

Peer Learning Activity – Blended Intensive Programmes – 14 May 2024

On the 14th of May, participants from Austria, Croatia and the Netherlands came together to discuss challenges and opportunities of Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes. According to Gerhard Volz, head of department at the OEAD, BIPs are one of the success stories of the programme Erasmus+. Stephan de Pasqualin, Deputy Head of Department at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF), adds to that. “Although the starting point of the Ministry is to promote long-term mobility, it is better to have any international experience than none.” With BIPs, more people will have an international experience.

The results of lots of interviews and enquiries: the basic toolkit

The main reason for coming together on the 14th was the presentation of the basic toolkit for Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes. It is a 26 pages document which gives practical guidance on how to go about a BIP. It’s not only for colleagues who are just starting out with BIPs, but also for the more experienced colleagues. That combination made it especially challenging to put together.

The basic toolkit is an interactive online document. As a user, you can choose which phase you want to know more about and navigate to that part directly. In the margins, you will find important tips or references to related topics. They are easily recognisable through different icons.

What is the student view on BIPs?

While the toolkit is a collection of experiences by colleagues who have set up a BIP, we have also asked students about their experiences, via a survey. A few highlights:

- Almost 70% of the students was told about a BIP by a teacher. Rarely any of the BIPs are included in the Course Catalogue of the curriculum.
- The main reason for participation is the opportunity to go abroad and exchange intercultural experiences, not the course or teacher.
- For about half of the participants, a BIP is a first international experience.
- The setup of BIPs can differ. First online, then at location or the other way around. Or an order of online, at location, and back to online. However, participants learn the most during the physical part of a BIP. On the 14th of May it was discussed that this could be the result of the programme setup. A lot of the time, the online part is merely used for getting to know the other participants.
- When the same course is offered via regular education and via a BIP, the BIP-course is better appreciated. There is a better intercultural understanding.

Tips to improve the setup of BIPs

There is a lot more potential for the online part of a BIP. At times it is just used for introductions, basically because the online part is a requirement to get BIP-funding. There are no requirements that state what the online part should look like.

However, institutions are thinking of another setup for BIPs. Where they first started online to get to know the other participants and do the actual work in the physical week, they are thinking of turning the order around. So, start with the physical week, and use the online part for reflections and evaluations.

Another thing discussed is to create a BIP for teachers who will be setting up a BIP themselves. That way they can experience a BIP and use this experience to improve their own BIP.

Let's talk about issues

During the world café session, we asked about issues and improvements. A few highlights:

- Communication. A key part, but also the part that needs improvement. This goes for communication with the international office, they are left out a lot and are therefore surprised often as well. Communication with teachers and with students also needs to be improved, mostly for clarity on the process.
- Manpower. Organising a BIP is a lot of work. People need to be aware of that from the beginning and clear agreements need to be made on how to deal with the extra hours.
- Motivation.
- More automation please! Unnecessary amounts of data need to be inserted in the Erasmus+ Beneficiary Module.
- Reliable partners. Tips were given to work with partners you already know and trust.
- Student commitment. How do you make sure they actually show up?
- Awareness of BIPs. We need to work on the branding and show the impact and advantages of joining a BIP.

Best practices: what have we learned/created and are we willing to share with others?

- Evaluate after every BIP and use the lessons learned to improve the next one.
- Check and always double check information.
- Multiple HEIs have created handbooks, roadmaps or internal checklists for administrative processes. These are step by step guides for colleagues implementing BIPs to make sure they exactly know about steps to take and information to collect and submit at any stage of the process.
- Provide students with a guideline about the steps they need to take when participating in a BIP.

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