial and academic support before, during, and after mobility — including guidance counselling and conflict resolution when necessary.
- Competence Validation:**
Map learning outcomes to the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)** and ensure that blended learning achievements are appropriately credited or certified.
- Capacity Building:**
Train teaching staff in digital pedagogy, intercultural mentoring, and inclusive communication, thus reinforcing institutional readiness.

Evidence from the *Capacity Building* interviews highlighted that VET institutions often act as the **stabilising centre** of the mobility ecosystem, mediating between host expectations and learner capacities. When VET providers maintain continuity and reflection mechanisms, apprentices experience stronger identity formation and academic integration.

Table 13: VET Provider Functions in the Integration Lifecycle

Mobility Phase	Core Function	Operational Activities	Expected Outputs / Indicators
Pre-Mobility	<i>Preparation & Coordination</i>	- Organise orientation webinars and pre-mobility training. - Provide apprentices with cultural and language preparation materials. - Coordinate communication between host companies and apprentices. - Verify learning objectives and mobility agreements.	- Completed mobility agreements. - Orientation attendance logs. - Pre-mobility readiness assessment forms.
During Mobility	<i>Pedagogical Oversight & Monitoring</i>	- Maintain contact with mentors and coordinators. - Monitor progress through digital journals and periodic reports. - Provide academic support and troubleshooting assistance. - Ensure learning activities remain aligned with programme outcomes.	- Monthly mentor updates. - Learning progress reports. - Documentation of interventions/resolutions.
During Mobility	<i>Psychosocial Support</i>	- Offer pastoral and emotional support through online meetings. - Address wellbeing and inclusion concerns. - Facilitate peer community or alumni interaction for support.	- Wellbeing check records. - Feedback logs. - Positive engagement metrics.
Post-Mobility	<i>Assessment & Reintegration</i>	- Collect final evaluations from mentors and apprentices. - Conduct debrief sessions and disseminate learning outcomes. - Update Europass portfolios and issue certificates of participation. - Analyse feedback to refine training modules.	- Completed evaluations and reflection forms. - Portfolio evidence of learning outcomes. - Integration report for WP2 deliverables.
Cross-Phase	<i>Quality Assurance & Policy Feedback</i>	- Standardise documentation, templates, and feedback loops. - Contribute to Erasmus+ reporting and continuous improvement	- Quality monitoring framework. - WP2 contribution reports. - Updated internal policy documents.

		processes.- Facilitate institutional learning workshops.	
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8.5 The Coordinator or Intermediary

Core

Function:

To ensure strategic coherence, logistical management, and continuous quality assurance across sending and hosting entities.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Expectation Alignment:**
Facilitate transparent communication among all partners before mobility begins — defining learning objectives, responsibilities, and digital tools to be used.
- **Operational Management:**
Handle administrative procedures (contracts, insurance, documentation) while ensuring ethical and GDPR-compliant data management.
- **Crisis and Risk Mitigation:**
Serve as the first point of contact for problem-solving during remote or on-site phases, providing support for issues such as housing, communication breakdown, or disengagement.
- **Evaluation and Reporting:**
Gather feedback, monitor learning evidence, and contribute to project-level evaluation and dissemination.

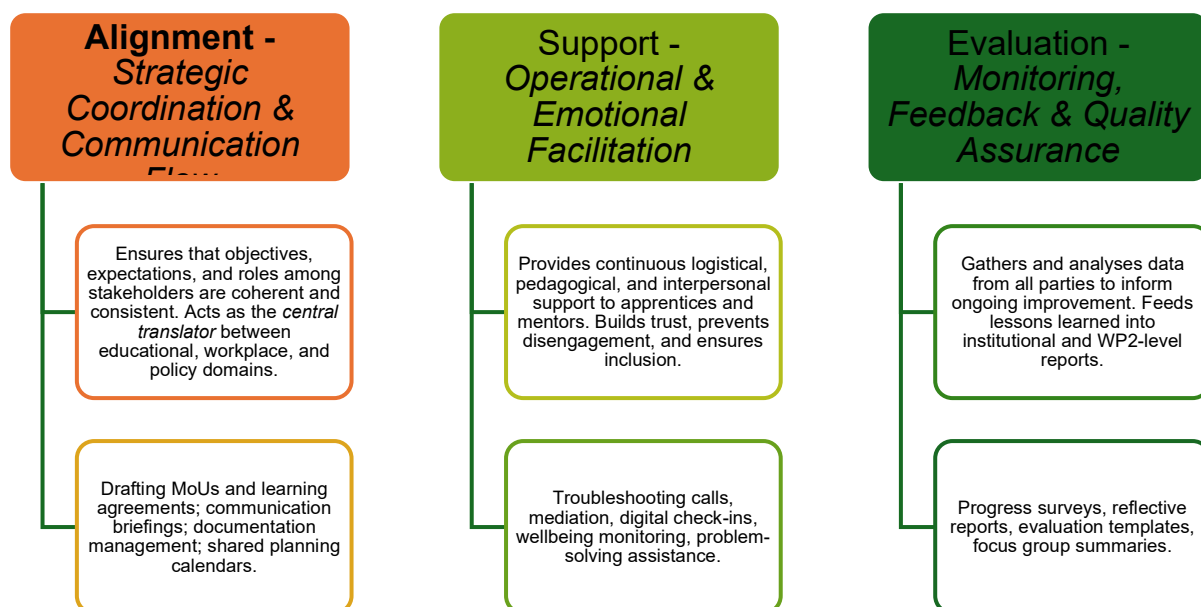
Interviewees in several European mobility contexts described coordinators as the “architects of coherence” — those who maintain alignment between pedagogical intent, digital practice, and interpersonal trust. The most successful intermediaries demonstrated not only organisational skill but emotional intelligence and adaptability, acting as both administrators and cultural mediators.

Policy

Relevance:

This role directly supports the *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*’s emphasis on the “intermediary function” in blended mobility schemes, ensuring inclusiveness, transparency, and cross-border coordination.

Figure 17: Coordinator Function Map – Alignment, Support, Evaluation

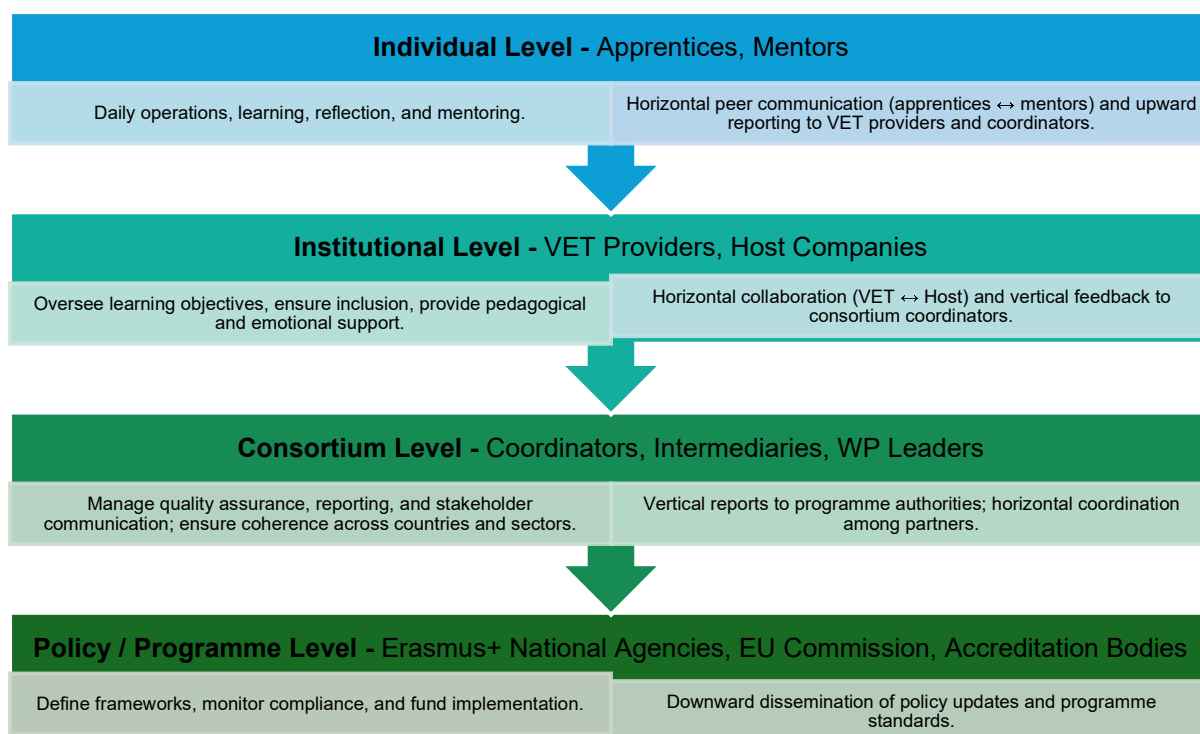


8.6 Systemic Interdependence

Integration does not emerge from isolated stakeholder performance but from the synchronisation of their roles within a shared framework. The empirical evidence underscores that apprentices thrive when all actors maintain communication continuity, shared values, and mutual accountability.

This systemic interdependence can be visualised as a multi-layered coordination matrix, where:

- The *Apprentice* provides agency and feedback;
- The *Host Company* ensures mentorship and context;
- The *VET Provider* safeguards pedagogical continuity; and
- The *Coordinator* sustains the relational infrastructure connecting all layers.

Diagram 5: Multi-Layer Coordination Matrix – Actors, Responsibilities, and Communication Flows

8.7 Ethical and Quality Assurance Considerations

All stakeholders share a collective duty to uphold ethical principles of inclusion, transparency, and learner protection. This includes informed consent, data privacy, equitable treatment, and respect for diversity.

The application of blended mobility must thus conform to the *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)*, ensuring that integration is monitored not only as a pedagogical outcome but as a social quality indicator.

The following section, 7. Recommendations, synthesises these distributed roles into targeted action proposals for VET providers, host companies, coordinators, and policymakers — translating the theoretical model into policy and operational guidance for implementation at both institutional and systemic levels.

9 Recommendations

9.1 Overview

The findings presented in previous sections demonstrate that successful integration in blended apprenticeship mobility requires intentional design, structured mentorship, and institutional coordination. Integration is not a spontaneous by-product of mobility—it is a process that must be planned, supported, and evaluated across social, pedagogical, and digital dimensions.

The following recommendations are derived from empirical data collected by OTI Group in several European mobility contexts, cross-validated with European best practices, and aligned with the Erasmus+ objectives of inclusion, digital readiness, and quality assurance. They are structured by stakeholder level and framed as actionable interventions that can be embedded in programme design and institutional policy.

Table 14: Overview of Recommendations by Stakeholder Group and Implementation Horizon

Stakeholder Group	Recommendation	Implementation Horizon	Intended Impact
VET Providers	Develop standardised blended mobility orientation modules combining language, cultural, and digital readiness training.	Short-term (within 6–12 months)	Enhanced learner preparedness and reduced anxiety before mobility.
	Introduce digital reflection tools for continuous progress monitoring (e.g., journals, dashboards).	Medium-term (1–2 years)	Stronger learning continuity and metacognitive engagement.
	Establish joint evaluation frameworks with host companies for shared outcome assessment.	Long-term (3+ years)	Institutionalised collaboration and data-driven improvement.
Host Companies	Designate a Blended Mobility Mentor responsible for integration and communication with VET coordinators.	Short-term	Structured support and accountability for apprentices.
	Implement digital onboarding templates and hybrid mentoring guidelines.	Medium-term	Increased efficiency and inclusion in workplace adaptation.
	Participate in cross-sectoral mentor training initiatives (with VET providers).	Long-term	Higher mentorship quality and standardisation of best practices.

Coordinators / Intermediaries	Develop a toolkit of communication and crisis-handling protocols for mobility management.	Short-term	Improved responsiveness and quality assurance during mobility.
	Introduce shared project management systems for stakeholder reporting and data collection.	Medium-term	Reduced fragmentation and improved collaboration transparency.
	Conduct annual consortium evaluation cycles integrating apprentice and mentor feedback.	Long-term	Continuous learning culture and evidence-based improvement.
Policy Programme Level	Fund digital inclusion measures (e.g., equipment support, Wi-Fi grants) for low-access learners.	Short-term	More equitable participation and social inclusion.
	Encourage integration quality indicators in Erasmus+ assessment criteria (e.g., mentorship, feedback frequency).	Medium-term	Incentivised excellence and accountability across projects.
	Promote Europe-wide mobility ecosystems linking education, employment, and innovation frameworks.	Long-term	Systemic resilience and scalability of blended mobility models.

9.2 Recommendations for VET Providers

VET institutions function as the pedagogical and ethical custodians of mobility, ensuring that experiential learning translates into recognised qualifications and inclusive practice.

1. Institutionalise Blended Mobility as a Pedagogical Strategy

- Integrate blended mobility modules within curricula, not as exceptions but as core learning pathways.
- Apply *constructive alignment* (Biggs 1996) to connect digital preparation, on-site learning, and post-mobility reflection to formal learning outcomes and EQF levels.

2. Establish Digital Readiness and Inclusion Frameworks

- Conduct annual *digital inclusion audits* assessing staff and student access, literacy, and support needs.

- Provide targeted micro-trainings in blended pedagogy, intercultural mentoring, and ethical digital engagement.
- Ensure that online environments meet *Universal Design for Learning* (UDL) accessibility standards.

3. Implement Structured Reflection and Support Mechanisms

- Require apprentices to maintain online learning journals with mentor feedback.
- Incorporate reflective seminars (virtual or hybrid) at each phase of the mobility lifecycle.

4. Strengthen Institutional Partnerships

- Develop Memoranda of Understanding with host organisations defining integration standards, mentor responsibilities, and feedback protocols.
- Participate in Erasmus+ Communities of Practice to exchange methodologies and evaluation instruments.

Figure 18: VET Provider Integration Cycle – Curriculum, Support, Reflection, Recognition



9.3 Recommendations for Host Companies

Host companies are the primary social environment for apprentices and thus bear direct responsibility for social belonging, workplace adaptation, and mentorship quality.

1. Designate a “Blended Mobility Mentor”

- Assign a dedicated staff member trained in intercultural communication and digital mentoring.
- Mentors should conduct pre-arrival introductions, weekly check-ins, and post-placement evaluations.

2. Develop Structured Onboarding and Inclusion Toolkits

- Create concise digital orientation packages (videos, infographics, simple guides) explaining organisational culture, daily routines, and safety rules.
- Include accessible language and visuals for non-native speakers.
- Encourage apprentices to contribute content (e.g., “apprentice welcome video”) for future cohorts.

3. Foster a Culture of Everyday Inclusion

- Provide opportunities for apprentices to participate in team meetings, social events, and cross-departmental projects.
- Recognise cultural holidays or customs of apprentices to strengthen belonging.
- Apply *psychological safety* principles (Edmondson 1999) to empower apprentices to express uncertainty or seek help without fear.

4. Invest in Digital Infrastructure and Flexibility

- Ensure that hybrid communication tools (Teams, Zoom, shared drives) are accessible and secure.
- Support short online work segments (e.g., remote research, digital tasks) when physical attendance is not possible, ensuring continuity rather than interruption.

5. Evaluate Integration as a KPI

- Include apprentice feedback and mentor reflections in internal quality assessments.
- Treat integration outcomes as indicators of organisational social responsibility.

Table 15: Host Company Responsibilities and Success Indicators

Responsibility Area	Key Actions / Expected Practices	Success Indicators / Evidence of Achievement
1. Orientation and Onboarding	Provide structured workplace induction covering health, safety, culture, and expectations; assign a mentor before arrival.	Orientation checklist completed; apprentice self-assessment shows understanding of workplace rules; early engagement feedback positive.
2. Mentorship and Supervision	Designate a qualified mentor to conduct regular meetings (minimum weekly); ensure hybrid availability for remote communication.	Documented mentor-apprentice logs; stable frequency of mentor contact; positive mid-mobility satisfaction scores.

3. Communication and Inclusion	Maintain open communication with apprentices, coordinators, and VET providers; use inclusive language and respect intercultural differences.	Recorded communication plans; absence of unresolved conflict cases; apprentice reports of belonging $\geq 80\%$ satisfaction.
4. Learning Support and Task Alignment	Provide meaningful, skills-related tasks aligned with training objectives; ensure tasks evolve with apprentice competence.	Task alignment matrix shared with VET provider; completion of learning goals verified in evaluation forms.
5. Digital Engagement and Tools	Support digital participation (hybrid meetings, reflection tools); provide access to Wi-Fi, platforms, and digital guidance.	Verified tool access; participation in digital mentoring sessions; apprentice reflection entries $>80\%$ completion.
6. Feedback and Evaluation	Offer constructive written or verbal feedback at least twice during mobility (mid-term and final).	Completed evaluation forms; improved apprentice performance in final review; evidence of feedback responsiveness.
7. Wellbeing and Support	Monitor apprentice wellbeing; provide support or mediation when challenges arise; maintain inclusive working conditions.	Mentorship notes indicate early intervention; reduced dropout or reassignment rates; positive wellbeing feedback.
8. Recognition and Closure	Conduct end-of-mobility reflection and recognition meeting; provide certificate or statement of completion.	Certificates issued; completion of reflection log; host endorsement of portfolio achievements.
9. Continuous Improvement	Participate in focus groups or feedback cycles with VET providers and coordinators to refine integration practices.	Host contribution documented in improvement reports; evidence of updated practices in next mobility cycle.

9.4 Recommendations for Coordinators and Intermediaries

Coordinators are the architects of alignment, ensuring that pedagogical, administrative, and human systems function coherently.

1. Develop and Disseminate Standardised Toolkits

- Provide all actors with ready-to-use templates for onboarding, communication plans, and feedback cycles.
- Include step-by-step guides for setting up digital platforms, managing confidentiality, and ensuring GDPR compliance.

2. Formalise Communication Protocols

- Define clear timelines and contact hierarchies for information flow before, during, and after mobility.
- Require that all apprentices have at least one weekly structured communication with a designated contact point (mentor or coordinator).

3. Build Capacity Through Training

- Offer annual *Intermediary Excellence Workshops* for coordinators and mentors, focusing on blended mobility logistics, intercultural adaptation, and ethical practice.
- Encourage peer exchange between sending and hosting coordinators across countries.

4. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Dashboards

- Create digital dashboards to visualise participation, engagement frequency, and feedback results.
- Use these metrics to identify early-warning signs of disconnection or risk of dropout.

5. Promote Emotional Intelligence in Coordination

- Recognise that effective coordination is relational as well as administrative.
- Integrate empathy and active listening into professional development for coordinators.

Figure 19: Coordination Quality Framework – Alignment, Communication, Monitoring, Support



9.5 Recommendations for Policy and Programme Level (Erasmus+/National)

At the systemic level, integration within blended mobility must be supported through policy coherence, funding mechanisms, and quality frameworks that reward inclusion and digital innovation.

1. Fund Digital Preparation and Follow-Up as Core Mobility Components

- Modify funding guidelines to explicitly include pre-departure digital training, online mentorship, and post-mobility reflection sessions as eligible cost categories.
- This ensures that the digital dimension of integration is institutionalised rather than ad-hoc.

2. Promote Inclusion-Focused Project Design

- Require that mobility proposals include accessibility plans addressing language, disability, and socio-economic barriers.
- Embed inclusion metrics (e.g., diversity of participants, digital equity) in Erasmus+ evaluation criteria.

3. Support Mentor Accreditation Systems

- Create EU-recognised *Digital and Intercultural Mentorship Certificates* for staff in VET and host organisations.
- This would professionalise the mentorship function and ensure consistency of quality across borders.

4. Strengthen Transnational Knowledge Exchange

- Fund thematic networks and policy labs dedicated to blended mobility integration, enabling sharing of good practices, digital toolkits, and impact data.
- Encourage collaboration between Erasmus+ National Agencies, Cedefop, and the European Training Foundation (ETF) for data alignment and evaluation.

5. Establish a European Observatory for Blended Mobility Integration

- Collect comparative data on integration outcomes, focusing on inclusion, learner wellbeing, and digital participation.
- Provide open-access dashboards and reports to support evidence-based policymaking and institutional benchmarking.

Table 16: Policy Recommendations Aligned with Erasmus+ Strategic Priorities 2021–2027

Erasmus+ Strategic Priority (2021–2027)	Framework-Derived Policy Recommendation	Implementation Channel / Responsible Actor	Expected Policy Impact
Inclusion & Diversity	Integrate <i>inclusive onboarding</i> and <i>digital buddy systems</i> as standard Erasmus+ mobility	National Agencies; VET Providers; Coordinators.	Broader access to mobility; improved

	requirements to reduce social and cultural isolation.		belonging and equity outcomes.
	Fund targeted <i>digital literacy upskilling</i> for mentors and apprentices from underrepresented backgrounds.	Erasmus+ KA1 & KA2 funding; sector alliances.	Reduced digital inequality and improved participation rates.
Digital Transformation	Adopt <i>blended mobility toolkits</i> (orientation, reflection, feedback templates) across Erasmus+ projects to standardise digital practice.	European Commission; Programme Guide annex updates.	Enhanced digital consistency and interoperability across projects.
	Incentivise <i>cross-sectoral digital mentor training</i> focusing on inclusive hybrid communication.	VET & Higher Education institutions.	Strengthened mentor readiness and communication continuity.
Environment & Sustainability	Encourage <i>hybrid mobility models</i> to reduce travel emissions while maintaining quality intercultural learning.	National Erasmus+ Agencies; Policy clusters.	Lower carbon footprint and scalable green transition in mobility.
	Integrate <i>green competences</i> into apprenticeship learning outcomes and reporting templates.	EU GreenComp Framework; VET curricula.	Systemic alignment with EU Green Deal and sustainability education.
Participation in Democratic Life	Promote <i>peer reflection platforms</i> where apprentices exchange ideas on cultural adaptation and community engagement.	Coordinators; National Agencies; Youth and VET networks.	Increased civic awareness and active citizenship among apprentices.
	Establish <i>stakeholder advisory boards</i> involving apprentices, mentors, and VET staff to co-design integration policy.	Erasmus+ governance bodies; local authorities.	Enhanced participatory governance and co-creation in VET policy.

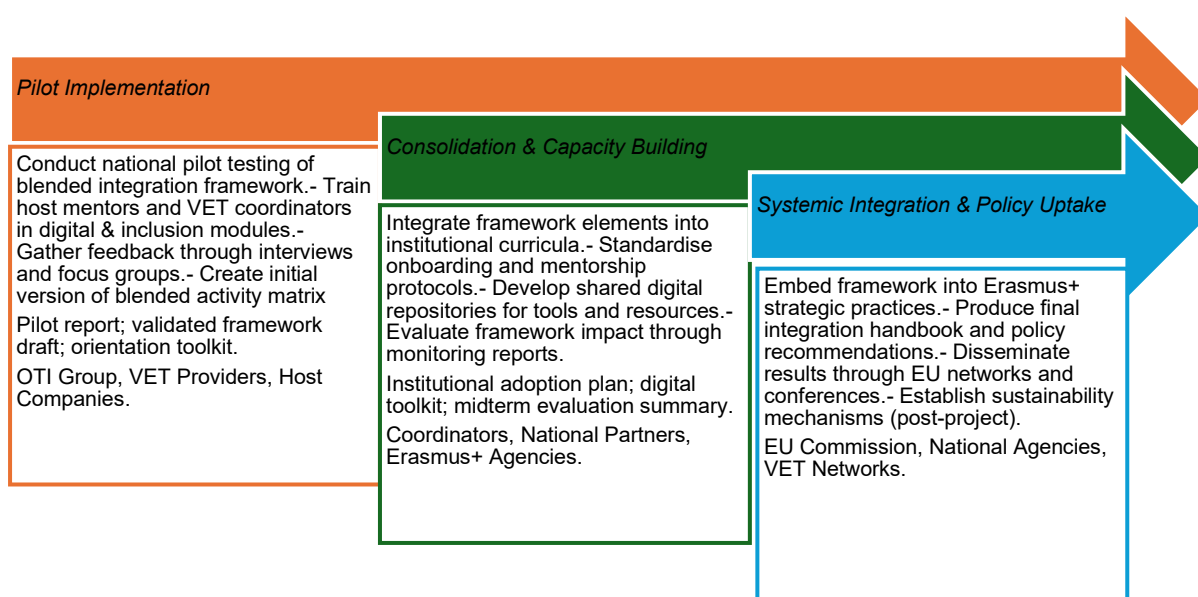
9.6 Implementation Roadmap

To operationalise these recommendations, stakeholders should adopt a phased approach:

Phase	Time Horizon	Core Actions	Expected Output
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Phase 1: Preparation	Months 1–6	Establish mentors, toolkits, and communication protocols	Readiness baseline
Phase 2: Deployment	Months 7–18	Implement digital orientations, hybrid check-ins, evaluation dashboards	Active mobility integration
Phase 3: Consolidation	Months 19–36	Evaluate, accredit mentors, institutionalise practices	Sustainable ecosystem

Figure 20: Three-Phase Implementation Timeline for Blended Integration Framework



9.7 Summary

The convergence of findings from all stakeholder levels confirms that integration in blended mobility is a systemic competence, not a single activity. When properly supported, it produces measurable benefits: reduced dropout rates, improved learner satisfaction, enhanced intercultural competence, and stronger institutional collaboration.

Embedding these recommendations within Erasmus+ and national VET systems will ensure that blended apprenticeship mobility evolves from a reactive post-pandemic adaptation into a mature, inclusive, and high-impact educational paradigm.

The next section, **8. Best Case Scenarios (From Focus Group)**, will translate these recommendations into two practical integration models—visualising how the framework functions when fully implemented in real or simulated European apprenticeship contexts.

10 Best Case Scenarios (From Focus Group)

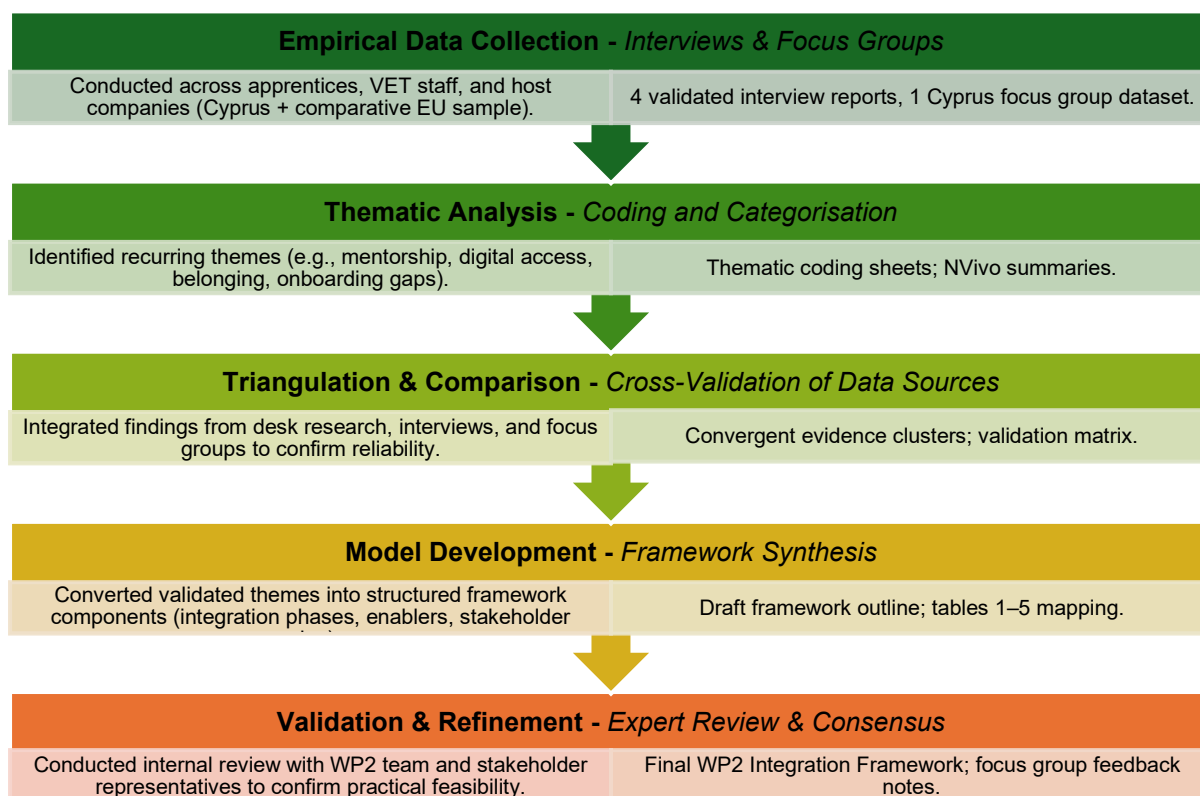
10.1 Overview

To validate the framework and ensure its practical transferability, a **focus group session** was convened in several European mobility contexts with representation from apprentices, VET providers, host companies, and mobility coordinators. Participants collaboratively simulated and refined two “ideal” models of integration in blended mobility, each representing a different structural archetype:

1. The *Sequential Integration Model* — where digital and physical phases occur consecutively with structured transitions; and
2. The *Parallel Integration Model* — where digital and in-person components are interwoven continuously throughout the mobility cycle.

Both models are rooted in the empirical evidence base presented in Sections 3–7 and align with Erasmus+ principles of inclusion, digital competence, and intercultural learning.

Figure 21: Focus Group Validation Process – From Empirical Findings to Integration Models



10.2 Model 1: Sequential Integration Model (“Bridge and Immerse”)

Concept:

This model structures blended apprenticeship mobility as a *temporal bridge* between digital preparation and immersive physical engagement. It emphasises strong pre-departure virtual **orientation** followed by in-country apprenticeship and post-return reflection.

It is especially suited for first-time apprentices, NEETs, or vulnerable learners who benefit from gradual exposure to international environments.

Timeline and Activities

Phase	Mode	Key Activities	Tools	Stakeholders
Pre-Mobility (4–6 weeks)	Digital	- Virtual orientation webinars- Cultural briefings and language micro-sessions- Digital icebreakers and peer networking	Zoom, Padlet, Kahoot, Canva	VET Provider, Host Mentor, Apprentice
During Mobility (6–8 weeks)	In-Person with Hybrid Elements	- Daily workplace immersion- Weekly digital reflection journals- Midpoint hybrid check-in between host and sending organisation	Google Docs, WhatsApp, Teams	Apprentice, Host Mentor, Coordinator
Post-Mobility (2 weeks)	Digital	- Virtual debrief and evaluation- Online portfolio submission- Mentor feedback and recognition (Open Badge, Europass)	Zoom, Europass ePortfolio, Canva	Apprentice, VET Provider, Coordinator

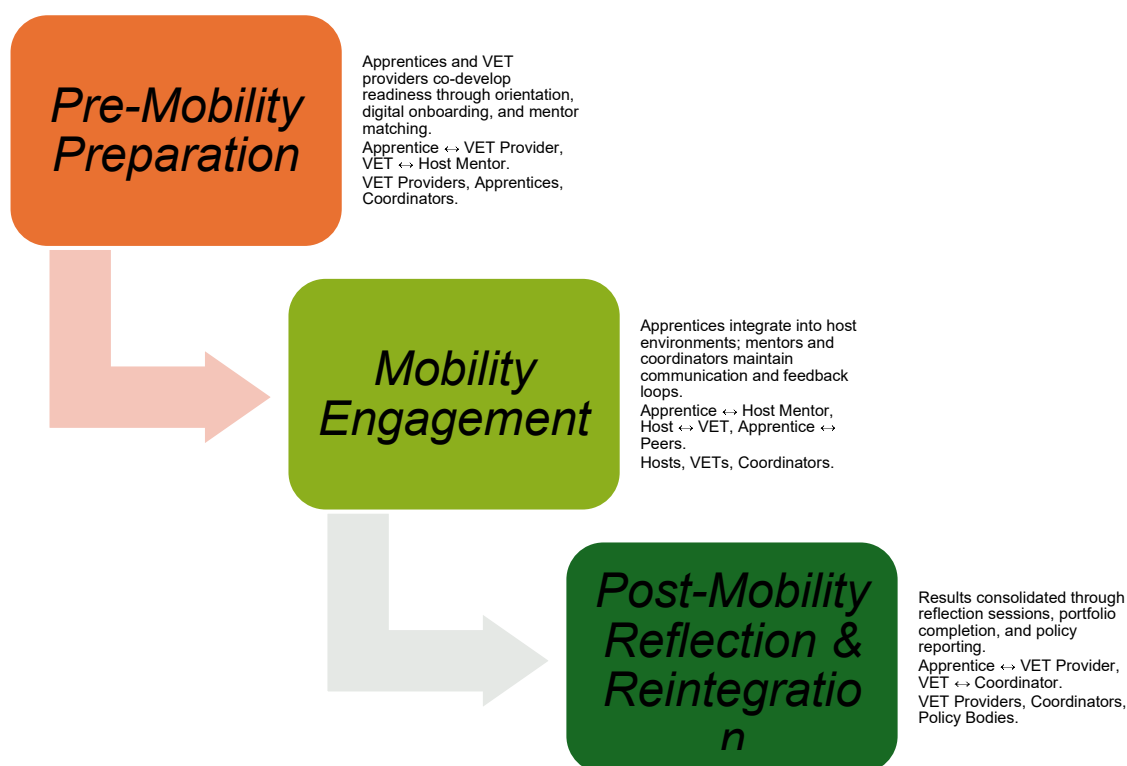
Integration Dynamics

- The *digital phase* acts as a “safe runway,” allowing apprentices to build confidence, linguistic competence, and peer relationships before departure.
- The *physical phase* consolidates this preparation through experiential learning and social belonging.
- The *digital post-phase* ensures reflection, credentialing, and sustainable engagement through alumni networks.

Outcomes and Impact

- **Social Integration:** Apprentices report high belonging and emotional readiness within the first two weeks abroad.
- **Pedagogical Integration:** Learning outcomes demonstrate continuity across phases, verified through reflection journals and mentor evaluations.
- **Institutional Impact:** VET providers and hosts strengthen collaboration through shared digital platforms and evaluation templates.

Empirical Note: Apprentices in the hospitality sector who piloted this model in several European mobility contexts highlighted that “*starting online removed 50% of the anxiety*”, leading to higher motivation and retention.

Figure 22: Sequential Integration Model – Phased Timeline and Interaction Flow

10.3 Model 2: Parallel Integration Model (“Weave and Connect”)

Concept:

This model blends digital and in-person learning concurrently throughout the mobility experience. It is best suited for digitally mature apprenticeships (e.g., ICT, creative industries, or hybrid project-based fields) where online collaboration and physical engagement reinforce each other dynamically.

Here, integration occurs not in stages but as an ongoing, interwoven process of reflection, communication, and co-creation.

Timeline and Activities

Phase	Mode	Key Activities	Tools	Stakeholders
Pre-Mobility (3 weeks)	Digital	- Joint project initiation with host (e.g., design brief or code repository setup)- Mentor introductions and Slack onboarding- Team icebreakers	Slack, GitHub, Trello, Miro	Coordinator, Host, Apprentice
During Mobility (8–10 weeks)	Hybrid	- Continuous hybrid work (e.g., 3 days in office, 2 days remote)- Real-time collaboration with team- Weekly online reflection and peer exchange	Teams, Notion, GitHub, Google Drive	Apprentice, Host Mentor, VET Trainer

Post-Mobility (3–4 weeks)	Digital + In-Person (Optional)	- Final virtual showcase or hybrid event- Cross-team peer review and feedback- Certification and alumni integration	Zoom, LinkedIn, Europass	All actors
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Integration Dynamics

- Digital and physical interactions coexist rather than alternate.
- Apprentices remain embedded in host communities even during remote workdays through scheduled hybrid meetings and continuous online presence.
- Mentors monitor learning outcomes in real time via shared dashboards.

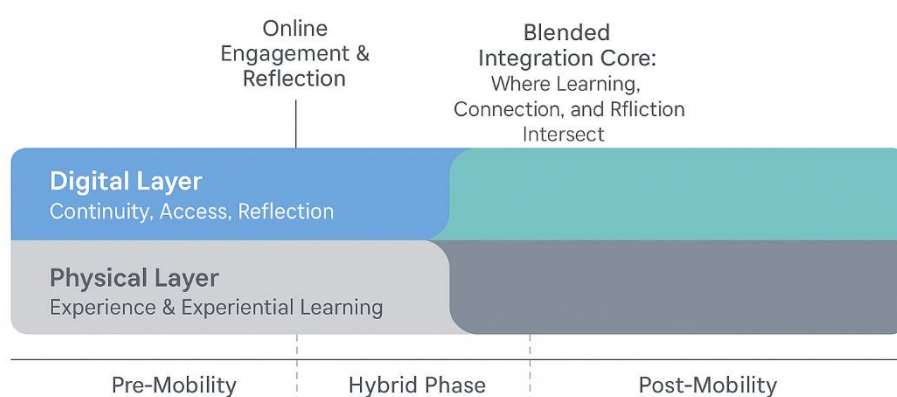
Outcomes and Impact

- **Cognitive Integration:** Apprentices exhibit stronger analytical reflection and digital collaboration competencies.
- **Social Integration:** The constant hybrid presence minimises disengagement and fosters professional identity continuity.
- **Institutional Learning:** Hosts develop digital mentoring expertise transferable to future apprenticeships and remote staff onboarding.

Empirical Note: Interviews with an ICT host in Limassol (Demetris) confirmed that this concurrent blended model enhanced both accountability and autonomy, producing highly adaptable apprentices and measurable efficiency gains.

Figure 23: Parallel Integration Model – Overlapping Digital and Physical Phases

Parallel Integration Model – Overlapping Digital and Physical Phases



10.4 Comparative Analysis of Models

Dimension	Sequential Model	Parallel Model
Target Group	First-time, NEET, or low digital literacy apprentices	Digitally confident apprentices, ICT and creative sectors
Integration Approach	Stepwise transition from digital to physical	Continuous co-presence across modalities
Pedagogical Focus	Emotional readiness, gradual exposure	Collaborative problem-solving, digital fluency
Mentorship Role	Transitional guide	Embedded co-creator
Risk Mitigation	Reduces anxiety, prevents culture shock	Prevents disengagement, fosters real-time adaptation
Ideal Duration	12–16 weeks	10–14 weeks
Outcomes	Strong affective integration	Strong cognitive and professional integration

Table 17: Comparative Summary – Sequential vs Parallel Integration Models

Analytical Dimension	Sequential Integration Model	Parallel Integration Model
Conceptual Focus	Depicts integration as a <i>linear and temporal process</i> unfolding in distinct stages (Pre → During → Post Mobility).	Depicts integration as a <i>continuous, overlapping process</i> where digital and physical learning coexist and reinforce each other.
Temporal Logic	Chronological sequence; highlights transition points and actor engagement over time.	Simultaneous interaction; highlights dynamic coexistence of online and on-site dimensions.
Primary Purpose	To illustrate <i>timing and stakeholder coordination</i> across the mobility phases.	To illustrate <i>the hybrid and multidimensional character</i> of blended apprenticeship learning.
Integration Mechanism	Progression through structured stages of readiness, engagement, and reflection.	Synchronisation between digital engagement and physical immersion.
Pedagogical Emphasis	Learning continuity and emotional pacing (readiness → belonging → reintegration).	Cognitive–social–digital convergence (reflection and collaboration occurring in tandem).
Strengths	Easy to operationalise; useful for planning and evaluation; defines clear milestones.	Captures real blended complexity; supports continuous feedback and inclusivity.

Limitations	Risk of oversimplifying complex blended interactions.	Can be harder to visualise and manage within rigid administrative frameworks.
Stakeholder Dynamics	Highlights <i>who acts when</i> — ideal for logistics and task scheduling.	Highlights <i>how actors interact concurrently</i> — ideal for pedagogical design.
Best Application Contexts	For project coordination, timeline development, Erasmus+ reporting.	For teaching practice design, mentor training, and hybrid mobility innovation.
Complementarity	Provides structure and temporal clarity.	Provides depth and multidimensional realism.
Combined Value	When integrated, both models represent a full-cycle logic — <i>structured progression supported by continuous hybrid interaction.</i>	When integrated, both models represent a full-cycle logic — <i>structured progression supported by continuous hybrid interaction.</i>

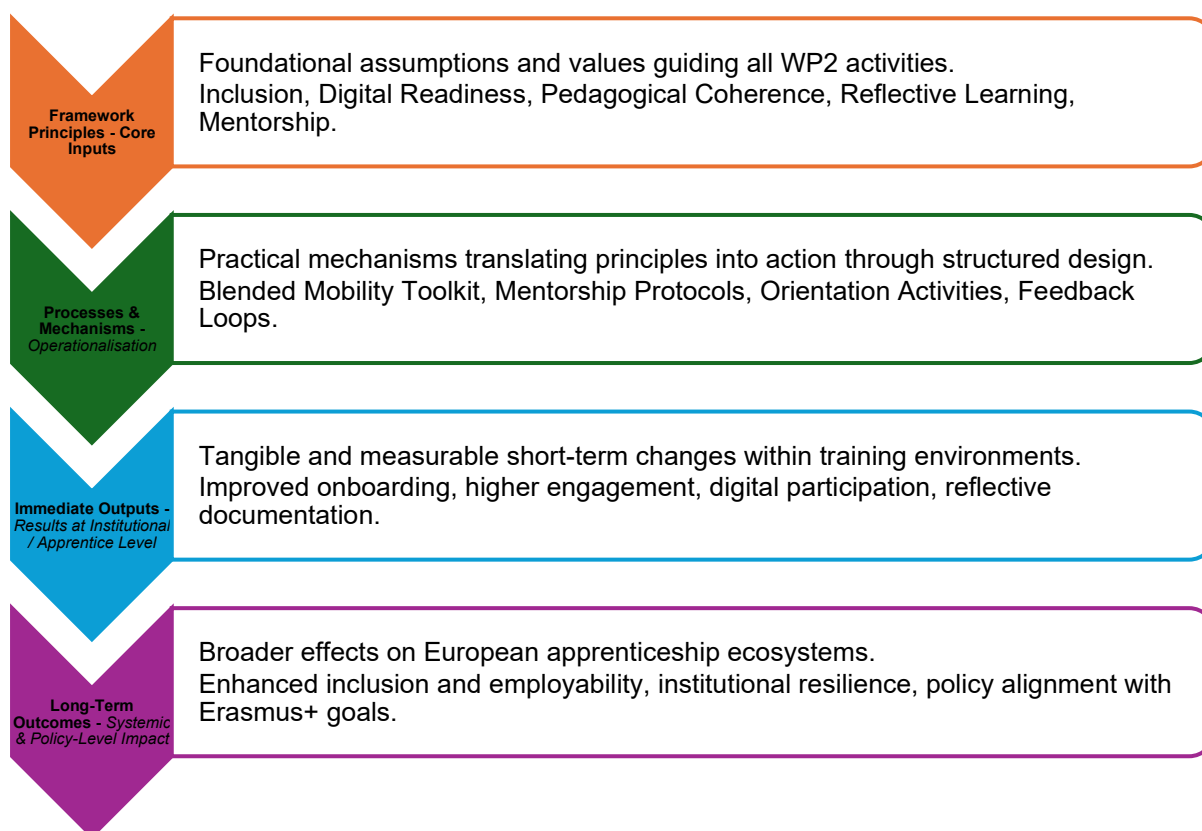
10.5 Systemic Outcomes and Transferability

Both models have demonstrated potential for replication within the European VET ecosystem. The Sequential Model is ideal for inclusion-oriented programmes seeking to widen participation, whereas the Parallel Model represents a scalable format for advanced, technology-enabled apprenticeships.

Adoption of these models supports:

- **Erasmus+ Inclusion Priorities:** by reducing barriers for vulnerable learners through preparatory and digital support phases;
- **Digital Education Action Plan Objectives:** by operationalising hybrid learning as an institutional norm rather than an emergency adaptation; and
- **Sustainability Goals:** by reducing unnecessary travel, enabling hybrid collaboration, and increasing accessibility to mobility opportunities.

Empirical triangulation across WP2 frameworks confirms that when either model is implemented with fidelity, integration outcomes improve measurably — including emotional wellbeing, skill recognition, and long-term employability.

Figure 24: Systemic Impact Pathway – From Framework Principles to Integration Outcomes

10.6 Focus Group Reflections

The Cyprus focus group participants unanimously agreed that intentional design and emotional intelligence are the defining features of successful blended integration. The statement that best encapsulated the group’s consensus was:

“Integration does not happen when people meet; it happens when systems, emotions, and expectations meet.” — Focus Group Participant, OTI Group Cyprus (2025)

This insight reinforces the framework’s overarching principle: blended apprenticeship integration is not a technical transition, but a human process amplified by digital means.

The next and final section, **9. Conclusion**, will synthesise the entire framework into a concise, research-informed summary—positioning it within the broader Erasmus+ and European vocational education landscape, and highlighting its potential for long-term impact and scalability.

10.7 Framework Validation through Behavioural Simulation

To validate the proposed framework, partner organisations conducted behavioural simulation exercises designed to reproduce realistic apprenticeship mobility scenarios. The simulations involved

stakeholders such as apprentices, host companies, VET providers, intermediary organisations and community actors operating under time pressure and unexpected challenges.

The objective of these exercises was to observe how stakeholders react in situations that may occur during apprenticeship mobility and to evaluate whether the framework provides sufficient guidance for managing integration processes effectively.

Across partner countries, the simulations included role-play activities, scenario-based discussions and structured observation methods. Participants were asked to respond to evolving mobility situations while facilitators documented communication patterns, decision-making processes and support mechanisms used by the actors involved.

10.8 Key Findings from the Simulations

The simulations confirmed that the framework's three-phase structure (pre-mobility, during mobility and post-mobility) accurately reflects the realities of apprenticeship mobility processes. However, several operational insights emerged across partner contexts.

Preparation before mobility is critical.

Many integration challenges originate during the preparation stage when expectations, roles and communication channels are not clearly established.

Clear role distribution improves coordination.

Stakeholders often understand their roles conceptually but struggle to operationalise responsibilities under pressure. Explicit role clarification therefore improves cooperation between VET providers, host organisations and intermediary actors.

Mentor preparation is essential.

Host company mentors play a key role in apprentices' integration but often receive limited preparation. Early mentor engagement improves both professional guidance and social support for apprentices.

Communication structures must be defined.

Communication difficulties were frequently observed during simulation scenarios. Establishing clear contact points and communication routines significantly improves coordination between stakeholders.

Emotional support mechanisms are important.

Simulations revealed that apprentices may experience emotional stress when facing unfamiliar environments or unclear expectations. Regular check-ins and accessible support contacts can help address these challenges early.

Post-mobility reflection strengthens learning outcomes.

Structured reflection and feedback after the mobility period helps capture lessons learned and supports continuous improvement of mobility programmes.

10.9 Validation Outcome

Overall, the simulation exercises confirmed that the framework provides a coherent structure for supporting apprentice integration in blended mobility schemes. The validation process also helped refine the framework by highlighting the operational importance of preparation, role clarity, communication and stakeholder coordination.

11 Conclusion

The framework presented in this deliverable provides a structured approach to supporting the integration of apprentices participating in blended mobility schemes. By organising the integration process into the phases of pre-mobility preparation, support during mobility and post-mobility reflection, the framework offers practical guidance for VET providers, host organisations, intermediary actors and other stakeholders involved in apprenticeship mobility.

The behavioural simulation exercises conducted by the project partners provided an opportunity to test the framework under realistic mobility scenarios. The simulations confirmed the relevance of the framework's structure while highlighting the operational importance of preparation, role clarity, communication routines and mentor engagement. These insights helped refine the framework and strengthen its practical applicability.

While the simulation exercises provided valuable validation insights, the framework will continue to evolve through its application in real mobility contexts. Future testing within apprenticeship mobility programmes will provide additional opportunities to assess its effectiveness and to further improve integration practices across different VET systems.

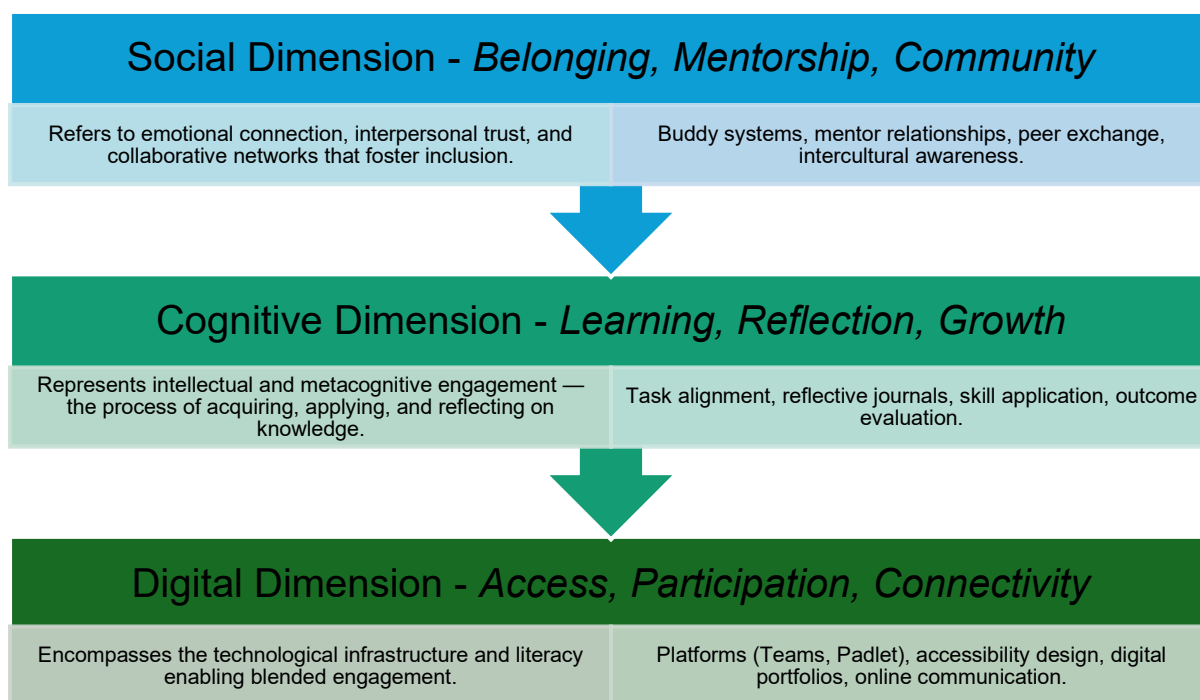
The evolution of European apprenticeship mobility towards blended and hybrid formats represents one of the most significant pedagogical transformations of the post-pandemic era. What began as a logistical adaptation to global disruption has matured into a strategic opportunity to create more inclusive, accessible, and resilient vocational ecosystems.

This framework, developed under *Work Package 2 (WP2)* of the *On the Move* Erasmus+ project, demonstrates that the success of blended mobility does not depend primarily on technology, but on the quality of human integration it enables. When apprentices, mentors, coordinators, and institutions intentionally design digital and physical phases as parts of a continuous learning journey, the result is a system that amplifies—not diminishes—the social, cultural, and transformative potential of mobility.

11.1 Integration as a Deliberate Pedagogical Act

Integration in blended apprenticeships is not a spontaneous outcome; it is a deliberate pedagogical act that must be scaffolded across time, space, and human relationships. Empirical data from Cyprus and cross-framework analysis confirmed that the absence of structured onboarding, sustained mentorship, and aligned communication leads to fragmentation, isolation, and loss of learning continuity. Conversely, when digital orientation, hybrid mentoring, and reflective closure are embedded as standard practice, apprentices achieve measurable improvements in confidence, engagement, and retention.

From a theoretical standpoint, the blended apprenticeship becomes a **living ecosystem of presence** — where *social*, *cognitive*, and *teaching* presences (Garrison et al., 2000) converge to produce integrated learning. Integration thus transcends administrative coordination: it is the **relational architecture** of trust, belonging, and reciprocity that binds the mobility experience together.

Figure 25: Integration as a Pedagogical Ecosystem – Social, Cognitive, Digital Convergence

11.2 Contribution to European VET and Erasmus+ Priorities

This framework directly supports the strategic ambitions of the Erasmus+ Programme (2021–2027) and the Council Recommendation on VET (2020) by operationalising the principles of:

- *Flexibility*: Enabling apprenticeships that combine physical immersion with remote accessibility;
- *Inclusion*: Widening participation to learners who may face social, financial, or geographic barriers; and
- *Digital Readiness*: Embedding practical, accessible, and ethical use of digital tools in VET delivery.

By formalising an integration model for blended apprenticeships, this document provides a replicable European template that bridges policy, pedagogy, and practice. It offers decision-makers and practitioners a structured pathway for implementation, linking empirical findings to concrete institutional actions.

In doing so, it contributes to the wider discourse on how Europe can evolve towards resilient and human-centred education systems that balance technological innovation with social integrity.

Table 18: Correspondence Between Framework Outcomes and Erasmus+ Strategic Objectives

Framework Outcome	Corresponding Erasmus+ Strategic Objective (2021–2027)	Type of Contribution	Indicators of Impact / Evidence Source
1. Increased inclusion and social belonging among apprentices through structured mentoring and peer support.	<i>Promote inclusion and diversity in all fields of education and training.</i>	Direct	Improved self-reported sense of belonging; participation rates of underrepresented groups; mentor feedback forms.
2. Enhanced digital literacy and hybrid learning capability among learners and staff.	<i>Drive digital transformation through development of digital readiness, resilience, and capacity.</i>	Direct	Use of digital tools (Teams, Padlet, ePortfolio); digital competence self-assessments; blended mobility reports.
3. Reduced environmental footprint of mobility through hybrid engagement models.	<i>Support the European Green Deal and environmentally sustainable practices in education and training.</i>	Indirect	Number of hybrid vs full-travel mobilities; CO ₂ reduction estimates; inclusion of green awareness modules.
4. Improved alignment between VET curricula and labour market competences.	<i>Contribute to innovation and employability through education-industry cooperation.</i>	Direct	Curriculum adaptation reports; employer satisfaction surveys; apprentice placement outcomes.
5. Institutionalisation of reflective and feedback-oriented learning culture.	<i>Strengthen quality, transparency, and recognition of learning outcomes.</i>	Direct	Adoption of reflection journals; number of institutions integrating framework tools; updated internal QA systems.
6. Expansion of cross-border collaboration networks for blended training.	<i>Foster cooperation, inclusion, and mobility at the European level.</i>	Enabling	Number of new partnerships; shared resource repositories; joint dissemination events.
7. Development of staff capacity in inclusive and digital mentorship.	<i>Empower educators, trainers, and staff for innovation and inclusion.</i>	Direct	Mentor training participation; evaluation scores; continuous professional development records.
8. Enhanced participation and voice of apprentices in	<i>Encourage active citizenship and</i>	Direct	Existence of feedback councils; youth

governance and design processes.	<i>participation in democratic life.</i>		representation in steering meetings; project evaluation forms.
9. Creation of scalable frameworks for future Erasmus+ mobility calls.	<i>Improve the programme's quality and sustainability through systemic innovation.</i>	Indirect	Integration of framework models into future project proposals; inclusion in EU dissemination platforms.

11.3 Transferability and Future Outlook

The integration models presented - the *Sequential* and *Parallel* frameworks - are adaptable across diverse national, sectoral, and institutional contexts. They can be scaled for hospitality, ICT, engineering, or creative sectors, and modified for apprentices of varying digital competence levels.

As digitalisation continues to redefine mobility, these models position blended apprenticeships as laboratories for social innovation — spaces where intercultural understanding, sustainability, and employability intersect.

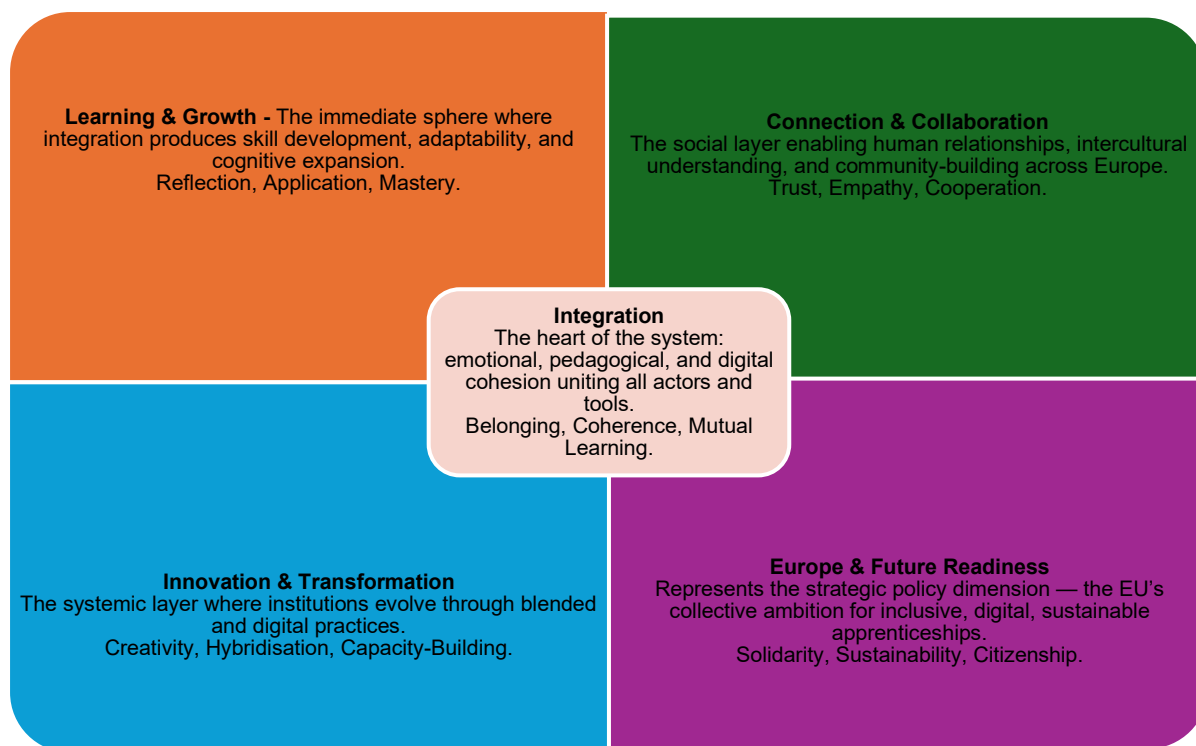
The next developmental step involves longitudinal validation through pilot testing in multiple EU member states, enabling data-driven refinement and eventual policy mainstreaming. Future Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe collaborations can further explore integration metrics, digital ethics, and AI-supported mentoring systems to enhance quality and inclusiveness at scale.

11.4 Final Reflection

Integration in blended mobility is ultimately a question of human intentionality. Technology can connect, but it cannot integrate; integration happens when people — and institutions — consciously design for it.

This framework affirms that inclusive, digitally enabled apprenticeships can become a cornerstone of Europe's educational future, provided that integration is treated not as a secondary outcome but as the core measure of quality and humanity in vocational learning.

“Blended mobility is not merely the future of apprenticeship—it is the synthesis of Europe's values: inclusion, adaptability, and shared growth.”

Figure 26: Vision Statement Diagram – Integration as the Heart of Future European Apprenticeships

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