GVERN TA' MALTA

eupa

FONDI.eu

MODULE 5

SMART VET
Erasmus+ K210-VET Small scale

Professional Ethics & Work Attitude

Equip learners with the awareness, skills and habits to demonstrate responsibility, respect and integrity across diverse workplace cultures.

Erasmus+ KA210-VET | SMART-VET Project

Funded by the European Union

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Learning Outcomes

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Professional ethics are the moral principles, values and behavioural standards that guide how people act at work — more than rules, they underpin trust, credibility and professional effectiveness. “Ethics is doing the right thing — even when no one is watching.”

BY THE END, LEARNERS WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Understand key concepts of professional ethics and explain why they matter in international work experiences.
2. Recognise and respond appropriately to ethical dilemmas across different cultural and workplace contexts.
3. Demonstrate professional attitudes such as punctuality, initiative, and respect for rules and diversity.
4. Accept, process and act constructively on feedback.
5. Reflect on personal behaviour and identify ways to strengthen their ethical and professional identity.

Six Core Ethics Domains

Each principle is supported by research and provides actionable guidance for mobility experiences.

1 Honesty

Communicate truthfully, admit errors, and avoid excuses. Misrepresenting your skills or hiding a problem leads to bigger issues later.

2 Integrity

Align actions with your values, even under pressure — refuse to misreport hours or ignore safety procedures.

3 Respect

Value others' contributions, be punctual, and honour diversity of culture, gender, religion and background.

4 Responsibility

Fulfil obligations, meet deadlines, and take ownership of mistakes — promptly, not defensively.

5 Confidentiality

Protect sensitive company or client information, including on social media, even unintentionally.

6 Fairness & Inclusion

Avoid favouritism, bias or discrimination; support colleagues facing cultural or language barriers.

The Same Principle, Different Norms

Ethics in practice depends on cultural context — requiring both adaptability and cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003).

Aspect	One Norm	A Different Norm
Punctuality	Germany/Switzerland: arriving 5–10 minutes early signals respect.	Southern Europe: flexibility around start time is more common.
Forms of Address	Scandinavian workplaces often use first names for everyone.	East Asian / Mediterranean workplaces often expect formal titles.
Feedback Culture	Anglo-Saxon workplaces tend to give direct, explicit feedback.	East Asian / Latin American contexts often preserve harmony with indirect feedback.

Positive Attitude in Action

A positive attitude is a proactive, solution-oriented mindset — and it's a choice that builds credibility.

Situation	Positive Response
You don't understand a task	Politely ask for clarification, take notes, and confirm your understanding.
You get constructive feedback	Say thank you, reflect on it, and implement the improvement.
You're asked to assist a colleague	Offer help willingly, even if it's outside your comfort zone.
You feel tired or overwhelmed	Communicate honestly, take a short break if needed, then return focused.
Team conflict arises	Listen actively, stay calm, and focus on solutions instead of blame.

3 Traits of a Positive Attitude Abroad

1 **Flexible**

Adapting your approach to fit cultural and organisational norms.

2 **Observant**

Learning from how colleagues communicate and behave before acting.

3 **Respectful**

Demonstrating humility and open-mindedness toward different ways of working.

4 Common Ethical Dilemmas in Mobility

Ethical challenges abroad rarely look like clear “right vs. wrong” — they hide in everyday interactions.

1 Pressure to Hide a Mistake

A colleague tells you not to mention a data-entry error — “everyone makes mistakes here.” Honesty vs. fear of blame.

2 Being Asked to Bend the Rules

A supervisor asks you to report more hours than you worked. Integrity vs. authority; short-term compliance vs. long-term trust.

3 “Jokes” About Identity

Colleagues joke about nationality, gender or accents and others laugh along. Inclusion vs. the desire to fit in.

4 Confidentiality in the Digital Age

You want to post placement photos — one shows internal documents in the background. Self-expression vs. professional responsibility.

How to Respond Ethically

A simple, practical response logic for navigating dilemmas in mobility contexts.

1

Pause & Clarify

Ask yourself: is this a misunderstanding, a cultural difference, or a genuine ethical concern?

2

Assess Impact

Consider consequences for you, your team, and the organisation.

3

Seek Guidance Early

Don't wait until a shortcut becomes a habit — ask a mentor or trusted colleague.

4

Communicate Respectfully

Use neutral, non-accusatory language: “I'm unsure if this is allowed” rather than “This is wrong.”

Real-Life Example: Ahmed's Story

CASE STUDY

Ahmed, a VET learner from Italy, began an internship in Belgium. His manager was direct and didn't offer much praise, which left Ahmed feeling unappreciated — in Italy, he was used to more encouraging feedback. He started avoiding questions and lost confidence.

After a peer discussion and some self-reflection, Ahmed realised the feedback style was simply different — not negative. He adapted, started asking questions clearly, and by the end of the placement his supervisor offered him a recommendation letter.

Takeaway: Professional culture may differ, but clarity, self-awareness and respectful communication are always useful. Feedback is not criticism — it's an invitation to grow.

Practical Exercises for This Module

1 Role-Play: Cross-Cultural Ethics Conflict

Practise asking for clarification and explaining your perspective respectfully when workplace rules feel unclear.

2 Feedback Handling Exercise

One partner gives feedback, the other practises active listening and clarifying questions without getting defensive.

3 Self-Reflection: Professional Identity

Journal prompts: “I feel most professional when…” and “One habit I want to improve is…”

Key Takeaways

- Ethics is doing the right thing even when no one is watching — honesty, integrity, respect, responsibility, confidentiality and fairness underpin it all.
- The same ethical principle can look different across cultures — punctuality, forms of address and feedback style all vary by context.
- A positive attitude is a choice: flexibility, observation and respect build credibility faster than technical knowledge alone.
- Ethical dilemmas abroad rarely look like clear right-vs-wrong — pause, assess impact, and communicate respectfully rather than staying silent or escalating.
- Feedback is not criticism — it's an invitation to grow, and how you receive it shapes your professional reputation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Skills Open Doors. Character Keeps Them Open.

You've now covered all five modules of the Smart Skills Training Guide — ready to support confident, capable learners on their mobility journey.