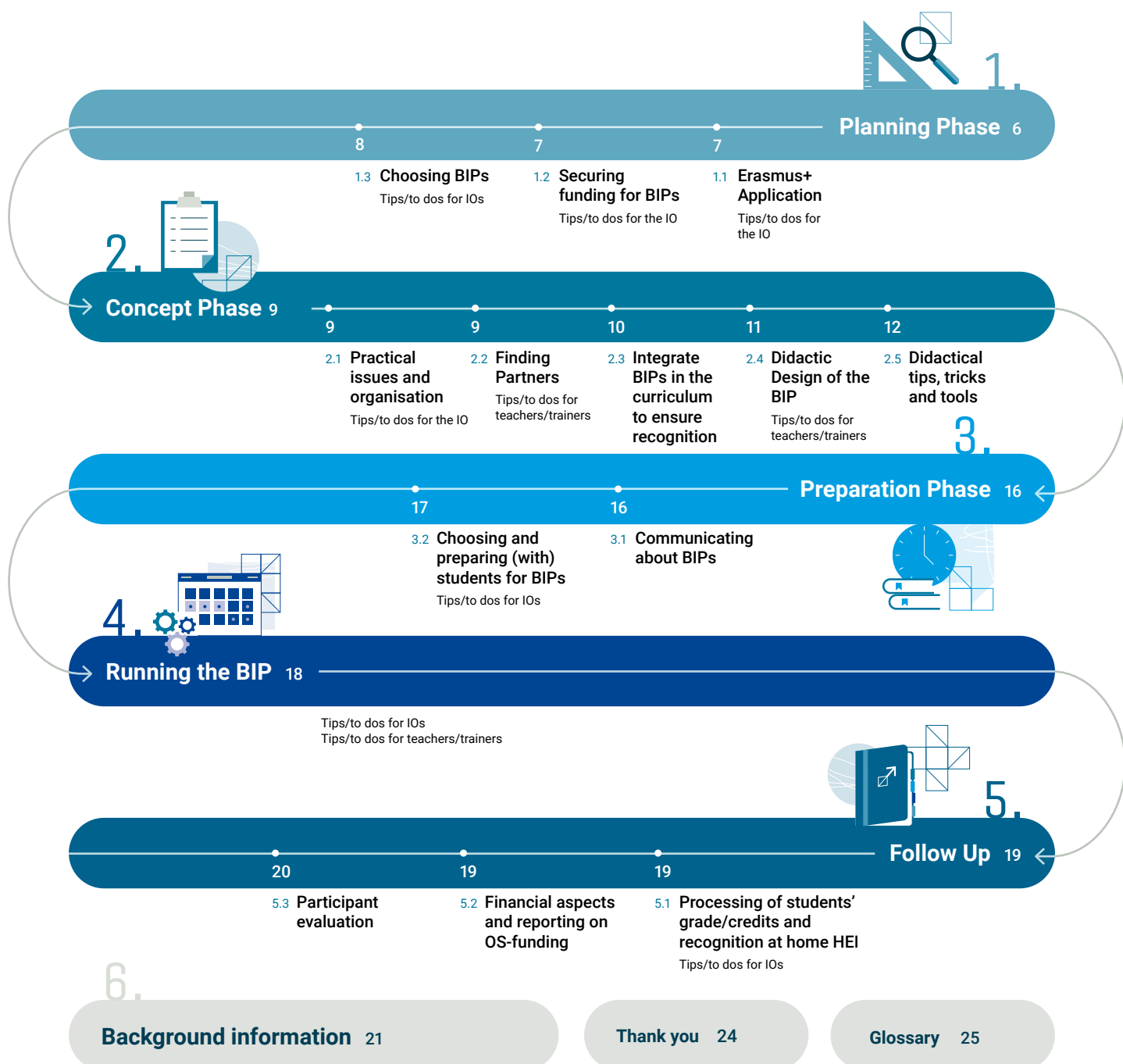# erasmus+
BLENDED INTENSIVE
programmes

BASIC TOOLKIT

BASIC TOOLKIT

erasmus+
BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME

Welcome to the toolkit to make your BIP life a bit easier!

For higher education institutions (HEIs) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) offer unique opportunities by combining virtual teaching and learning with short periods of physical mobility. This approach allows for meaningful encounters between participants from at least three European HEIs.

This toolkit looks at the whole life cycle of a BIP and summarizes tips and tricks for planning, designing, preparing and running a BIP. We will not be reproducing the Erasmus+ programme guide's rules and regulations, but instead give you insights from teachers/trainers and experienced BIP organisers. Please keep in mind that the acronym "BIPs" always refers to Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes.

This toolkit is the result of an extensive consultation process. We (colleagues from the OeAD and Nuffic) thank various interview partners for their valuable contributions.[1]

To paint a comprehensive, practical picture of the implementation of BIPs, we spoke with teachers who are directly involved in the conception and implementation of BIPs, as well as with representatives of international offices. We tried to capture diverse perspectives by interviewing representatives from different sizes and types of HEIs with varying amounts of experience in implementing BIPs.

In addition, we conducted an online survey to hear from students themselves about their experiences with BIPs. The survey link was sent to the International Offices of all ECHE holding HEIs in Austria and the Netherlands. The International Office staff were requested to forward the survey to students who participated in a BIP organized in the academic year 2022/2023. The survey was filled in by 171 respondents and provides a first insight into the students' perspective on BIPs.[2] You will find first results scattered throughout this toolkit.[3]

For whom is this toolkit intended?

This toolkit is primarily designed for **two target groups:**
- institutional Erasmus+ Coordinators like international officers dealing with the administrative aspects of BIPs
- teaching/training staff involved in implementing, designing and organising the courses

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1   Section 7, page 24 provides a list of all people who contributed input to our research and feedback to the different stages of development of this toolkit.
2   56 HEIs in the Netherlands and 41 HEIs in Austria that had implemented BIPs before were contacted and asked to forward the survey link to students participating in a BIP in the academic year 2022/23.
3   Detailed results of the survey will be published later on in 2024.

How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit offers a path through the entire process of implementing a BIP along the steps and phases defined in the table of content. You may use this guide at any stage of the organisation process you are currently in, finding the information you need to make sure you will be successful in organizing a BIP course. As the document is supposed to be online only, the interactive content table will take you to the desired section.

We have tried to address the most important aspects related to the organization of a BIP, please note that this may not be complete due to the diversity of individual cases when it comes to internal procedures and regulations of HEIs.

BIPs in a Nutshell

These are short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including online cooperation. Groups of HEIs (at least three from three different countries) organise short, blended courses of learning, teaching and training for students and/or staff (for at least 10 participants). BIPs combine a short-term physical mobility abroad with a compulsory virtual component facilitating collaborative online learning exchange and teamwork. The virtual component must bring the learners together online to work collectively and simultaneously on specific assignments that are an integral part of the BIP and count towards the overall learning outcomes. In addition, BIPs can be open to student and staff from any HEI, including local students and local staff.

Every partner HEI in the BIP must be involved in developing and implementing the programme and should have a role in either receiving or sending participants, except if they are coordinating only. The roles descriptions are clearly defined on page 9 of the Higher Education Mobility Handbook (↓ PDF).

Why should a HEI take the long and winding road towards implementing a BIP and for what courses is it a viable option?
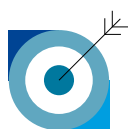
INnovation

BIP courses are predestined to deal with complex social issues, as they transcend borders, disciplines, and institutions. BIPs bear the opportunity for transdisciplinary and innovative learning-techniques including online collaboration, research-based learning and challenge-based approaches. In a BIP, transnational and transdisciplinary teams can work together to tackle challenges linked to the United Nations' sustainable development goals or other societal challenges identified by regions, cities, or companies.

INclusion

One of the goals of the European Commission is to make the Erasmus+ Programme more inclusive for all students. By enabling new and more flexible mobility formats that combine physical mobility with a virtual part, BIPs aim at reaching all types of students from all backgrounds, study fields and cycles. BIPs are supposed to provide opportunities for students and staff that cannot go abroad for long-term mobility. While BIPs provide a framework that can be attractive to broader student populations, HEIs still must ensure to promote them to groups of students that are underrepresented among mobile students and provide specific guidance and support if needed. In addition, they can serve as an introduction to international mobility for those wanting to get acquainted with principles and practicalities of Erasmus+ mobility through a shorter and more guided experience.

INterconnection

With their flexible structure, BIPs can facilitate collaboration with international partners, businesses, organisations, and local authorities. They can also provide a framework for mobility in highly regulated fields which are traditionally underrepresented in internationalisation due to strict national laws and mandatory curricula that complicate mobility, such as healthcare studies.

1.

Planning Phase

We don't want to gloss over it: Planning BIPs is challenging. There are various factors to consider, and various ways to get there. Before we give essential tips and tricks for planning a BIP for different organizational areas, we would like to point out general aspects that are good to be kept in mind.

Implementing a BIP ...

... is group work

- Discuss and acknowledge each other's roles and **expertise** and ensure a clear **division of responsibilities:** IOs are experienced in international relationship management and know how the E+ administration works, teachers/trainers are curriculum experts and know what topics can be taught in the form of a BIP (with some help from educational advisors).
- **Map your stakeholders** and make sure you know who you need to contact when you are interested in designing a BIP or participating in one. Start these internal conversations at an early stage.
  - Form a project team if it corresponds to the organizational culture and communicate about deadlines and responsibilities.
  - Stay in continuous contact with the colleagues in your HEI.
  - Choose an **online environment** accessible for all parties to use for communication that both the IO and teachers/trainers can access.
  - Develop a **checklist and roadmap.**
- Make sure all relevant stakeholders are aware of the official rules and regulations of the Erasmus+ Programme that are relevant for their role. Ensure good communication outside the project team, so that colleagues are well informed

about the progress. International coordinators should know which BIPs are organised in their institution, when they take place and where they are located in the curriculum so they can advise staff and students accordingly.

... demands institutional coordination

- Find a partner institution you trust.
- Find out about the rules at your institution: Do they match with the partners?
- Before any mobilities take place HEIs must have signed an inter-institutional agreement.
- As coordinator be transparent and discuss funding with your partners.

... needs enough lead time

- Think of when you want the course to take place and work backwards. Know what the deadlines are in your institution and in your partner institution with regards to funding, promotion and all aspects concerned with organizing this project.
- Be aware of the academic calendar while you do your planning, consult your partners about their availabilities.

... involves the international office and teachers/trainers

As teacher/trainer contact your international office as soon as there are plans about organising a BIP. The IO will inform you about the official deadlines and funding rules.

1.1 Erasmus+ Application

Tips/to dos for the IO

… at all participating HEIs:
The IOs are guiding the way and should ensure a clear communication among all stakeholders. For that purpose:
For the beneficiary module (BM), you will need information from teachers/trainers on their BIP. Some HEIs' good practice is to collect this information with a form they designed and require teachers/trainers to fill in.

… at the organising HEI:
The crux with the minimum number of students:
Reaching the minimum number of participants can be a major challenge for organising institutions, as this number excludes home students. It is always possible that the number is not reached for whatever reason, so it is recommended to admit more students to the programme to be on the safe side. Be aware that long-term incoming students at your HEI can participate in the BIP but are seen as home students and therefore do not count towards the minimum number of students that is required for the organisational support (OS) funding. HEIs tackle this issue also on a formal level, e.g. by forming a consortium of four (instead of three) partners, and by planning well ahead to allow students sufficient time to organise their participation and the recognition of credits and enhance commitment to the BIP.

1.2 Securing funding for BIPs

Tips/to dos for the IO

Concerning mobility grants for outgoing students participating in BIPs
- Mobility grants for participation in BIPs come from the general Erasmus+ mobility budget, on top of the grants for long-term mobility. HEIs need to take this into account when planning their Erasmus+ applications. Please consult the Higher Education Mobility Handbook for further information.
- Be aware of the possibility to limit the number of days a student can receive the grant for. Keep in mind that you are not obliged to give a grant for travel days. However, this practice can cause issues for students with fewer opportunities, so consider its pros and cons.
- You can keep track of your grant budget spent on students participating in BIPs by only approving mobilities to participate in BIPs organized with a strategic partner and/or announced well in advance.

Concerning BIPs your HEI organizes
- HEIs receive a lump sum for the organisational support which can be used for specific goals. Consult the national agency to find out what can be done with the money.
- The administration of the budget is managed in the BM.
- Ensure open communication about financial opportunities for all beneficiaries.
  · **Students** need to know about the (maximum) grant they can apply for.
  · Inform organisers of BIPs (such as **teachers, international coordinators,** etc) how much of the OS they can use for practicalities/their purposes.

Preliminary data show that the grant covers most of the expenses. In our explorative survey, 79.9 per cent of students stated that their grant covered more than 50 per cent of their expenses.

1.3 Choosing BIPs

How BIP funding is allocated to teachers/trainers varies between HEIs.

Generally, **two pathways** can be distinguished:
- Some HEIs plan ahead and only apply for BIPs that are already planned.
- Other HEIs apply for a certain number of BIPs and decide on who will implement them later during their project.

Most universities have an educational mission statement as well as an internationalization strategy to define the international and pedagogical profile of the institution. It is recommended to link BIPs to these strategic documents. This way, BIPs can be a means to bring a pedagogical vision to life and address internationalization efforts.

Selection based on didactic and thematic suitability

BIPs enable innovative didactic approaches to complex topics. They incorporate different perspectives by facilitating cooperation with educational institutions, businesses, NGOs and local authorities. BIPs are predestined to address complex social problems as they transcend national and disciplinary borders. They can serve as a specific didactic medium to address topics directly related to the SDGs, for example.

Selection based on internationalization efforts

As the period abroad is much shorter, BIPs can be a means to attract students who otherwise would not be able or willing to go abroad.

Students engaging in international activities are often highly motivated and interested in intercultural experiences, which results in a self-selection. We want all student to be on board, not just the ones that already have this international mindset.

We therefore advise you to ask yourself the following critical questions:
- Who are the mobile students at our HEI?
- Who is not participating and why?
- How can we tackle the why? What can we do to make mobility more inclusive? Can BIPs be a means to attract students who otherwise would not be able to go abroad or motivate those who do not want to go abroad for a longer period?

If there is a general desire to launch BIPs at the institution, consider degree programmes with a low propensity for mobility and see if BIPs have potential in these areas.

Tips/to dos for IOs

In case there are more teams of teachers interested in implementing a BIP than funding available, some HEIs conduct internal selection procedures involving internal juries. In any case: Make sure to respond to existing structures and procedures at your HEI when designing new processes for BIPs.

Concept Phase

2.1 Practical issues and organisation

Tips/to dos for the teachers/trainers

- Be prepared to act as **project manager or coach:**
  Teachers/trainers play a central role in the whole BIP process. They are often the ones initiating a specific BIP, designing and later implementing it. Often, they are also the link to the partner organisation. This involvement requires teachers to take on responsibilities beyond those they are used to and to act as project managers or coaches.
- Inform yourself about the **timelines and procedures** of applying for and implementing a BIP at your HEI, these differ considerably between HEIs.
- Familiarize yourself with the **Erasmus-specific language** by reading information provided by your HEI and – if needed – the European Commission (see links in section 1 on page 6).
- HEIs receive a lump sum for the organisational support (OS). Ask your international officer how much of the OS you can use and, above all, for what purpose (see also 5.2).

2.2 Finding Partners

A BIP needs to consist of at least three partners from EU Member States and third countries associated to the Erasmus+ Programme. There are various ways to establish these partnerships.

- In many cases, HEI fall back on existing partnerships and strategies. In this case you can jointly define a topic or find a common challenge around which to build a BIP. Especially HEIs which are part of European Universities consortia have organised most of their BIPs within these partnerships.
- If new partnerships are to be established: Define the topic of the BIP before looking for partners.
- A middle way would be to rely partly on existing partnerships but to bring in new HEIs.

When working with new partners: have a standard clause in the inter-institutional agreement which asks if they are willing to develop new BIPs in the future to outline how the partnership will develop.

- Try to work with at least three partners from different EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme. If one needs to step out of the project, you should still be able to implement the BIP.
- It is advisable to discuss all the different aspects of the organisation of the course with your partners in the design phase of the BIP to avoid confusion and even irritation at a later stage.

Tips/to dos for teachers/trainers

- Use your network of teachers/trainers and international coordinators to find suitable partners. Make sure you get the IO at your HEI involved at an early stage; they can support you in finding suitable additional partners.
- If you are approached by a partner, contact the IO about your plan to participate in a BIP. They need to be involved because of the planning, registration and funding.

Teachers can also organise a staff BIP course based on the peer learning method. Through such a format, dissemination of best practices is facilitated and teachers, but also administrative staff can use this as an opportunity for in-depth peer learning, which offers more opportunities than only "job shadowing".

2.3 Integrate BIPs in the curriculum to ensure recognition

Even though, until now, BIPs are mostly offered as electives or add-ons to students' ECTS credits, they can and should be embedded in curricula as compulsory courses or part of compulsory modules. Embedding BIPs in the curriculum provides for a more inclusive mobility option for students belonging to groups who are underrepresented among mobile students. Short-term mobility is more attractive for students with care responsibilities or working students, and the recognition of ECTS credits as part of compulsory modules provides an additional incentive for them. In this way, students do not have to fear that even a short-term mobility period outside of their compulsory courses would prolong their studies and thereby put them in financial distress.

Having the BIP embedded in the curriculum also benefits the participating HEIs and teachers, as it provides the basis for long term cooperation instead of a one-off opportunity.

Even if it is not possible to embed the BIP in the core modules of the curriculum, approaching the topic from a multi- or interdisciplinary perspective and addressing one or more of the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme can provide for a thematic link to the content of a study programme and to HEI's strategic priorities, which enhances recognition as part of compulsory elective credits.

To ensure easy recognition of ECTS credits, teachers, teaching and curriculum support and other staff involved in the planning of a BIP must ensure the following:

- It is essential that learning outcomes are formulated for every BIP. Ideally, these learning outcomes are jointly developed by the participating institutions, in any case their compatibility with partners' curricula needs to be checked. Keep in mind that in addition to subject specific learning outcomes, international learning environments are an opportunity to develop transversal and international skills.
- Make sure all partners' curricular needs are reflected and avoid that one partner's ideas are dominating.
- For recognition, it is not necessary that content and methods are identical to your own curriculum but that there is no substantial difference in the learning outcomes achieved.
- Consider legal frameworks such as differing examination regulations.

In addition to linking BIPs to curricula as you are designing them, it is beneficial to keep them and other forms of Blended or Virtual Mobility/Virtual Exchange in mind, when designing new study programmes or revising existing ones. Integrating options for short-term mobility in the curriculum from the start will provide opportunities for acquiring international skills for groups of students who are underrepresented among those participating in mobility. This is particularly relevant in cases where cultural approaches to designing curricula or field-specific requirements, such as those for regulated professions, require highly regulated curricula that do not offer much choice for students.

2.4 Didactic Design of the BIP

Tips/to dos for teachers/trainers

- Developing and implementing a BIP not only helps starting new cooperation with colleagues or deepening existing partnerships but is also an opportunity to further develop your professional skills as a teacher: teamwork, intercultural and international competences are not only a benefit for participants but also for those implementing the BIP.

- The design of a BIP with a diverse group of learners is a challenge for educators. Constructive alignment is key: Which methods will support participants in acquiring the intended learning outcomes and how can they be assessed? Especially developing well-suited assessments takes time.

- Consider the **composition** of the group:
  · Are there students, staff or both participating?
  · Which study cycle are they in?
  · Which teaching and assessment methods are they used to and how can they be supported to adjust to new methods?
  · When forming the group, keep in mind that there is a good division of international and home students, while also keeping track of the mandatory number of students necessary. The mix of cultures is important for the internationalisation component.
  · Make sure to define prior competencies that are entry requirements and think of an inclusive selection method in case of more applications than places.

- Consider the **sequence of the virtual and physical parts:** Starting online or offline has impact on teambuilding and the commitment of the students. Some HEIs have had positive experiences with starting with the physical mobility, as they perceive a higher commitment of the students to finish the programme and not drop out right before the mobility. However, most

BIPs seem to start with introductory online sessions as they experience difficulties to engage students online after they have already completed the physical mobility part.

- Consider the **content of the virtual and physical parts:** Virtual and physical parts need to complement each other and together enable participants to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Although virtual parts are sometimes used for thematic theoretical inputs, practical experience shows that too often online sessions only serve as introductory meetings to present practical issues and get to know each other.

- Online group work of students needs particular attention and guidance by teachers. Determine clearly how you will support the students in the virtual phase.

- Consider the **duration of the virtual and physical parts:** To ensure building up knowledge, more virtual sessions beforehand can be useful, while longer physical mobilities can be difficult to integrate into academic calendars and for providing funding for participants for the full duration.

- Consider the programme as an **opportunity to cooperate with non-HE partners,** such as private enterprises and the public sector. Tackling societal problems with an international group of participants can not only be a way to contribute to Erasmus+ priorities but also provide space for developing creative, innovative solutions that benefit from more diverse perspectives and experiences.

- Consider **practical issues** and constraints:
  · When are there holidays and lecture-free periods at the HEIs involved?
  · Are all HEIs located in the same time zone?

For 79.6 per cent of the students responding to the exploratory survey the BIP started online.

- Which video conference tools and online learning environments will be used?
- Do all teachers and participants involved have access to these tools and are able to proficiently use them?
- Do all participants have access to the necessary hardware, software, and a stable internet connection?
- Are there any issues of data protection and privacy to consider, when sharing students' data with teachers from other HEIs?

- Dedicate **more time to setting the frame for the joint work** at the beginning by in-troducing rules, assessments, and require-ments. This is needed in any educational setting, but it is even more important in a joint course with participants who are used to the different regulations and customs of their respective HEIs and cultures. Be aware of the hidden curriculum and dis-cuss your expectations with your partners.

- Dedicate time to opening and closing of both the whole programme and in particu-lar the mobility period to provide a clear beginning and end to the joint experience.

- Dedicate time to activities that **help participants to get to know each other.** Participants will much faster develop a common way of working if this process is facilitated by ice-breaking activities both online and during the physical mobility that help them understand each other better. Some methods and formats can serve dual purposes, especially during the mobility period: While field trips help to convey knowledge, they are also a joint experience that helps develop a community.

- Make sure to **get to know each other,** to clarify each teacher's/trainer's role and what is expected from them throughout the different phases of the BIP. Clarify which regulations need to be followed and define assessment requirements, grading includ-ing grade conversion and who assesses which students before the beginning of the course. Communicate these rules to the participants. The challenges of intercul-tural understanding do not only apply to participants but also to the cooperating teachers, so build a common base for your joint work.

2.5   Didactical tips, tricks and tools

Implementing a BIP requires additional skills from teachers that go beyond those for im-plementing courses for a less diverse group of students in a physical setting. It can be helpful to first join a BIP that is coordinated and lead by an experienced partner to learn from them.

An international group of learners requires more attention on the diversity of cultural backgrounds, languages spoken, lived expe-rience and ways of learning and interacting they are used to and feel comfortable with. Some European University Alliances have created resources to support their teachers

in catering to their diverse students' needs, e.g. through specific training programmes on intercultural competences of teachers. Such competences are crucial for designing and delivering a BIP which will be inclusive and effective in fostering students' competences.

The push towards the digital transition in higher education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic increased the use of online tools and digital literacy of teachers significantly. However, many still refrain from using more than a video conference tool and stick to its basic functionality of facilitating the call. Using interactive and collaborative tools can

enrich the virtual parts of blended courses and support a bigger variety of activities during the online part. When choosing activities and tools, the tools should never be leading your deliberations, instead, always focus on supporting your students in achieving the learning outcomes.

Online tools and their application

Multiple tools support interaction in online settings, most of them are commercial products but do offer free basic accounts or reduced fees for educational purposes.

- For engaging with your participants via quick feedback surveys or activities to get to know the group, search for "interactive presentation tool" or "interactive survey tool".
- To gather and structure information, create mind maps, etc. search for "online white board". Many video conferencing tools provide an in-app whiteboard that might just do the trick for your needs.
- For repeating content or a fun pub quiz search for "online quiz app".

When choosing a tool for your purpose, consider the following:
- Can you access the functionalities you need with a free account, or do you have to sign up for paid access?
- Are there any issues with data protection or privacy that need to be considered? How easy is it to access for different users? Can you just share a link when participants are supposed to interact with the tool, or do they all have to create an account themselves?
- What are its requirements for hardware? Some newer video conferencing tools with virtual or augmented reality features require special hardware and high computer performance.

- How easy is it to use? Some whiteboard apps provide a variety of design tools, but they are also more difficult to use. For quick use just to gather and structure information turn to a tool that is less visually appealing but easier to use.
- Do you need to document and download results/outputs for further use and if so, does the tool allow to do so in a way that suits your needs?

In an intercultural setting, more attention needs to be given to people getting to know each other, becoming a group and forming teams. Team building activities will support students in getting to know each other, learn to understand how other team members work on a task in a fun way with less at stake than when doing their academic group work. Icebreakers both online and offline, scavenger hunts or team challenges during the physical mobility might not be activities that most HE teachers implement with their students on a regular basis, therefore we provide a list of examples and helpful search queries below.

Make sure to dedicate enough time to these activities especially at the beginning of your programme and the beginning of the mobility period. Towards the end, a small warm-up activity in the morning to focus participants' attention will be enough. This will pay off through increased productivity of the teams.

Activities to support team building

Easy icebreakers
Icebreakers provide an opportunity to get to know each other on a more personal level besides the topic one is collaborating on.

Online

This or that
Prepare slides or surveys with common dichotomies such as "cat or dog", "coffee or tea", "mountains or beach". Depending on the size of the group, and time available, one can just do the survey or use each of the question as the starting point for conversations in smaller breakout groups.

Touch blue
Participants are asked to find an item in the room that meets a certain requirement such as "touch something blue/soft/old" and are supposed to show it to the camera. Again: depending on group size and time available, there are different variations of how to implement and debrief the icebreaker.

Offline

Human Bingo
Prepare a Bingo card with nine squares, each containing a question: "What is your favourite drink / movie / tv-show?" Participants answer these questions for themselves on their Bingo card and are then asked to find colleagues who gave the same answer as them. Adjust the pattern and number of colleagues found that are required for a Bingo to group size and time available. Same goes for how detailed to debrief the activity, for instance by asking which of the questions had the fewest matches.

Triangle /Quadrangle of commonalities
Participants form groups of three or four and are asked to find commonalities (interests, personal situation and private life – as far as they want to discuss this – skills, etc.) that two or more of them share. They document their findings on a flipchart, which can then be more or less comprehensively presented to the group – depending on time available.

Team Challenges
These exercises can support those collaborating on a project in developing their joint way of working together. Some of the suggestions below refer to the teams' identity and expressing it in a creative way, others establish identity by competing against other teams in the group. Some well-known examples are:
- create your team flag
- create your team coat of arms
- constructing a tower or a bridge from very few materials such as five sheets of paper and 15 cm of tape

Find more ideas online, searching for "icebreakers", "team challenge ideas" or "team building activities".

### Scavenger hunt or mission impossible
Prepare a list of challenges that teams must accomplish during the physical mobility. Those can include taking photos of team members at certain places on campus, while eating local food, writing poems, learning a few words in the different native languages, etc.

You can let yourselves be inspired by the results of searching online for "university scavenger hunt".

When working with those kinds of activities, it is important to consider a few aspects to make them a positive experience for participants and teachers/trainers.

- Respect personal boundaries: Different people have different levels of tolerance for physical contact, so do without activities that require physical contact, especially in the beginning of the onsite mobility. When it comes to giving information about oneself, there are questions that might feel too intimate or uncomfortable for some people. Work around this by using activities that leave it up to participants what personal information they want to share. Make sure to always provide an opt-out of an activity in case people feel uncomfortable.

- Own your activities: Do not try to use an activity if you do not feel comfortable with it because it seems too silly, it is too complicated to explain, or you are not sure about how useful it will be. These kinds of exercises only work if you stand behind your decision to implement them and are confident in facilitating them.

- Don't use them just for the sake of using them: Just because an activity seems interesting and might be fun does not mean it will be beneficial for your BIP group. Be sure the activity fits your needs.

- Adjust them when needed: If an activity looks interesting but is not a perfect fit for your purpose, you can try to adjust it to your needs by changing ice breaker questions, rules of team challenges, etc.

- Get used to this kind of activities: Start with activities that are easy to facilitate and move on to more complicated ones when you have gained some experience.

- Always work with empathy: The group will let you know if something does not work. Read their facial expressions and enthusiasm or lack thereof and decide when it is time to move on from an activity.

3.

Preparation Phase
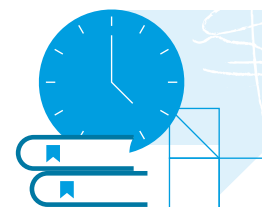
3.1 Communicating about BIPs

It is important to clarify who is responsible for which part of communication about and promotion of the BIP and how and by whom applications by participants will be processed. In big, diverse institutions, it is often the involved teachers who communicate directly to their own students as well as their scientific network to recruit participants. In smaller institutions with more centralized procedures, communication might be organized by the international office.

It is important to advertise the BIP early enough so that there is enough time to apply for grants and to plan travel and accommodation at reasonable prices.

Communication on BIPs to students must include:

- information on individual educational components, as defined in the ECTS Users' Guide 2015 (p 57).
- alignment with the curriculum at participating HEIs
- schedule of the BIP
- eligibility for participation: which study cycle, programmes, etc. are eligible? How many students can participate?
- available grants: Who can receive a grant and how much do students receive?
- information on the application process: schedule, required documents, who will decide on applications

To reach underrepresented students involve the institution's support system. Ask study advisors and student deans to promote the options and refer the students to the IO for practical information with regards to grants, top-ups and other formalities. Maybe even involve **inclusion or diversity officers** if your HEI has these positions.

Data from the exploratory survey indicate that most students (67.3 per cent) find out about the BIP from their teachers, followed by the international office as their second source of information (22.8 per cent).

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3.2 Choosing and preparing (with) students for BIPs

Selection process

- It is mandatory to have a selection process in place before advertising the course.
- The selection criteria should be clear, transparent and inclusive, in accordance with overarching regulations of the HEI and communicated to students interested in participating.
- Check not only the grades but also students' motivation. It should be visible that the student is interested in the course topics and future perspectives, not just in the receiving country as a tourist destination. Students should also demonstrate an ability and/or willingness to work in a group together.
- While academic merits are important, keep in mind that BIPs are supposed to increase opportunities for groups of students that are underrepresented in mobility.

In most cases, the selection of the students is done by the teachers/trainers or programme directors. Clarify beforehand, who is responsible at your HEI. If the BIP is included in a mandatory module of the curriculum, no selection is needed.

- Have a clear idea about the group formation. Remember to include home students and know what the workable maximum group size is.
- All HEIs have experience with students cancelling their participation in the BIP at the last moment. A form they must sign to confirm their participation after being selected can increase students' commitment.
- Recruit more students than the minimum requirement and have a contingency plan in case participants cancel their physical participation last minute (based on transparent selection criteria).

Preparing students/teachers for their BIP participation

- Provide a handbook to guide participants through administrative requirements and making practical arrangements. This should at least cover:
  - for students: How to prepare and sign the learning agreement?
  - How to enrol at the host HEI? (if needed)
  - How to apply for grants, including top-ups?
  - recommendations concerning travel arrangements including green options
  - How to organize accommodation?
  - practical info on the location of the physical mobility, as would be provided for any other international event

- It is important that the necessary information reaches students in time for applying for funding, organizing accommodation and making travel arrangements – take necessary deadlines in consideration when planning.

Tips/to dos for IOs

- Make sure that the learning agreement is filled out and signed by all three parties before the start of the BIP.
- Provide information about funding, especially top-ups available.
- Registration at the host HEI is an important issue. Make sure to provide additional support if needed.

4.

Running the BIP

The BIP is ready to be launched in the classroom.
That's not the end of your duties.

Tips/to dos for IOs

- When exchanging the students, and reporting in the BM, the inter-institutional agreements need to be in place.

- You must enter various information about the BIP in the BM. A good practice is to collect this information with a standardized form (see section 1.1). In this way, reporting in the BM should only be a formality. Plan this step enough in advance to avoid delays in case of issues with online systems.

- Make sure to dedicate enough time to the Erasmus+ documentation of grants, they take about the same time as it takes for long-term study or internship grants. Equally to long-term grants, letters of acceptance, mobility agreements and other paperwork are needed.

- IOs need to prove that students participated in the physical part. An adequate possibility of doing that is to ask teachers/trainers to provide pen and paper attendance lists.

- Some kind of certification of participation (Transcript of Records, certificate of participation) is mandatory for participants to receive the funds.

Claim time for doing a presentation on long-term mobility options during the physical mobility to inform participants in case they got interested in going abroad for longer.

Tips/to dos for teachers/trainers:

- Define one teacher as contact person for participants during the BIP to be notified in case of technical difficulties during the virtual and emergencies during the physical mobility.
- During the virtual part: make sure to know whom to contact in case of technical issues you cannot resolve yourself.
- In case your institution provides didactical or pedagogical support, do not hesitate to ask for help.
- Think about a welcome pack for the physical mobility. Some possibilities for its content:
  - city map and tourist information
  - info on the hosting HEI
  - goodies from the hosting HEI
  - vouchers or rebate coupons for restaurants near the campus
  - T-shirts that were printed for the BIP participants

- During the physical mobility:
  - Keep track of the attendance of your students as the IO has to certify participation.
  - Schedule regular monitoring meetings of the teacher/trainer team to discuss progress and possibly necessary adjustments.

- After the physical mobility: Schedule a feedback meeting of the teacher/trainer team to reflect on your experience while your memory of it is fresh.

- After the end of the BIP: Schedule a feedback meeting of the trainer/teacher team to reflect on the course as a whole and discuss possible lessons learned to be taken into consideration in future BIPs.

First data show that BIPs are a common first-time study-related mobility for students. In our explorative survey, this was the case for 63.2 per cent of respondents.

5.

Follow Up
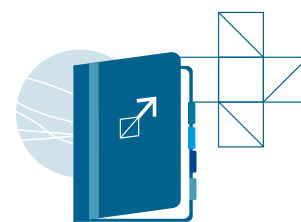
5.1 Processing of students' grades/credits and recognition at home HEI

The recognition and allocation of ECTS credits is different at each institution. It is recommended that there are checklists developed for the students about how to get the credits recognized, to make sure that the process is as easy as possible. It is important to think beforehand about which grading system you want to use within the programme. How does this relate to all partners? Besides working towards a generally accepted grading system, use the four-eyes principle for each assessment.

Tips/to dos for IOs

Students should obtain confirmation of the recognition before they go and take the course. This can be done when the learning agreement is signed, but this might differ from institution to institution.

Students need to obtain a transcript after finishing the course. This transcript must be issued by the host institution to the student or the home institution.

- The receiving institution needs to obtain the transcripts.
- Students need to be registered at the host HEI in order to produce these transcripts.

In the survey 72 per cent of the surveyed students stated that the BIP was a free elective, and thus had no formal link to their curriculum. In addition, the process of recognition is not automated yet in all institutions. Only 49 per cent of the students stated that their ECTS were recognised automatically, whereas 51 per cent had to submit an application for the recognition of examinations/ECTS credits.

5.2 Financial aspects and reporting on OS-funding

The official rules with regards to the OS funding spending are listed in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide but are not very extensive so as to say that all the amounts and options are spelled out. It is therefore recommended that you know which claims you can declare before you start spending money. Check with your international office about which expenses you are allowed to claim, so that you are prepared for the financial reporting at the end of the project.

Tips for using OS funding in many ways:
For example, it can be used to organise specific IT help for the online part of the course or for renting a group accommodation. Alternatively, it can be used to finance sensors or robots and/or any literature that might be needed.

5.3 Participant evaluation

Even if you do not plan to implement the same course as an Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme again, it is important to benefit from participants' feedback. Their perspective, both on content, teaching methods, and their learning, as well as on practical aspects of the implementation of the course can feed into further development of other teaching activities as well.

General Tips

For implementing your own evaluation, teachers and international office staff need to consider:
- Which parts of the BIP should it cover, virtual part(s), physical mobility, or both? In any case it should be issued soon after the last session of the part(s) it is addressing.
- Is it feasible to use one HEI's digital course evaluation tool or is a different way – including pen and paper questionnaires – more practical?
- Should the feedback be anonymous or not, and how can anonymity be ensured?
- Do you want to include some sort of feedback activity at the end of the physical mobility as part of giving the period a clear end?

Organise a meeting of all teachers involved to reflect and evaluate, e.g. on the last day of the physical mobility.

Tips/to dos for teachers/trainers

Beyond the topics that are covered in the Erasmus+ participant report surveys, teachers can gain deeper insights in how their course design worked out when grappling with the following questions:
- Which inputs or activities did participants value the most?
- Which skills did they learn?
- How did they experience the international collaboration during the BIP?

For most teachers, the BIP is most likely a rare opportunity to teach a group of such a diverse composition, so participants' feedback on aspects of teaching an international classroom can be especially useful to enhance your own teaching.

Tips/to dos for International Offices

Similarly, International Offices that contribute to the organisation of the BIP might usually not be organising courses and events on a regular basis and benefit from feedback on practical issues.

6.

Background information

6.1 Virtual mobility or Virtual Exchange

Virtual Exchange can be defined as an umbrella term which refers to the many different online learning initiatives and methodologies which bring students together in online collaborative learning with partners from different cultural backgrounds as part of their study programmes. The emphasis in Virtual Exchange is very much on person-to-person communication and exploring how students can develop different competences and achieve learning objectives by collaborating online. By working online together with partner classes in other countries in carefully designed projects, and by receiving the necessary mentoring and support from their teachers, students can develop their collaborative skills, intercultural competence, digital competence and, of course, their foreign language skills.

Virtual Mobility allows students from one educational institution to follow courses organised at a different institution (usually based in a different country) without having to leave home. The focus of Virtual Mobility is to provide subject knowledge (possibly in an area or a specific topic not taught at the student's home university) by taking advantage of complementary expertise and does not require the student to interact with peers from the host institution.

Some well-known forms of Virtual Exchange are:

COIL
Online learning in an international setting, with interactive involvement of students and faculty from different international and intercultural backgrounds in and outside the classroom.[1]

In order to qualify as COIL, activities must absolutely meet the cumulative conditions of being:
- **Collaborative:** staff are co-teaching the module on equal footing; students are put in a position of needing to cooperate effectively and efficiently to produce the required outputs of the activity. There is also a co-dependency (positive interdependence). It stools on theories in social constructivist learning. In short: learning takes place with each other and learning from each other. Learners create their learning.
- **Online:** the interaction between the students and staff in question takes place (mostly or exclusively) online.
- **International:** Through meaningful interaction between staff and students in two (or more) different countries, international and intercultural competences can be acquired. Additionally, it provides a useful framework for interdisciplinary cooperation.
- **Learning:** COIL modules are learning activities, and should be an integral part of the curriculum, not an optional and inconsequential "extra".

As management is not always completely aware of all the internationalisation possibilities, describing different forms of internationalisation like COIL or Virtual Exchange can be used as a conversation starter. These programmes work towards the inclusion of underrepresented students by offering different opportunities.

But this is not the goal per se. The goal is to be for all, not specifically underrepresented students in mobility (mobility is not always the goal). What else are you doing that connects to Virtual Exchange? Make an inventory within the institution to show what you are already doing.

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1   de Wit, H. (2020). Collaborative Online International Learning in Higher Education. In: Teixeira, P.N., Shin, J.C. (eds) The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions. Springer, Dordrecht. p. 188-190

6.2 Blended Mobility in general

Blended mobility in general is a great new teaching method that will hopefully reach more groups of students than traditional mobility. Nevertheless, blended mobility also brings great challenges as it is much more complex than traditional mobility and involves multiple stakeholders. Blended mobility often involves multiple HEIs, and, in addition to teachers, various supporting services. Besides physical mobility and synchronous online learning additional online tools can be used to create asynchronous learning environments.

It becomes obvious that designing and implementing blended mobility is a time-consuming and complex endeavour, that will only succeed if various actors work in unison (teachers, international office, support staff). A real team effort, in other words!

6.3 Institutional support and esteem for teachers

Teaching an international group of learners in cooperation with colleagues from other HEIs in different countries requires additional skills. There needs to be more focus on how to enhance communication and collaboration between learners with diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, virtual components demand skilled use of online tools. HEIs should provide didactical training on teaching international classrooms as well as on designing courses and on using online tools, including incorporating asynchronous methods of learning when appropriate, such as forum discussions. While didactical support on the latter has increased due to the digitalisation push caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, many institutions do not focus yet on the former in their didactics provisions.

However, it remains a responsibility of HEIs to support teachers in developing their skills to run international and partially virtual classrooms.

International umbrella organisations and associations involved in higher education policy making can recommend trainers or even offer training courses themselves. Smaller HEIs that might not have enough teachers interested in those specific didactical skills may consider cooperating with other HEIs to be able to offer a broad range of HE didactic courses to their teaching staff.

Besides support, it is also necessary to acknowledge and compensate the additional workload required for developing and implementing an Erasmus+ BIP. Considering more resource intensive and innovative ways of teaching in the institutional compensation scheme does not only provide acknowledgement for those teachers already involved in them but might also incentivise those who have not yet taken the time to develop something off their beaten tracks. Beyond the individual teacher, financial compensation of special commitment also fosters the parity of esteem of research and teaching in a HEI.

6.4 BIPs and HEI strategy

So far, only HEIs that are part of European University Alliances seem to include BIPs in strategic considerations and use them to pursue their objectives. They can, however, be part of any HEI's efforts in a broad range of contexts of internationalisation and innovation in learning and teaching.

The most obvious perspective on BIPs is emphasising their inclusivity for groups of learners who might not be able to be mobile for a longer period. In addition, they can give students a taste of mobility who otherwise might never have considered being mobile. BIPs can be part of multifaceted cooperation with long-term partners (such as those in a European University consortium) but they could also be a way to start engaging with new partners to explore common interests in teaching and research/advancement of the arts.

HEIs face increasing competition for students, and innovative learning offers such as

BIPs can be part of what attracts students. Internationalisation of the curriculum is demanded more and more, close collaboration with a link to the curriculum enables benchmarking with your partners. This can help strengthen the collaboration but can also be used to showcase your internationalisation internally.

In turn, a commitment to organising BIPs in a broad variety of subjects also needs to be reflected in other strategies e.g. concerning teaching and learning and measures to enhance it (see also 6.3 Institutional support and esteem for teachers). For implementing them on a large scale, procedures should be developed to increase efficiency of addressing the steps and challenges presented in this toolkit. Contentwise, BIPs can be interlinked with a HEIs strategy concerning its third mission, be it contributing to tackling societal challenges or engaging with the local community.

6.5 BIPs for Staff or BIPs for Staff/Students

Besides organising Erasmus+ BIPs for students, it is also possible to organise them for administrative and/or academic staff as well as for students and staff together.

They can serve to create an international learning experience for staff and an environment to expand their intercultural competence which is highly needed in an internationalized working environment as a HEI. The priorities of the Erasmus+ programme can provide inspiration for topics to tackle within a BIP for staff, in particular the fields of Inclusion and Diversity and Digital Transformation

offer a broad range of knowledge and skills that could and should be further developed among both academic and administrative staff of HEIs to support them in contributing to their institution's goals.

The provisions of the Erasmus+ programme also allow for BIPs in which students and staff participate as learners together. However, we have not found examples of such a BIP yet and look forward to hearing about first attempts to implement this new way of joint learning of different groups among the HE communities.

Thank you for your Input and Feedback

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GLOSSARY
OF abbreviations used

BIP	Blended Intensive Programme
BM	Beneficiary Module
EC	European Commission
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IIA	Inter Institutional Agreement
IO	International Office
KA 131	mobility within Europe
KA 171	mobility outside of Europe
NA	National Agency
OS	Organisational Support

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