

Peer Learning Seminar on the Quality of Staff Training Mobility in Higher Education

The Austrian National Agency Erasmus+ Education (OeAD-GmbH) hosted a Peer Learning Seminar on the Quality of cross-border mobility of university staff from September 18th to 20th 2019 in Vienna. The event, organised as an Erasmus+ Transnational Cooperation Activity (TCA), was the very first TCA focused exclusively on staff training mobility. It was organised with support of the Erasmus+ National Agencies from Germany, Estonia and Poland.

In 2007 staff training opportunities started to be funded under the Erasmus programme and the participation has been growing continuously. As a consequence the need for a strategic approach to the quality of mobility has increasingly gained relevance. The TCA was focused particularly on linking internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions with human resource development.

Key Questions and Messages

- **Linking staff mobility with internationalisation activities can benefit both the international portfolio and HR strategies of an institution**
- **This would need the raising of awareness among HR departments about the value of cross-border mobility for the institution and the individual career development**
- **Involving staff in the development of an internationalisation strategy is essential**
- **Developing recognition mechanisms of staff mobility is crucial as well**
- **In order to enhance quality, learning outcomes for staff mobility should be defined**
- **Role models at institutional or department/team level are needed**
- **Improvement of the information flow helps**

Key note: Current trends & initiatives in the area of staff training mobility

(Stefan Jahnke, European University Foundation)

Stefan Jahnke outlined the need of modernisation and internationalisation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe. Digitalisation and internationalisation often go hand in hand which means that universities have to find their pathway into a more modern and digital way of administration and to increase the internationalisation of its staff. According to the Erasmus Impact Study which was carried out in 2014, more than 90% of the participants reported that taking part at the programme improved both field-specific knowledge and non-field-specific knowledge. Furthermore the participants' social and intercultural competences have also broadened.

However, the Impact Study also identified the main barriers to participation in the programme: in addition to family or personal reasons, the increased workload and the inability to secure a replacement for the mobility period manifest the biggest obstacles for teaching as well as non-teaching staff. The uncertainty about the advantages of an Erasmus+ stay for their further career and the missing or ambiguous recognition may deter an interested individual from going abroad, which could have had a positive impact on their career development. According to Mr Jahnke it is urgently necessary that the aims of ongoing education and training be clearly defined in advance. However one of the biggest obstacles to overcome is the lack of information about the programme itself and the eligibility of mobilities.

Three Initiatives at European Level were presented: BEST, TEACHWITHERASMUS+ and FESC.

BEST (Blended Erasmus+ Staff Training) is an online platform for blended mobility and utilises online course material to support the learning outcome. It should give any higher education institution the opportunity to offer blended mobility. – see more at <https://uni-foundation.eu/project/best/>.

TEACHWITHERASMUS+ (TWE+) is an initiative which provides a platform for academics offering teaching opportunities for international academic staff complying with the minimum of eight hours of teaching. The initiative supports interested individuals with the search for a suitable partner. In addition, a toolkit with innovative teaching methods could be used during the mobility. – see more at <https://teachwitherasmus.eu/>.

FESC (Framework for Erasmus Staff Competences) is about the creation of a professional framework and to professionalise how international relations work. It is based on a survey about current and future skill needs for Erasmus+ coordinators. – see more at <https://fesc-project.eu/framework-erasmus-staff-competencies>.

Key note: Future actions and strategic developments

Johannes Gehringer (European Commission)

Johannes Gehringer Policy Officer at the European Commission was linked-up live from Brussels and reported about the future Erasmus programme. The new programme should not only be more innovative but also more inclusive. So it will be important to find, adapt and to provide more innovative educational pathways. The general framework will be blended mobility for all learners – both a physical and an online collaboration. There will be intensive blended and short-time programmes which will cover the duration of about five to sixty days. However, higher education institutions will be able to decide whether to implement blended mobilities or not, so the choice is up to any institution.

In the course of his lecture, Mr Gehringer emphasized that mobilities should be included into the internationalization strategy of each institution and the importance of an improved recognition process was underlined.

Integrative approach towards staff training and HR development

Agata Bruska (West Pomeranian University of Technology (WPU))

Agata Bruska shared the integrative approach towards staff training and human resources development at her institution. At the WPU an internal granting scheme was worked out. Continuing development courses and training activities for all categories of staff are co-financed so that professional qualifications can be enhanced. Her recommendation is to make sure that all the information about the application criteria is provided online and easy to find.

In order to promote the mind-set of 'internationalisation@home' and to increase the motivation of staff, attention should be paid to the involvement of both academic and non-academic staff in all projects.

At the WPU there are two different views about the mobilisation of staff: on the one hand there is the bottom-up approach. In this case an interested candidate approaches the institution with a proposal of a mobility activity. The top-down approach on the other hand, is about a university to contact a target group to bring specific knowledge to the university. The resulting competences and skills are seen as useful for the strategy of universities.

It was emphasized that when planning staff mobility it should not only focus on the benefit for the staff member itself but also on how the students at the institution could profit from the mobility. Furthermore a specific guiding theme, a defined target group and a fixed number of participation guarantee an active collaboration and interaction during the staff activity. An essential role should be paid to the recognition of staff mobility which must be transparent.

Staff training weeks – how to really benefit

Marlene Wahlmüller and Christa Karner (Vienna University of Economics)

Marlene Wahlmüller and Christina Karner reported about their Staff Training Weeks and how to benefit from such events. Originally a one-day event was organised which aimed at the target group of staff of international offices. The Vienna University of Economics and Business aimed to invite partners - which were selected together with their partner institution from Bratislava – and to present the services on site. In addition workshops and discussions should lead to an intercultural exchange among the participants, thus the institution could benefit from the internationalisation of the event.

In cooperation with the UEBA in Bratislava a joint international week for staff and students was established which aimed to show the value of an exchange even on a short distance. The event was organised together and split up in two venues. The participants joined one part of the joint international week at Bratislava and the other part at Vienna. So the organisers became participants as well, which was considered as a huge benefit.

Erasmus+ funding schemes related to staff mobility and to the development of ‘focus projects’ Elmar Harringer and Christine Schwab (Austrian National Agency Erasmus+ Education)

Elmar Harringer mentioned that in addition to the professional development through mobility, the focus is also on developing language skills as well as the awareness and the understanding of other cultures and countries. As a consequence the thought of a European identity and European citizenship should be strengthened.

Christine Schwab gave a brief overview of the possibilities of staff mobility in cooperation projects. It was emphasized that staff mobility is not a goal of a project, but it is a means to achieve the objectives. Especially for strategic partnerships the main purpose is to test or to implement innovative practices which are done very often through an LTTA (Learning, Teaching and Training Activity). However, Strategic Partnerships can be an instrument to development new approaches, tools or methodologies related to the enhancement of staff mobility – see the following project presentations of REALISE and SUCTI.

The main purpose of the Knowledge Alliances is to complement and support the existing activities and to achieve the added value in the realisation of the project’s objectives. In this case a precise reason regarding the need and the purpose of an LTTA should be given.

The idea of capacity building projects is based on the ‘train the trainer’ principle in which only one person becomes mobile and goes abroad to teach the partner on-site.

How to REALISE quality in staff training mobility – Experiences, observations and recommendations from the REALISE project

Anne-Marie Motard (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3)

Anne-marie Motard presented the project REALISE – a European Strategic Partnership Project (2016-2019) which focused on realising the potential of the international mobility of staff in higher education. It also aims to improve the implementation as well as the recognition of staff mobility and thus to maximise the impact of an individual and of the institutions.

All partners participating in the project conducted a survey so that problems and obstacles could be identified and analysed. Furthermore, a toolkit and an Erasmus+ Staff Mobility Handbook of Good Practices was developed and published. Subsequently a seminar was held in Brussels to present the results followed by a training week at the University of Ghent.

Thus the general objective is to enhance staff mobility as a strategic instrument for the internationalisation of higher education institutions. It is intended to identify and develop both innovative practices for the implementation of staff mobility and to promote the recognition of mobilities regarding the career development. In addition, REALISE aims to enhance institutional awareness, highlighting the value of staff mobility and to show institutions that such mobilities can play an important role in the internationalisation strategy and can contribute to the overall internationalisation of the institution.

Furthermore, three key-messages were highlighted: firstly the cooperation between units at the institutional level needs to be improved; secondly the human resources departments need to be informed about the possibility of funding and the Erasmus+ programme ; and lastly, the recognition needs to be further developed.

At the national level initiatives should be started to integrate the mobilities into the requirements for a national position. For this purpose national authorities should define staff mobility as an important lever.

At European level, however, conditions and requirements need to be harmonised. According to Ms Motard the European Commission should encourage countries to develop guidelines to enhance mobilities. Additionally, the Erasmus+ guidelines need to be described more clearly and definitions in more detail, so that institutions as well as human resource departments can recognise the added value of staff mobility.

Project website: <https://realise-erasmusplus.fr/>

Systemic University Change Towards Internationalisation (SUCTI) – Julia-Sophie Rothmann (Justus Liebig University Gießen)

Julia-Sophie Rothmann talked about SUCTI (Systemic University Change Towards Internationalisation) and its idea to develop an in-house training in the own institution in the mother tongue of the participants. Another intention of SUCTI is to create a multiplying effect and to help institutions to enhance the management to become international. SUCTI has received the EAIE Presidents' Award in 2019.

The project focussed on two groups: those who work with the topic of internationalisation on the one hand and the administrative staff which is not working at an international relations office on the other hand. Consequently, the aim of the project was to train the trainers, build a network of those trainers, and provide open-source material in all languages of the partner institutions.

From the target group of administrative staff working at higher education institutions (excluding staff from international offices) at least 20 persons should be chosen to take part at the interactive training. Thus, everyone is able to contribute their own expertise as the participants came from different working areas.

Project website: <https://suctiproject.com/>

Panel discussion on outcomes and recommendations for institutions, national and European stakeholders

- Gabriele Abermann, EHEA Expert, FH University Salzburg of Applied Sciences
- Stefan Jahnke, European University Foundation
- Anne-Marie Motard, Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3
- Maarja Murumägi, Estonian Business School
- Faciliator: Gerhard Volz, National Agency Erasmus+ Education I OeAD-GmbH

During the panel discussion the key points in the field of staff training were debated. The speakers agreed that the staff mobility can serve as an excellent strategy to internationalise the entire institution, but argued that it also involves a huge deal of responsibility. In addition, it has been emphasized on several occasions that internationalisation must be exemplified by the institutions, but first of all the authorities and the management, as well as the human resource department must be convinced that staff mobility is extremely valuable. Moreover, it may have an important long-term impact on the internationalisation strategy of the institution.

In order to develop a solid strategy for staff training, it should be exactly defined why a staff training is desired. So the 'why' is seen as one of the real key factors, because first of all the knowledge about the opportunities and benefits must be identified. The management has to understand that the participation in the Erasmus+ programme and the staff mobility may represent a great strategy to acquire a funding for educating the staff. However, it requires initiatives at all levels of the institution to implement high-quality staff mobility. Additionally, the flow of information must be strengthened and occur through different channels at both informal, as well as formal occasions.

One has to keep in mind why it is beneficial that the students and/or the staff go abroad. The answer lies in the acquisition of competences. For this purpose the entire institution must incorporate the international mind-set. This means that human resources departments do not only need to be informed about the possibility of staff mobility, but also perceive them as an important tool for continuous education. Role models especially from higher positions could help to communicate the value of staff mobility and motivate a broader audience. Besides that, the creation of a framework or guidelines should be considered.

However, administrative staff needs to be involved in the development of an internationalisation strategy so that employees feel valued and actively participate in the initiatives. Therefore it is very important to understand that a consistent internationalisation is only possible if the staff is involved. In addition, the gap between the administrative and the academic staff needs to be bridged. There is also the need to analyse and understand what hinders employees from participating and also how to individually address people in order to reduce their fears.

Regarding the wishes concerning the European level, there is a clear preference that staff mobility needs to be professionalised and learning outcomes need to be clearly defined. In addition, Mr Jahnke expressed the need to make a clear cut between a staff week and a training activity, which is not for creating cooperation. Therefore, templates have to change and new or different types of mobility should be considered.