

	<b>Final Version</b>	<b>IO5 – Guidelines for Learning Material for Quality Blended Staff Mobility</b>
<p><b>BEST (Blended Erasmus+ Staff Training)</b>  KA203 Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education  REFERENCE: 2016-1-ES01-KA203-025594  Coordinator: ALCALA University</p>		<p>Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union</p> 

## **Guidelines for Learning Material for Quality Blended Staff Mobility**

Blended Staff Mobility - an innovative approach to boosting your university career

### **Contents**

<b>PREAMBLE</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction	3
Aim	3
Intended users	3
Project background	3
<b>PART ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>5</b>
Terminology	5
Different formats of blended mobility	6
Benefits and drawbacks	6
<b>PART TWO: PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>8</b>
Methodology	8
Online blendedmobility.eu platform	10
Guide for using the platform	12
<b>PART THREE: MODULES IMPLEMENTATION [piloted in the BEST+ project]</b>	<b>14</b>

Case 1: BEST+Riga – Intercultural competences [Moderator/Leader: University of Eastern Finland]	14
Case 2: BEST+Joensuu – International attractiveness of universities [Moderator/Leader: University of Alcala]	22
Case 3: BEST+Lodz – Student experience [Moderators/Leaders: University of Lodz & Erasmus Student Network]	33
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
REFERENCES	45

# **PREAMBLE**

## **Introduction**

The 2011 EU modernization agenda identifies key policy issues for Member States and higher education institutions setting as a priority the need to strengthen quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation (COM, 2011: 3). However, realities differ substantially between different European countries and the impact of the Erasmus+ program, a European initiative, has to be harmonized through quality standards of cross-border cooperation, administration and application of modern learning solutions.

The professional development of staff members working in international relations traditionally takes place within the institutions, where senior staff train new staff members. As a result, some practices may be perpetuated even if they would fail to be evaluated as efficient practices.

Staff members can participate in staff training weeks (STWs), workshops at larger scale and costly conferences or training events, such as the EAIE or ERACON, but these activities often lack the focus and quality of knowledge that can be achieved through community driven Learning Material.

Using blended staff mobility can not only substantially lower the cost but also ensure a higher quality of learning outcomes, as it can be prepared by experts and continuously be developed by the whole community. Blended staff mobility could be used to get the right content in the right format to the right people at the right time.

## **Aim**

The objective of the Guidelines for Learning Material is to provide an open educational result (OER) facilitating blended staff mobility for different initiatives at higher education in the future. Apart from documenting the course of the actual pilot blended mobility module, the guidelines constitute an easy way to reuse the framework created for implementing blended mobility, by exchanging the contents as per necessity of the future users. The guidelines also depict the comparison of 4 different methodologies of blended learning as drafted and piloted by the project team.

## **Intended users**

Staff at higher education institutions who are active in promoting internationalization and personnel development; policy makers such as National Agencies and other stakeholders interested in maximizing the efficiency of learning by using modern technologies when conducting actual staff mobility.

## **Project background**

The present guidelines discuss the findings drawn from the practical implementation of 4 different formats of blended mobility piloted in the BEST+ project.

The BEST+ project provided a quasi-experimental setting for a new form of staff mobility, thus exploring ways to cope with the new challenges of increased mobility, the evolution of mobility schemes and the digital development in mobility management.

By developing a community platform for higher education professionals working in international relations, the project addressed the following aspects:

- Open Educational Resources
- Quality & Quantity of mobility
- Combining online resources
- On-site, face-to-face instruction with computer mediated learning (Hope, 2017: 2421)

The activities organized in the framework of the project have been of various kinds and purposes for the following target groups:

- higher education professionals
- students
- policy makers.

Three curricular and organizational proposals, which can be reused and refined way beyond the project, have been derived from BEST+project, each aimed at discussing a different aspect of the everyday issues the target group faces, as presented in these guidelines:

- Case 1: BEST+Riga – Intercultural competences [Moderator/Leader: University of Eastern Finland], IROs
- Case 2: BEST+Joensuu – Attractiveness of Higher Education [Moderator/Leader: University of Alcalá], policy makers
- Case 3: BEST+Lodz – Student experience [Moderators/Leaders: University of Lodz & Erasmus Student Network], students

These guidelines examine the key issues that can be helpful for implementing this academic collaboration in a successful way.

## PART ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Terminology

**Blended learning.** According to earlier terminology development, “Blended learning” means int.al. combining various pedagogical approaches (e.g., constructivism, behaviorism, cognitivism) to produce an optimal learning outcome with or without instructional technology. It may also mean mixing or combining instructional technology with actual job tasks in order to create a harmonious effect of learning and working (Driscoll, 2002:1), or refer to other combinations(e.g., individual and group instruction; self-paced instruction and lecture method) (Cano & Ion, 2014:79).

According to Friesen (2012: 1) blended learning designates the range of possibilities presented by combining Internet and digital media with established classroom forms that require the physical co-presence of teacher and students. Goeman, Poelmans & Van Rompey (2018) defines blended learning as a result of deliberate, integrated combination or integration (Graham, 2013) of online and face-to-face learning activities. From 2006 to the present, blended learning has been understood as a combination of face-to-face and technology-mediated instructional forms and practices.

In the sense of this paper and BEST+ project these eclectic discourses have to be regarded as possible elements when designing the actual face-to-face and technology-mediated learning systems. In order to better differentiate from the various preceding terms and emphasize the computer mediated learning component in combination with mobility element, further in this paper the “blended learning” term will be referred to as “blended mobility”.

**Blended teaching.** Designing and facilitating blended learning activities (Goeman, Poelmans & Van Rompey, 2018).

**Blended mobility.** The definition of “blended mobility”, used in this paper and BEST+ project, has to be understood as defined by the European Commission (2013: 3), namely – it is “short-term physical mobility combined with virtual mobility”. Virtual mobility described accordingly from the mobility perspective appeared in 2003-2005 (Dauksiene & Tereseviciene, 2011:1), and was defined as a representation of physical mobility existing in virtual space (Silvio, 2003:2).

**Blended education.** As blended education is considered the formal context of blended learning (practices) that is determined by policies and conditions with regards to the organization and support of blended learning (Goeman, Poelmans & Van Rompey, 2018).

**Learning outcomes.** International trends in education show a shift from the traditional “teacher-centered” approach to a “student-centered” approach. This alternative approach focuses on what the students are expected to be able to do at the end of the module or program. Hence, this approach is commonly referred to as an outcome-based approach. Statements called intended learning outcomes, commonly shortened to learning outcomes, are used to express what it is expected that students should be able to do at the end of the learning period (Kennedy, 2006: 17).

**Webinar.** Merriam-Webster internet dictionary defines webinar as a live online educational presentation during which participating viewers can submit questions and comments. With increasing popularity of webinars (Kartashova, 2009: 17) it is useful to include this approach among the tested methodologies. The webinar, one of the most advanced computer-mediated-communication systems (Wang & Hsu, 2008:175), may be organized in different formats depending on the aims to be achieved – interview, two person presentation, panel discussion/fireside chat, with screen sharing etc.

### **Acronyms used in e-learning design and development:**

- CBT (computer-based training),
- WBT (web-based training),
- LMS (learning management system),
- RLO (reusable learning object),
- SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model).

### **Different formats of blended mobility**

Rosenberg (2001:86) admitted that “the question is not if we should blend” and pointed out that “rather the question is what are the ingredients”. This project undertakes comparing 4 different methodologies of blended mobility, each consisting of different combinations of e-learning components.

To ensure the learning efficiency, the blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior (Harvey,2003:54). In blended mobility the formal education is obtained in part using digital and online media with some degree of learner’s control over time, place, path, or pace (Manzoor, 2015:545).

Learners are important partners in any learning process. Therefore, their backgrounds and characteristics affect their ability to effectively carry on with learning and being in blended learning, the design tools to be used may impinge on the effectiveness in their learning (Kintu et al.,2017:2). The BEST+ project aims to address learners involved in higher education sector.

### **Benefits and drawbacks**

Blended Learning arose to overcome the disadvantages of traditional learning and to obviate the failure of e-learning by providing a combination of various learning strategies or models. It mixes various event-based learning activities, including face-to-face class room, live e-learning, student-centered learning, and self-paced learning, which increases learning quality, social contents, and learners’ interactivity. Blended Learning is an evolution of e-learning; it provides the best mix of traditional learning and e-learning (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs, 2013).

It becomes increasingly evident that over the last decade, blended learning has been growing in demand and popularity in higher education and has become a widespread teaching phenomenon and that blended learning can overcome various limitations related to online learning and face-to-face instruction and (Alammary, Sheard, & Carbone, 2014).

The project team shares the confidence that the new information and communication technologies allow creating a new approach to mobility for educational purposes – blend the physical mobility with virtual training, augmenting thus the mobility with meaningful content already before the physical mobility is started.

Blended mobility contributes to the implementation of the reforms in line with the 2011 EU modernization agenda, particularly to point 2.3 Improve the quality and relevance of higher education and 2.3 Strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border co-operation. This is in coherence with the ET2020 objective of ‘Improving quality and efficiency of education and training’, tackling also the benchmark of having at least 20% of higher education graduates spent some time studying or training abroad.

Blended staff mobility provides the higher education institutions with a cost-efficient incentive to actively develop their staff members’ professionally. Giving staff members the opportunity to engage in mobility schemes themselves and simultaneously engage with colleagues through a blended online approach increases the impact of international

cooperation further by equipping staff members with the right skills set, which can be certified. It is expected that in long-term it will improve both the quantity and quality of student mobility by creating more qualified staff members who will serve as ambassadors for mobility.

Because one of the benefits of a blended learning curriculum that includes asynchronous collaboration between participants is that they tend to form more long-lasting relationships and rely on each other after the formal experience is over. E-mail, instant messaging and community discussion boards facilitate the participants' seeing each other as resources, especially since communication is only a click away (Hofmann, 2014). This is especially important, because a great deal of international relations officers' everyday work is spent in virtual space networking and collaborating with colleagues from other countries.

The 2013 Communication on Opening Up Education suggests to use innovative teaching and learning methods through the use of digital technologies and content and to boost the use of Open Educational Resources (OERs). The blended staff mobility contributes to making professional development opportunities more accessible, by combining digital technologies with traditional physical mobilities while simultaneously strengthening international cooperation between HEIs through digital technology.

The provision of high quality digital Learning Material contributes to both the Opening up Education communication and the horizontal priority of open and innovative education, training and youth work, embedded in the digital area. It therefore allocates possibilities for staff members to develop themselves professionally while indirectly increasing the motivation and satisfaction in their daily work.

Hofmann (2014) reasons that users having difficulties using technology may end up abandoning their learning. To address this challenge proactively the project team is preparing these Guidelines, to ensure that a minimum advisory support, that is especially important in the starting phases of blended mobility, is in place for the individuals wanting to reuse this Open Educational Resource.

Blended learning, because of its flexibility, allows to maximize many positive education functions, however one has to be aware that much of what is called blended learning nowadays, in reality, is blended teaching that reflects pedagogical arrangements (Dziuban, Graham & Moskal, 2018).

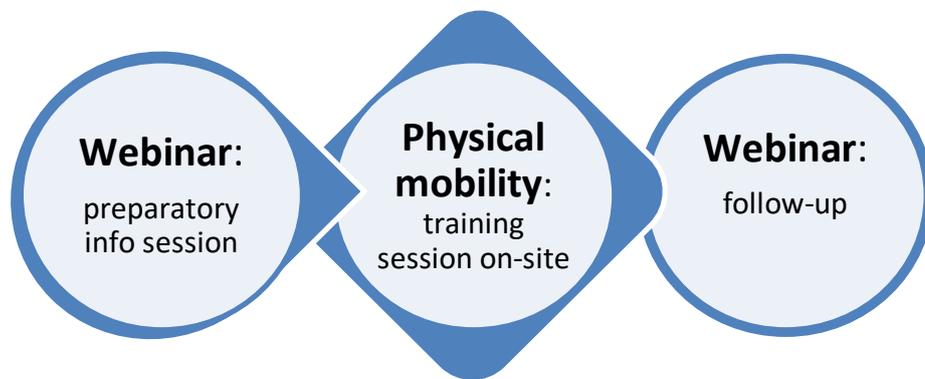
## PART TWO: PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

### Methodology

The project is implementing blended staff mobility not only as a proof of concept but also as exploration of different methodologies and their testing in practice through three different courses developed during the project life.

#### ***Testing the approaches to Blended mobility - Methodology A***

The content for two webinars is developed. The first webinar is planned to serve as a preparatory info session to be held before the staff training, which provides all participants with the main concepts of the topic to be learned and therefore serves as an introductory element of the course. The second webinar can be used as a follow-up on what has been learned during the physical staff training if convenient.



Picture 1. Blended Mobility – Methodology A

#### ***Testing the approaches to Blended mobility - Methodology B***

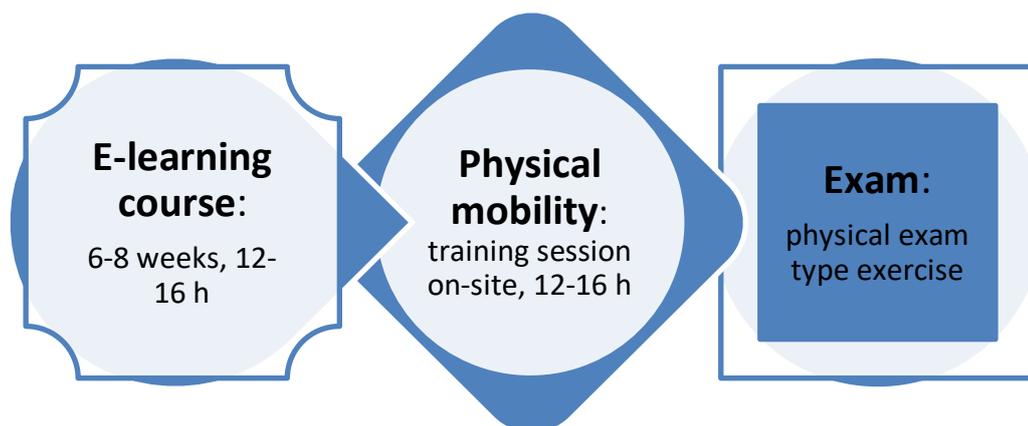
**Succeeding online course.** An e-learning course was designed to follow the staff training for 6-8 weeks, with a, approximate weekly workload of 2 hours, amounting to 12-16 hours for the online course that would complement the 12-16 hours of the on-site “physical” mobility. At the end of the course, an exam-type activity was made available on the platform of the course.



Picture 2. Blended Mobility – Methodology B

**Testing the approaches to Blended mobility - Methodology C**

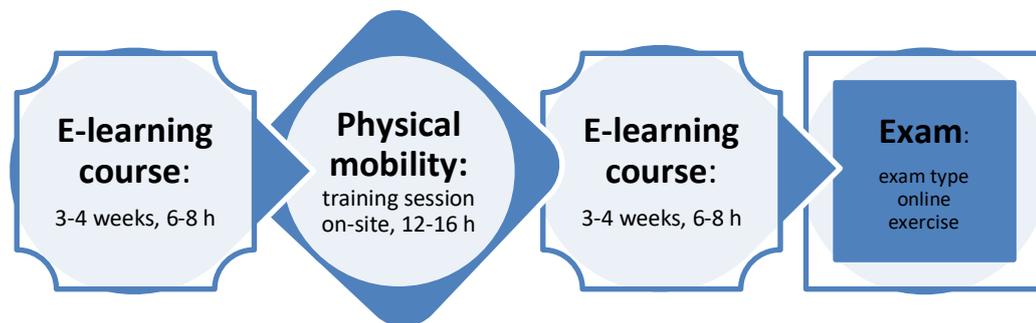
**Preceding online course.** The 6-8 weeks e-learning course precedes the staff training with a weekly workload of 2 hours, totaling in 12-16 hours before the staff training and 12-16 hours workload during the staff training. A physical exam type exercise concludes the course.



Picture 3. Blended Mobility – Methodology C

### **Testing the approaches to Blended mobility - Methodology D**

**Encompassing online course.** The e-learning course encompasses the staff training. The first part of the course lasts 3-4 weeks, with a weekly workload of 2 hours, preparing the participants for the physical staff mobility. Then the physical staff mobility takes place with the workload of 12-16 hours. Afterwards the second part of the online course takes place, lasting 3-4 weeks with a weekly workload of 2 hours. The course is concluded with an exam type online exercise.



*Picture 4. Blended Mobility – Methodology D*

**Training session outline.** The learning material for the physical training is delivered in form of a training session outline (TSO). The TSO is an organized description of activities and resources used throughout the sessions, guiding the participants towards the specific learning objective. It details the subject matter that is taught, the length of each section, the method of instruction and how to evaluate the learning outcome. It is a comprehensive script with instructions and prompts, possible questions, facilitation methods, material required et c. It helps to visualize each step of the session and ensures that the session combines formal and non-formal methods to achieve a successful learning outcome.

**Integrated blended mobility course.** A course, combining virtual consecutive learning activities (an e-learning course) with a physical mobility.

**Online content.** Interactive, built on reality based scenarios, closely integrated with the physical training content. The online content is made to engage the participants through exploration and collaborative work.

**Assessment.** Assessment is based on learning outcomes. The quizzes, tests and follow-up discussions allow to gauge the progress and summarize the learned content in a self-reflective way.

#### **Online blendedmobility.eu platform**

The BEST+ project not only developed the learning material to feed in as the content to both online learning and physical training, but also coextensively, in line with the content to be

provided, developed an online platform as the main tool for facilitating the blended staff mobility.

To ensure that a broad range of learning methodologies can be applied and an online community is created, the LMS implements a range of front-end features such as assignment submission, discussion forum, messaging, events and overview of the different activities function, news function, online quiz.

The platform that has been developed through this project enables the community of staff members in international relations to develop their own courses and these guidelines are aimed at providing clear guidance and illustration. It also encourages more collaboration between institutions by facilitating an online community. It will be possible for National Agencies to develop their info sessions together with the community and make them openly accessible. The platform might also serve as a marketplace for experts to offer consulting and tailor-made courses in the future.

The learning platform is the main system integrating all features necessary for a robust learning environment, enabling a blended approach to professional development for university staff members working in international relations. The platform combines the traditional Learning Management System (LMS) and a web conferencing application to enable the implementation of e-learning courses and webinars. These two are the main activities accompanying the face-to-face trainings organized by the European University Foundation.

Furthermore the platform creates back-end solutions for general community management such as user management system, analytics tools and file upload/download capacity.

In order to guarantee the interoperability with other websites systems run by EUF, the platform is developed through the Drupal Content Management System (CMS). Drupal ensures several benefits, like: popularity (it is one of the most popular open-source based systems, distributed with no license fees and powering millions of websites, especially high-profile ones); proven stability and performance (it is used by the European Commission, the US Presidency and the Municipality of London); flexibility (it can be customized to support specific features or specific workflows); long support period (security updates and bug fixes are provided by the Drupal community, guaranteeing long-term sustainability of projects); consultants availability (commercial support is available from thousands of companies , with no risk of vendor lock-in and lower maintenance costs).

The website architecture is started by the discovery phase where the foreseen interaction with the website is broken up into “user stories”: website visitors are divided in “roles” (students, teachers, site administrators et c.) and the satisfactory interaction of each “role” with the system is described. The graphical wireframes and mock-ups are evaluated and then implemented. User stories are converted into automated tests, that will verify that there are no functional regressions at each stage of development.

The website development proceeds by iterations, with new features being deployed in a non-destructive fashion on the existing live website.

The platform is hosted by the European University Foundation on its server.

## Elements of the Platform

- Feedback option by the participants to the learning material
- Webinar functionalities – Gotomeeting, the option to have editors add new material to the platform
- Forum / discussion platform
- Assessment / multiple choice questions / Self-assessment
- Availability overview of trainers/teachers on the webinar platform
- Events and overview of the different activities
- File management/upload

## Guide for using the platform

The platform has a user management system where each user can have different roles. The manager role gives a user extra privileges across the site and courses, whereas the teacher role can be assigned on a per-course basis. This way a user can be a teacher in one course and a participant in another. The roles have a hierarchy within each higher role having all of the privileges as the lower ones and some more. The following sub-chapters describe how to use the platform for each role with only the features that are specific to that role to reduce duplication.

**Using the platform as a manager.** Managers can edit all content on the platform and manage all registered users. In particular managers can create courses by approving requests received through the “Add Course” form at <http://beta.blendedmobility.eu/form/course-request-form> that allows to pre-fill course information. Once a course is created the manager will be in contact via e-mail with the person proposing the course and can add a user account to the course with a teacher role so that the teacher can create the course material. Managers can promote existing users to managers.

**Using the platform as a course teacher.** Teachers can edit the course information and add course activities and events to the course once they have asked an existing manager for permission to be a teacher by sending an email to them or filling the form for a course request here: <http://beta.blendedmobility.eu/form/course-request-form>. Once a course is created the manager will be in contact via e-mail with the person proposing the course and further teachers can be created. A course can be in different states, it can be open for users to register or not, it can be publicly listed or not and it can have the course content be public or not. Teachers can change the state of the course that has impact on how non participants can interact with the course. For courses that are not publicly listed a secret code can be set up that can then be shared with prospective participants.

A teacher can add three types of course activities:

- *Reading activity:* These contain mostly documents and links to reading material participants are expected to have read in order to progress through the course.
- *Assignment activity:* These contain a form for participants to upload their work or answer questions. External quizzes or questionnaires can be embedded. This course activity is meant to be interacted with.
- *Webinar activity:* These are tied to a virtual meeting and the activity serves as a place to inform participants about the webinar and link to resources needed for the preparation.

Next to activities teachers can create discussion groups for the course. Discussion groups can be open for course participants (public) or for selected participants only (private), and a checkbox allows to choose between the two options. Within discussion groups, topics can be created on which participants can then comment. Teachers automatically have all the privileges within all the discussion groups related to the course. They can choose different modes of privacy of the discussion group and access to it. When you edit the group <http://beta.blendedmobility.eu/group/10/edit> you can see the checkbox "Public" and the "Access code" text field. If it is "Public" all participants of the course can access all the discussion topics. (it is still not accessible to un-authenticated users). If you un-tick the public box then the group is locked to members only. This means that you have to go to the "Members" tab on the group and add all people for that group manually.

To make this a bit easier to manage you can set an access code and give that to the people that should be able to join.

When someone then visits the link they will get a notification that the access is denied, but there will be a box to enter the access code and if it is the same as you set up they will become members directly and thus have then access to the group.

Teachers can also create events for their course. An event can contain all the information related to the physical meeting of participants. Events are also separately listed to give them more visibility. Teachers can create course messages. Course messages are there to inform participants about updates. The last course message is promoted on the course page and all older messages can be accessed from the menu on the course page. Attachments can be uploaded and attached to the activities, events and discussion topics. In addition attachments can be uploaded directly to the course, for example to provide a handy archive of all the course material.

**Using the platform as a course participant.** Course participants are users that have subscribed to the course, but they have not been granted the teacher role in the course. Participants can access all the course materials and open discussion groups in the course even when the course is not publicly listed or doesn't have all content publicly available. Participants can submit the assignments and participate in webinars. Participants can participate in discussion groups.

**Using the platform as an authenticated user.** Authenticated users can sign up to courses either by clicking the "Subscribe" button on the course or by providing the secret access code. Authenticated users can also submit a course request that can then be turned into a real course by a manager.

Users who create an account must specify an e-mail address, but verification of the e-mail address is not mandatory for access. If they forget their password, the e-mail address will be used for password recovery; in that case, they will be able to restore their access through a link sent to them by e-mail (it is recommended to check the spam folder too).

**Using the platform as an anonymous visitor.** Anonymous users can create a user account to become authenticated users. No administrator approval is needed but users have to use the link provided in the welcome email to log in the first time and set up a password to verify their email address. All the courses and the course content which is set to be public can be accessed by anonymous users without an account on the platform.

## **PART THREE: MODULES IMPLEMENTATION [piloted in the BEST+ project]**

### **Case 1: BEST+Riga – Intercultural competences [Moderator/Leader: University of Eastern Finland]**

#### ***Topic: Cultural awareness and intercultural learning***

The Learning Material 1 - Intercultural competences (LM1) focuses on the importance of intercultural understanding of staff members working with international students directly or indirectly. The aim is to enhance the experience of international students by having well trained staff members taking care of them. This will reduce the culture shock of students and let staff members cope with different behaviors and expectations of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This potentially also tackles disadvantaged learners such as migrants or refugees. Current practices show that tasks related to support services for those target groups are partially falling under the responsibility of staff members working with international relations (e.g. in International Offices).

#### ***Learning outcomes***

After the course, participants are expected to have gained the following skills and competences:

- (1) Recognize and explain their existing practical intercultural competence
- (2) Categorize different conceptual understandings of culture and their implication for intercultural competence
- (3) Recognize and analyze their own cultural assumptions and social background with self-reflection.

#### ***Content: Online session and physical training***

Prof. Dr. Helmi Järviluoma as the leading professor for cultural studies at the Eastern University of Finland produced Learning Material for this subject together with Tuomas Järvenpää, university teacher in media culture in communication studies in the University of Eastern Finland. Other project partners (except for Nuvole), contributed to the Learning Material by supporting the fine-tuning and adapting it to match the target audience of university staff members working in international relations.

The blended mobility learning course was planned for 15 days in total, out of which the duration of the physical on-site training is 3 working days.

#### **Methodology A**

Online content outline was created and has the following elements included:

- Assignment A
- Introductory webinar
- Preliminary reading materials
- Assignment B

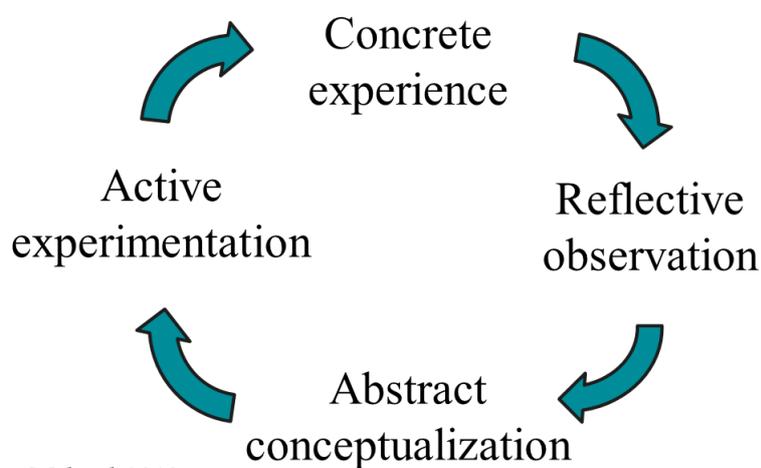
Physical on-site training included the following elements:

- Lectures
- Working groups
- Activating exercises
- Discussions
- Self-evaluation

### *Description of the training*

The starting point of the course was to use the blended formula for an experiential learning process. According to Kolb (1984) (as cited in Mcleod 2010), experiential learning experience refers to a process, which starts from the concrete experiences of the learners. In the context of higher education staff training, these concrete experiences are most typically the challenges that the participants face in their work tasks. In an experiential learning process, the practical challenges are then reflected, processed and reformulated with theoretical knowledge. The ultimate aim is to use theoretical knowledge in order to search solutions for the identified issues and change the modes of action in work situations.

Figure 1 – The cycle of experiential learning



According to Mcleod 2010

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 2017, a week before the staff training event, a first meeting of the course was held in form of an online webinar. In the webinar, the participants introduced themselves and they were given instructions for preliminary online assignments. The online assignments included an essay assignment and a reading task on the role of intercultural competences in the context of higher education institutions.

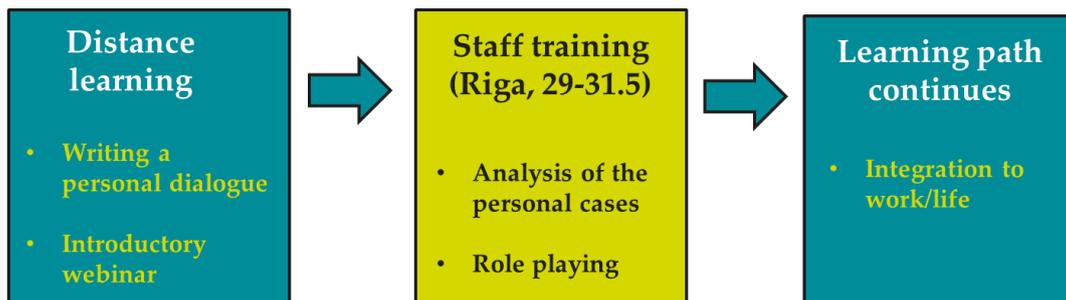
The task of the essay was to write a dialogue, where the participants were requested to describe a personal communication problem with an intercultural element. The participants were encouraged to write these dialogues with a personal manner and from their everyday experiences. By this manner, the assignment was intended to be integrated into their actual working conditions. Participants described in dialogues very different kinds of situations, ranging from an intercultural encounter in a pub to a heated conflict with an exchange student in the office of the head of international relations.

The three-day staff training event in Riga was built around the analysis of these personal experiences.

By its design, the course followed a model created and described by Antal and Friedman (2008). Antal and Friedmans' (2008) model has been developed specifically to the requirements of intercultural understanding in working life and the business sector. During

the course sessions, the dialogues in the essays were rewritten to a new form with the theoretical tools provided in the learning sessions. These rewriting exercises were done in small working groups. In these groups, the members searched solutions for the conflicts by helping each other to identify preconceptions and stereotyping from the dialogues. Finally, new communication strategies were rehearsed within the working groups by role plays and with the aid of these rewritten dialogues.

Figure 2 – Best+ Intercultural Competences course design



Outline based on Antal & Friedman 2008

### *Assessment of the training*

Antal and Friedmans' original model for teaching intercultural competences is not based on blended learning formula. In the Best+ project, the blended formula posed both advantages and challenges for the implementation of Antal and Friedmans' model. The advantages of blended formula in this setting were 1) a more structured and goal oriented form of study 2) an increased group cohesion and 3) a shorter course duration

The online platform ([blendedmobility.eu](http://blendedmobility.eu)) provided the course with a clearly visualized pedagogical structure and timeline. In the online platform, the participants could see with a one glimpse the learning objectives, the structure of the course and what they would need to do in order to pass the course structure. From the organizers' point of view, the clearly identifiable course structure also enhanced the learning motivation of the participants. The course feedback also indicated that the participants indeed experienced the course both as highly goal-oriented as well as personalized to their individual schedules.

In addition, the online elements of the course increased group cohesion with a webinar and an online discussion forum. At the same time shortened time abroad made the course more accessible and affordable to an increased number of university staff members.

However, blended learning also involves big pedagogical challenges for teaching skills such as intercultural competences, where face-to-face communication remains essential element for learning. These challenges were reflected also in the course feedback, which was overall very positive, but also highlighted some areas of future development in the approach.

The first critical remark in the feedback included the tight schedule during the course meeting in Riga. This reflects the fact that, shorter time spent in face-to-face learning is

inevitably a challenge for the facilitator, as the available time has to be used in an effective and highly planned manner.

The shorter time in class room learning becomes a tricky issue especially when rehearsing new behavioral patterns, such as interpersonal communication strategies. It is obvious that these new models of social action cannot be developed via distance education. That being said, distance education can compensate this shorter time frame and facilitate learning, if used in an intelligent way. However, shorter time in class room requires highly planned, tested and balanced learning content.

Secondly, many participants would have wished for more in-depth and content-rich online learning, which could have been beneficial also from the organizers' point of view, but which remained out of reach due to the relatively limited trainer resources allocated for the development of the course. The wish for more in-depth online learning also reflects the fact that the management of online environment is often surprisingly time-consuming for the course facilitator. In a course format, which is based on experiential learning, the incorporation of online elements should not be seen as a viable way to save in training resources in relation to traditional contact learning. Instead, the blending of online and contact learning should be seen as way to increase the quality of the learning learning experience.

## Course info

### ONLINE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	Preliminary assignment A - Introduction
<b>Task description</b>	Read the detailed instructions for the assignment A and submit it through the online platform before the webinar. Please introduce yourself in a free manner. Describe shortly your work duties and environment and the intercultural communication situations that you meet in your work. Describe also your expectations and personal aims for the course. Post the written introduction to the google form of the course and prepare to introduce yourself orally for the learning group in the learning webinar.
<b>Activities</b>	Follow the tasks of the assignment

<b>Title</b>	Introductory Webinar
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>WEBINAR AGENDA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Testing and troubleshoot for the webinar participants</li> <li>- Welcoming words and introductions of the Finnish team (Helmi Järviluoma-Mäkelä, UEF)</li> <li>- Presenting the aims and outline of the course (Tuomas Järvenpää, UEF)</li> <li>- Introductions of the webinar participants (Oral presentation of the preliminary assignment A: Please introduce yourself in a free manner. Describe shortly your work duties and environment and the intercultural communication situations that you meet in your work. Describe also your expectation and personal aims for the course).</li> <li>- Instructions for the preliminary assignment B (Tuomas Järvenpää, UEF)</li> <li>- Possible general questions on the preliminary assignment B, preliminary reading or the course contents in general</li> </ul>
<b>Activities</b>	Webinar, oral presentation of webinar participants

<b>Title</b>	Preliminary reading before the Riga event
<b>Task description</b>	<p>Read the preliminary reading. The article problematizes the current use of the concepts of "culture" and "interculturality" in the context of higher education. The article also discusses some of the pitfalls in the attempts of Finnish universities to build intercultural awareness. The article serves here as an introduction to our discussions on culture and intercultural competence. Please read the article before the first learning session of the Riga event.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Read the material before the discussion

<b>Title</b>	Preliminary assignment B - The personal case
<b>Task</b>	Read the instructions for the assignment B and bring the assignment with you. Think of a personal case that describes a

<p><b>description</b></p>	<p>communication problem or a conflict in which you were personally involved. The purpose of the assignment is to help you learn how to become more effective by obtaining fresh insights into a situation. You can also choose a situation that you have to face in the future in order to help yourself prepare for it. In this sense, writing the case gives you an opportunity to “practice” handling a difficult situation.</p> <p>Every participant is required to write a personal case for this course. The case will be analyzed in groups during the course in order to share the insights into such processes. The assignments are processed with the entire group during the course, so please share a personal case that you comfortable to share in the learning group, but try to write the case in as open and reflective manner as you possibly can. Please bring the personal case with you to the Riga event for every learning session (in digital format or on paper).</p> <p>Steps for writing a personal case:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Begin the description with a paragraph about the situation itself: the setting, the problem, the people involved, your role, events leading up to this incident, and any other important background information.</li> <li>2. Next, write a few paragraphs about your intended strategy. What were your objectives, how did you plan to achieve them, and why did you select these goals and strategies?</li> <li>3. Then, write a few lines of dialogue (what was actually said in the situation, or, if you choose to write about a future event, what you expect to be said).</li> </ol> <p>Use the format described below:</p> <p>Divide the page into two columns:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="528 1458 1324 1711"> <tr> <td data-bbox="528 1458 927 1711"> <p>On this left hand side of the page, write what was going on IN YOUR MIND while each person in the dialogue(including yourself) is speaking.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="927 1458 1324 1711"> <p>On this right hand side of the page, write what each person, including yourself, ACTUALLY SAID (or what you expect will be said in a future event).</p> </td> </tr> </table> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Briefly describe the outcome of the case and your evaluation of your own performance and effectiveness.</li> </ol> <p>Please proceed with “File Upload”</p>	<p>On this left hand side of the page, write what was going on IN YOUR MIND while each person in the dialogue(including yourself) is speaking.</p>	<p>On this right hand side of the page, write what each person, including yourself, ACTUALLY SAID (or what you expect will be said in a future event).</p>
<p>On this left hand side of the page, write what was going on IN YOUR MIND while each person in the dialogue(including yourself) is speaking.</p>	<p>On this right hand side of the page, write what each person, including yourself, ACTUALLY SAID (or what you expect will be said in a future event).</p>		
<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<p>Write a personal case</p>		

## PHYSICAL ON-SITE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<b>RIGA EVENT DAY 1</b> Learning session 1 & Learning session 2
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1 – Culture &amp; Cultural identity</b></p> <p>(1) Lecture: conceptualization of culture and cultural identity (Helmi Järviluoma-Mäkelä, UEF)</p> <p>(2) Group exercise on individual identities.</p> <p>(3) Debriefing the results of the group exercises.</p> <p><b>Learning session 2 – Developing Intercultural competence 1 part</b></p> <p>(1) Lecture: What intercultural competence is and how it matters &amp; “ladder of inference” (Tuomas Järvenpää, UEF)</p> <p>(2) Split into working groups and analysis of the preliminary assignment B</p> <p>(3) Debriefing of the results of the working groups</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1</b> - Lecture followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p> <p><b>Learning session 2</b> - Lecture followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p>

<b>Title</b>	<b>RIGA EVENT DAY 2</b> Learning session 3 & Learning session 4
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 3 – Cultural Perception</b></p> <p>(1) Activating exercise (Tuomas Järvenpää)</p> <p>(2) Debriefing of the exercise and discussion</p> <p><b>Learning session 4 – Developing intercultural competence 2 part</b></p> <p>(1) Lecture: “Communication strategies” (Tuomas Järvenpää)</p> <p>(2) Working groups continue by analyzing communication strategies in the preliminary assignment B.</p> <p>(3) Debriefing of the result of the working groups</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p><b>Learning session 3</b> – Activating exercise followed by debriefing and discussion.</p> <p><b>Learning session 4</b> - Lecture followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p>

<b>Title</b>	<b>RIGA EVENT DAY 3</b> Learning session 5 & Learning session 6
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 5 – Intercultural communication &amp; conflict resolution</b></p> <p>(1) Lecture: Exploring different ways of framing a conflict (Tuomas Järvenpää)  (2) Working groups continue by analyzing the conflict frame in the preliminary analysis B  (3) Debriefing of the result of the working groups</p> <p><b>Learning session 6 – Self-evaluation &amp; open discussion</b></p> <p>Self-evaluation of the learning process and feedback from the course contents (Karin Koivisto, UEF)</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p><b>Learning session 5</b> – Lecture followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p> <p><b>Learning session 6</b> – Self-evaluation and open discussion</p>

## Case 2: BEST+Joensuu – International attractiveness of universities [Moderator/Leader: University of Alcalá]

### *Topic: International attractiveness of universities*

The Learning Material 2 - International attractiveness of universities (LM2) is focused on how a university can improve its branding, outreach and reputation through international students. This LM has been coordinated by the University of Alcalá, who features in the QS ranking of Universities on #1 in Spain and #191 in the world when it comes to international students. Contents have been developed by experts at University of Alcalá (UAH), University of Eastern Finland (UEF), University of Lodz (UL), EUF and ESN.

The general aim of this Learning Material is to create comprehensive content that can help university staff members working in international relations to learn how to improve the branding and reputation of their institutions through internationalization processes.

This course focuses on the impact of internationalization on international recruitment and the university reputation. It tackles issues such as branding, outreach and reputation building through international offices and international students. During the 3-day event in Joensuu, the participating Higher Education professionals experienced a combination of networking, peer-learning, training and social activities guided by professional staff and learnt about different aspects of the international attractiveness of universities, which in turn would allow to further develop their Higher Education career.

### *Learning outcomes*

After the course, participants are expected to have gained the following skills and competences:

- (1) Identify resources and strategies to improve the branding and reputation of universities through internationalization.
- (2) Draft and implement strategies to improve the branding and reputation of the home universities through internationalization.
- (3) Gain awareness on several possibilities to personally contribute to the internationalization of their institutions.

### *Content: Online session and physical training*

The Learning Material is prepared under the guidance of experts from the University of Alcalá together with experts at University of Eastern Finland (UEF), University of Lodz (UL), EUF and ESN. The coordinator and facilitator, Professor Dr. Carmen Santamaria Garcia works in the fields of Applied Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics, Translation of Pragmatic aspects. Dr. Carmen Santamaria Garcia has been institutional coordinator at UAH for EUF (European University Foundation) for more than 10 years and has 10-year experience as Erasmus Coordinator for Teacher Education programs.

The course runs for 2 months, specifically - 68 days in total. The blended learning process is arranged in 3 distinct phases (see the tables below), supported by an ongoing Discussion Group called “International attractiveness of universities”, where participants can get guidance and discuss the activities that are part of the virtual training. Apart from serving the needs of providing consultancy on the activities, the Discussion Group is used as a platform for getting acquainted with other participants. In a self-organized manner participants provide input into the platform, following the endorsed structure, namely, the participants’ own personal introductions and video links, showcasing the represented universities. This serves not only the aim of improved networking at the actual physical on-site training session, but also responds to the subject of the Joensuu case: International attractiveness of universities. The contents encourage the participants to self-reflect on what a good presentation for best first impression is, what are available resources and what

are the strategies to follow, both in cases when a person and an institution have to be promoted. Thus the mindset of the participants is already focused on the problem to be solved at the very initial phase of the blended mobility.

## Methodology B

### *Virtual training (before on-site training)*

Timeline	Assignment	Explanation
16.10.2017 - 24.10.2017	Assignment A	Preparation for the webinar
25.10.2017 (2 hours)	Webinar	Actual virtual training
25.10.2017 - 27.11.2017	Assignment B	Preliminary readings

### *Physical on-site training session*

Timeline	Assignment	Explanation
28.11.2017	Introduction	Kick-off, visiting the facilities, lectures, social dinner
29.11.2017	Resources for promotion	Social event (trip) linked to the lecture in afternoon
30.11.2017	Stakeholder involvement	Lectures & discussions

### *Aftersession*

Timeline	Assignment	Explanation
30.11.2017 - 22.12.2017	Follow-up assignment C	Finalization of the course

### *Description of the training*

This training was designed to combine the blended formula with experiential learning, as described in Kolb's (1984) model (cited in Mcleod 2010), which is a combination previously implemented in the course on intercultural competences described above by the partners from UEF. Experiential learning, which starts from the concrete experiences of the learners in their daily tasks, are invoked in a reflective process, which calls for some theoretical knowledge that will stimulate further reflection and understanding. The ultimate aim is to use the new theoretical knowledge gained in finding solutions for everyday challenges and change the modes of action which are not efficient in work situations.

A webinar was designed by the course facilitator (Dr. Carmen Santamaría, UAH) in order to develop a community feeling among the participants in the course and to activate the main topics of the course. Before the webinar took place, participants were asked to facilitate some information (Preliminary assignment A) including personal details (name, university, position, town and country) and a brief description of work duties and work environment. They were also invited to upload one or more picture(s) of themselves and their universities. Options were given to upload a typical CV picture or more creative pictures, possibly including favorite hobbies. This proved to be a good idea, encouraging participation and higher involvement of those who volunteered more creative pictures and personal accounts of hobbies. Participants later discussed how this activity helped to break the ice, look forward to meeting personally and recognize each other and start talking while travelling to the course (on the plane, bus, train, etc.).

Participants were also asked to share one slogan they would choose to promote their universities and briefly describe their expectations of the event. (The slogan could be already in use or could be created by themselves). These two questions also proved an effective way to have participants engaged in conversation both during the webinar and the physical training. The webinar was also very useful for presenting the aims and outline of the course, giving participants a clear panoramic view and sense of direction.

Some preliminary readings and activities were also uploaded on the platform in order to facilitate informed discussion of interesting topics related to the course:

- The Effectivity Of Slogans
- Online Marketing Of Academic Institutions
- Country/City Reputation And Higher Education Marketing
- Student Mobility And Student Choices
- Marketization Of Higher Education

Participants have online reading self-assessment forms which facilitate personal monitoring of their own learning process. The amount of time estimated for the reading activities is of 2-3 hours.

#### **READING ACTIVITY 1: Logos and visual identities of academic institutions**

READING ARTICLE:

Alessandri, Sue Westcott, Sung-Un Yang, and Dennis F Kinsey. "An Integrative Approach to University Visual Identity and Reputation." *Corporate Reputation Review* 9, no. 4 (2006): 258–70. doi:10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550033.

For this reading activity we need your reading of the article for gist and more specific scan reading of pages 259-261, in order to find replies to these questions:

1. What are the arguments for the convenience of a multiplicity of identities of universities?
2. How can a university 's reputation be defined?
3. How can a university 's reputation be formed?

#### **READING ACTIVITY 2: Critical accounts on marketization of higher education**

READING ARTICLE:

Furedi, Frank. "Introduction to the Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer." *The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*, 2010, 1–8.

For this reading activity we need your reading of the article for gist and more specific scan reading of pages 1-6, in order to find replies to these questions:

1. What do advocates of marketisation argue as benefits derived from such marketisation?
2. What arguments could be taken against these arguments?
3. What is new and disturbing regarding competition among universities in the late 20th century?
4. What is, according to Furedi (2010: 2) the relationship between marketing and the promotion of widening participation?
5. Could you think of real situations in your daily activities that show that students are increasingly positioned as consumers and institutions working to improve the extent to which they meet 'consumer demands'?
6. Did you notice something quite unusual for a study lounge in the picture above? How do you think this study gym can meet students' demands? Do you have something like this at your institution? Would you suggest having a study lounge gym at your institution? Why or why not?

*Picture 5. Example of reading activities used in BEST+ Joensuu course*

A second set of preliminary activities to be done before the on-site course was designed as “Assignment B” on the topics of “Slogans and promotion” and “Places worth a visit near your university”. Both tried to draw from the actual experiences of participants. The first dealt with the use of slogans for their universities, their possible uses and benefits. Participants were asked to do a survey by informal consultation with colleagues or open a contest for the purpose of finding out.

“Places worth a visit near your university” encouraged reflection on those places that could add value to universities for their historical, artistic or landscape value. Participants were requested to prepare a draft for a page to be included in a students’ guide including information on places to visit near their universities that could add extra value to them.

This valuable information was presented during the on-site training and was uploaded on the discussions section together with some videos, so all participants had information on the different institutions of participants.

These activities gave them a feeling of how they can personally contribute to the internationalization of their institutions and become aware of the value of their institutions in order to attract more international students.

The learning sessions included in the on-site training are further detailed in the “Course information” section below together with the names of the lecturers. These are the main topics:

**Learning session 1 – How can a university improve its branding?**

**Learning session 2 – How can we act upon the improvement of university promotion?**

**Learning session 3 – Natural landscapes as resources for promotion**

All the sessions encouraged experiential learning, as explained above, with the main aim of strengthening connection between everyday experience and knowledge gained, which can facilitate further reflection and improvement of daily practice. Worth mentioning also, that prior to the first lecture, students had some activities for developing personal connection and breaking the ice. They were standing in a circle while the facilitator shook hands and greeted participants one by one. After being greeted, participants joined the facilitator in shaking hands and greeting the rest of colleagues. Some “get to know each other” games were played in the circle, which proved to be an excellent warming up and compensation for lack of personal contact for the weeks before the on-site training. These activities seem to be very important for successful blended learning, as they compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction during online sessions.

A set of activities (assignments C1, C2, C3) were developed to be done after the on-site training. They were related to the topics: PLACES ADDING VALUE TO YOUR UNIVERSITY; INSTITUTIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION; STUDENTS AS CONSUMERS.

These activities were designed for participants to further develop their community feeling and gain a sense of achievement. They encourage experiential sharing plus further reflection on previous readings, especially, the article “Introduction to the Marketization of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer”, which can illustrate the behavior of international students increasingly positioned as consumers and the challenge for institutions working to improve the extent to which they meet ‘consumer demands’?

## Course information

### ONLINE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<b>Preliminary assignment A – Introduce yourself</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>Introduce yourself and the institution that you are coming from to other participants of the blended mobility course</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please let us know your name, university, position, town and country and describe shortly your work duties and environment</li> <li>2. Share one slogan you would choose to promote your university. The slogan can be already in use or you may choose to create one yourself.</li> <li>3. Briefly describe your expectations of the event.</li> <li>4. (Optional) Please upload one or more picture(s) of yourself and your university. The picture of yourself can be either CV picture or any other picture, such as a picture of you doing your favourite hobby.</li> </ol>
<b>Activities</b>	Follow the tasks of the assignment

<b>Title</b>	<b>Webinar - International attractiveness of universities</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>WEBINAR AGENDA</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Testing and troubleshoot for the webinar participants</li> <li>2. Welcoming words and introduction by the course designer (Carmen Santamaría, UAH)</li> <li>3. Presenting the aims and outline of the course (Carmen Santamaría, UAH)</li> <li>4. Introduction of the webinar participants by sharing results from activity A</li> <li>5. Presentation of Assignment B</li> </ol>
<b>Activities</b>	Webinar, oral presentation of webinar participants

<b>Title</b>	<b>Preliminary readings before the Joensuu event</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>Read the preliminary readings to facilitate informed discussion of interesting topics related to this course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Effectivity Of Slogans</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Online Marketing Of Academic Institutions</li> <li>● Country/City Reputation And Higher Education Marketing</li> <li>● Student Mobility And Student Choices</li> <li>● Marketization Of Higher Education</li> </ul> <p>You can also find reading self-assessment forms that will facilitate your personal monitoring of your own learning process.</p> <p>The amount of time estimated for the reading activities before our training in Joensuu is of 2-3 hours.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Read and complete self-assessment forms

<b>Title</b>	<b>Assignment B - Introducing your university</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p><i>B.1. Slogans and promotion</i></p> <p>Ask colleagues, students and/or teachers which could be a nice slogan for your university. Think whether it would be appropriate for a university T-shirt (You can do a survey by informal consultation or open a contest for the purpose of finding out)</p> <p>Think of possible uses for this T-shirt (for teachers, host institution students, incomings and outgoings..., other?)</p> <p>Think of possible benefits derived from the use of this slogan.</p> <p>[In case you use existing logos, please mention this when you include them in your document]</p> <p><i>B2. Places worth a visit near your university</i></p> <p>Think about some of the places that may add value to your university. Your university itself may have historical or artistic value. In this case, please mention, but in case it does not, it will be important that you consider some of the places within easy reach that can offer extra value to it for international visitors.</p> <p>Please collect some leaflets of your university town and natural landscapes or places worth a visit within easy reach by public transportation and bring some to Joensuu.</p> <p>Using them as models, you are kindly requested to prepare a draft for a page to be included in a students' guide including information on places to visit near your universities that could add extra value to them.</p> <p>Bring your paper draft (a word/pdf document) to Joensuu for further discussion and group sharing. Alternatively, we will be using a computer projector to present some pictures of your</p>

	<p>universities and interesting places to visit near them.</p> <p>Please upload video links to our universities (1-2 links) in a discussion in the discussion groups section.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Give some reflection to the questions above, create a word/pdf document, print it out and bring it with you to Joensuu for further discussion and group sharing.</p>

## PHYSICAL ON-SITE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<p><b>JOENSUU EVENT DAY 1</b></p> <p>Learning session 1 &amp; Learning session 2</p>
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1 – How can a university improve its branding?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Resources and strategies for the promotion of universities (Matias Pitkänen, UEF, Maj Vuorre, UEF, Weronika Ćmielewska, U. Lodz, Carmen Santamaría, UAH)</li> <li>(2) Group tasks on our university resources for promotion incorporating results from assignment B, readings and lectures, part 1 (2)</li> <li>(3) Group tasks on our university resources for promotion, part 2, (2)</li> <li>(4) Debriefing the results of the group tasks above.</li> </ol> <p><b>Learning session 2 – How can we act upon the improvement of university promotion?</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Lecture: “Implementing strategies to improve the reputation of our universities through internationalisation: Institutional and interpersonal communication”. (Carmen Santamaría, UAH)</li> <li>(2) Lecture: “Students – the best marketing ambassadors” (Weronika Ćmielewska, U. Lodz)</li> <li>(3) Lecture: “How to collaborate with student organizations in the promotion of universities” (Virtual presentation prepared by Rasmus Aberg, ESN)</li> <li>(4) Debriefing the results of the session and preparation for social activity on Wednesday morning</li> </ol>
<b>Activities</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1</b> - Lecture &amp; discussion by facilitators, followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p> <p><b>Learning session 2</b> – Diverse lectures followed by a group exercise and debriefing of the results.</p>

<b>Title</b>	<b>JOENSUU EVENT DAY 2</b> Learning session 3
<b>Task description</b>	<p>Before the training in Joensuu you were asked to collect some leaflets of your university town and natural landscapes or places worth a visit. Using them as models, you were also asked to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Prepare a draft for a page to be included in a students' guide including information on places to visit near your universities that could add extra value to them</li> <li>-Bring your paper draft to Joensuu. <b>Learning session 3 – Natural landscapes as resources for promotion</b></li> </ul> <p>Facilitators: Carmen Santamaria, UAH, Tuomas Järvenpää, UEF, Kirsi Laurén, UEF.</p> <p>(1) Lecture by Kirsi Laurén, UEF.</p> <p>(2) Morning trip to Koli National Park</p> <p>(3) Debriefing tasks. (Facilitators: Carmen Santamaria, UAH and Tuomas Järvenpää, UEF).</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Learning session 3</b> – Lecture followed by trip to Koli National Park, followed by debriefing tasks.

<b>Title</b>	<b>JOENSUU EVENT DAY 3</b> Learning session 4
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 4 – Question time, self-evaluation &amp; open discussion</b></p> <p>(1) Lecture “ Student organizations and attractiveness of universities” by Stefan Jahnke, EUF; Rasmus Aberg , ESN</p> <p>(2) Question time - participants are invited to make questions on topics related to the course.</p> <p>(3) Self-evaluation of the learning process and feedback from the course contents (Carmen Santamaria, UAH and Stefan Jahnke, EUF)</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Lecture, Q&A, self-evaluation and feedback

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES' BUILDING BLOCKS

Title	READINGS FOLLOW UP
<b>Task description</b>	Consolidation of gained knowledge through revisiting the answers to the questions, collective feedback. Information on further readings.
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Read the follow-up material in order to further gain perspective into the topic of the marketization of higher education:</p> <p>Chapleo, Chris. "Branding a University: Adding Real Value or Smoke and Mirrors." <i>The Marketisation of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer</i>, 2011, 101–114.</p> <p>Nielsen, Katherine. "'This Place Is Not at All What I Had Expected': Student Demand for Authentic Irish Experiences in Irish Studies Programs." <i>The Marketization of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer</i>, 2010, 129–141.</p> <p>READING ACTIVITY</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please use the reading self-assessment forms and fill them in with notes for these 2 chapters.</li> <li>2. After reflection, see whether your reading of these chapters modifies some of the views discussed in preliminary readings 1 and 2. Why?</li> <li>3. You can further discuss some of your ideas in a discussion forum with the name "More on reading activities".</li> </ol>

Title	ASSIGNMENT C
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>C1. PLACES ADDING VALUE TO YOUR UNIVERSITY.</b></p> <p>Places worth a visit near your university, it will be interesting for you to share some pictures and video links of one or two places that may add value to your university together with a few comments on what is special of that place. In other words, where would you bring us and our students if we go and visit you?</p> <p><b>C2. INSTITUTIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.</b></p> <p><b>THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF OUR WORDS. THE TYPICAL CASE OF REQUESTS.</b></p> <p>Requests are very frequent speech acts in institutional and</p>

interpersonal communication. They are produced when we want another speaker to carry out an action in our benefit (even if the benefit is for the good flow of tasks needed for the institution. Requests are different form offers “Would you like some tea?” in that offers invite an action in the benefit of the addressee.

These are examples of requests:

“Could you, please, send us this form filled in as soon as possible?”

“Could you, please, upload the activities before the deadline?”

Administrators and teachers need to produce many requests in order for their work to be done.

Requests are considered face threatening acts, i.e. acts that threaten individuals’ needs to be free from imposition by Brown and Levinson (1987, [1978]: 65-66). This is so because requests are acts that put pressure on the addressee to carry out an action. (See the presentation for learning session 2, slides 23-25)

Could you please think of a request you would normally do in your work environment that frequently causes any of these emotions:

Disappointment

Frustration

Annoyance...

Please write one or two examples (include the exact wording whenever possible, especially if you can copy text from a mail message). Please, discuss briefly if this activity helps you to gain awareness on the following:

- The potential effect of face threatening acts
- The importance of choosing words that mitigate the potential negative effect of face threatening acts

### **C3. STUDENTS AS CONSUMERS**

This activity is connected to PRELIMINARY READING 2:

Furedi, Frank. “Introduction to the Marketization of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer.” *The Marketization of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*, 2010, 1–8.

As part of the activities in this preliminary reading, we discussed the interesting topic of *The Marketization of Higher Education and the Student as Consumer*

Could you think of real situations in your daily activities that show that students are increasingly positioned as consumers and institutions working to improve the extent to which they meet ‘consumer demands’?

	<p>Eg. students who complain that they want their degree dissertations to be checked for spelling by teachers, due to the cost of registration of the dissertation.</p> <p>Please give some examples and discuss briefly.</p>
<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<p>C1: Consider the location and places nearby the university that may add up to its brand value.</p> <p>C2: Become aware of the impact of the words on the institutional and interpersonal communication.</p> <p>C3: Identify real situations in daily activities that show that students are increasingly positioned as consumers</p>

### **Case 3: BEST+Lodz – Student experience [Moderators/Leaders: University of Lodz & Erasmus Student Network]**

#### ***Topic: International student experience***

International student experience (LM3) focuses on the international student's experience from two different viewpoints - students and universities. To get a holistic view on how to improve the quality of student experiences, the integration of students with the local community needs to be facilitated by both, the university and local students themselves. To achieve this goal, a range of topics should be tackled (not exclusive) - buddy systems, housing, welcome days, student association, cultural integration, volunteering and language cafes.

The Blended Erasmus+ Training in Lodz is part of the BEST+ course on international student experience and combines eLearning and a 3-day event in the wonderful city of Lodz, Poland. Our experts from the Erasmus Student Network and the University of Lodz offer a combination of networking, peer-learning, training and social activities. You will learn about different aspects of international student experience from both an institutional and a student perspective.

#### ***Learning outcomes***

- (1) learn new ways of looking at and managing students' problems and helping students to find solutions for a better mobility experience;
- (2) be able to recognize the importance of using an appropriate language to communicate successfully with students and partner institutions;
- (3) get knowledge why humans have a fundamental need to belong to groups and how it can be used to enhance student experience;
- (4) get familiarized with the latest statistics on students' use of internet/social media and how they influence their experience during studies;
- (5) find out about useful and easy to implement practices on how to use social media to disseminate students' positive experience;
- (6) be able to draft and implement a strategy for an integration of international students into local communities;
- (7) get an awareness regarding how the cooperation with student organizations help to enhance student experience;
- (8) get an insight into student perspective of the mobility exchange.

#### ***Content: Online session and physical training***

The Learning Material is prepared under the guidance of experts from the University of Lodz in cooperation with Erasmus Student Network. The training team consists of the following University of Lodz experts and international relations officers: Karolina Adamiak, Katarzyna Ciupa, Weronika Ćmielewska, as well as experts from Erasmus Student Network: Inês Moreira, Trainer, Rasmus Benke-Åberg, Director, Erasmus Student Network.

This almost one month training combines eLearning (virtual content) and a 3-day event (physical training) in Lodz, Poland.

The blended learning process had been arranged in 3 distinct phases (see the tables below), supported by an ongoing Discussion Group called "Get to know each other", which not only was used for getting introduced to other participants, but also provided a useful support platform where participants can get guidance and discuss the activities that are part of the virtual training. In a self-organized manner participants provided input into the platform, following the endorsed structure of array of assignments serving the achievement of learning outcomes.

*Virtual training (before on-site training)*

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
07.05.2018	Introduction: get to know each other	Joining the discussion group
07.05.2018	Case study: student experience in the UK	Reading and writing assignment
07.05.2018	International friendliness of universities	Reading and writing assignment
09.05.2018, 1.5 h	Webinar - international student experience	Webinar, introduction and discussion of assignments
11.05.2018	Let's make it go viral! Introduction	Activity with four tasks and attached webinar
14.05.2018	Webinar: Let's make it go viral!	Webinar for discussing the prior activity
14.05.2018	Visualization of students' mobility	Written assignment
14.05.2018	Effective communication	Reading and writing assignment, drill of practical communication skills
14.05.2018	Difficult situations	Reading and writing assignment
18.05.2018	The psychological aspects of belonging to groups	Activity with four tasks

*Physical on-site training session*

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
22.05.2018	Introduction Reflections on virtual course content Building connections & Trust with international students Student Organizations & the benefit of student volunteers	Kick-off, review of virtual course content, lectures, social dinner
23.05.2018	Welcoming international students Buddy system and how to stay in touch with int. students after their return home How to transform the IRO to be more efficient	Lectures and discussions, social activities in Lodz
24.05.2018	Integrating international students in the local community Digital Erasmus+ administration Action-plan building & wrap-up	Lectures and discussions

*Aftersession*

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
12.06.2018	Webinar - International Student Experiences - digitizing management	Follow-up of the course

**Description of the training**

The first online assignments were there not only because of the learning of the content, but also in order to prepare the participants, to have them getting to know each other better, thereby creating a comfortable learning environment where they could learn as much as possible. After a relatively simple exercise where the participants were asked to introduce each other and post pictures in a discussion forum, the case study dealt with the theoretical aspects of international student experience, based on publication by UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in 2015. The participants were asked to reflect on the recommendations of the publication and discuss whether or not these were relevant also in

their own universities. They wrote their answers in a document which was uploaded on the platform. These answers were then discussed in the following webinar.

After having looked at international student experience from the universities' side in the previous assignment, it was now time to look at the same issue from the students' side. The starting point of this was a survey report and the participants were asked to read it and reply to different questions about it in an online questionnaire. This had the form of a quiz where the participants could look up the correct answers in the survey report. By filling in the quiz they were also reflecting on the situation regarding international student experience in their own universities. After the assignments, it was time to discuss these issues together. This was done in a webinar, facilitated by ESN and with all participants of the training invited to join. In the webinar, there were both a get-to-know-each-other part, as well as discussions about the two assignments done up to this point. Questions were the sort of "Did you agree with xxxx?" and "In your experience, what is different from yyyy?".

Moving on, it was time to look at the topic of internet and social media. This is an important part of the lives of young people and needs to be taken into account also from universities' side. In this introduction to the topic, the participants were asked to prepare by looking into a pdf file with infographics on internet usage, and to relate that to their university situation. In the second webinar before the physical training, the participants discussed the topic that they had started working on in the previous assignments, and to follow up on those discussions. The webinar was facilitated by University of Lodz. Next assignment was a continuation of the previous one. The participants were asked to look at a short film prepared by exchange students from University of Lodz, and to think about how students visualize their mobility, their expectations and their fears. A very important aspect of successful interaction between students and partner institutions is communication, and this was the topic of this assignments. The participants were given two articles to read and further given a letter with missing texts, and were asked to fill in the gaps. Staff at universities can often be faced with ad hoc situations that they are not prepared for. As explained in this exercise: "Being responsible for international students at your institution, you assist them during the process of admission for studies, preparing appropriate documents, finalizing their stay and other. Nevertheless, it is common that you face situations that require non-standard student service, which involves you or your institution". The participants were asked to read two stories based on difficult situations faced by staff at University of Lodz. They then had to think of solutions to the problems and upload these on the platform.

This was then followed up on at the physical training. The very last part of the online training phase was about psychology and being member of a community. The participants were given a template to fill in different parts of their lives and to read a related article. The physical session was opened by introduction session, the participants were officially welcomed by University of Lodz and were introduced to the program of the training. There were ice-breaking activities in order to create a good learning environment. There was also a recap of the online training, and a short follow-up discussion on that. In the afternoon, there was a session focused on building connection and trust. Since other students and student organisations can play a very big role in improving the experiences of international students, there was a session with discussion on how international organizations and volunteers can facilitate the work for IROs. The second day was started by a session which dealt with issue of welcoming international students. After that, there was a session on how to stay in touch with international students after their return home. This can be done for example through

“buddy systems”. The final session of day two considered the transformation process of IRO towards more efficiency, built upon practical experience of the University of Lodz. The last day of the physical training started off with a session about international students’ integration in their local community. While it is very common that international students have an overall positive experience, it is also true that many of them (arguably Erasmus students in particular) tend to stick together with each other and not integrate very much into the local community. In this session, ESN presented the SocialErasmus project<sup>1</sup>, which aims at facilitating the integration of international students into the local community. The day and the overall training, was wrapped up, summarized and the participants discussed plans for the future. The physical training was followed up with another seminar, looking into the administrative side of student experiences.

There are many online tools nowadays which can make the lives of international students easier - online learning agreement<sup>2</sup>, the Erasmus+ App<sup>3</sup>, etc. – and these were introduced and discussed in a final webinar, taking place around two weeks after the physical training. This was facilitated by EUF and it was the last aspect of the training.

## Course info

### ONLINE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<b>Introduction: get to know each other</b>
<b>Task description</b>	In order to get to know each other a bit before the course starts, please go to this discussion group, in which we ask you to present yourself briefly.  Also, please be prepared to present yourself at the first webinar.
<b>Activities</b>	Start using the discussion group, improve self-presentation skills by preparing for the first webinar

<b>Title</b>	<b>Case study: student experience in the UK</b>
<b>Task description</b>	The UK publication Supporting and Enhancing the Experience of International Students in the UK (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2015, attached below) outlines three main aspects of international student experience:  *Marketing, recruitment and admission;  *Arrival, orientation and induction;  *Learning, teaching, and enabling student development and

1 See <https://socialerasmus.esn.org/>

2 See <https://www.learning-agreement.eu/start/>

3 See <https://erasmusapp.eu/>

	<p>achievement.</p> <p>Now, do you agree with the suggestions in the document? Have they missed something? If you would write the same report, what would you change?</p> <p>Please write your answer in a Word document and upload it. Please keep your answers to maximum 1/2 A4 page.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Read the report and write down the answers

<b>Title</b>	<b>International friendliness of universities</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>In the previous assignment we looked at student experience from the universities' side. In this assignment we will look at it from the students' perspectives.</p> <p>Below you can find a survey report called "The International Friendliness of Universities". It was done by the Erasmus Student Network in 2016 and looks at different parts of international student experiences. We would now ask you to have a look at the document; we do not expect you to thoroughly read all of it, but please browse through it and take some notes of what seems to be the most relevant parts of "international student experience".</p> <p>For this assignment, please complete the questions in this quiz. As you will see, the first questions are about your own university and about your perception of things. The second part is about results of the survey and you will have to find the answers in there.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Browse through the report, make notes, complete the questions in the quiz

<b>Title</b>	<b>BEST+ Webinar - international student experience</b>
<b>Task description</b>	This is the introduction webinar in which we will get to know each other and discuss some of the answers from the online assignments.
<b>Activities</b>	Introduce yourself. Discuss the prior assignment.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Let's make it go viral! Introduction</b>
<b>Task description</b>	The Internet has become an essential part of our lives – both on professional and private level. There are various trends that are especially visible within the younger generation – among them, for example, a rising amount of time is spent browsing the Internet. Those age groups were born when the world was

	<p>already “online” and it is natural for them to function in that way. That affects the way they communicate with everyone, including higher education institutions. And, at the same time, it creates a challenge for HEI’s to adjust their communication to the demands of their clients, that is, students.</p> <p>The activity comprises four tasks (please keep the order):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Think about internet and social media. How popular – in your opinion – are they nowadays? How many people use them? Is internet used mostly through computers (laptops, etc.) or smartphones? How much time people spend online? Please write down your thoughts.</li> <li>2. Check the pdf file with infographics with latest statistics about internet usage. Are you surprised with the results? Why, or why not?</li> <li>3. Think about your university's communication with students: Can you name all the social media that your university uses? Don't check it, just write down names of portals/apps that you think your institution uses.</li> <li>4. Please make a research about the social media your university uses to communicate with students. How many did you get right? Are there more, or fewer than you thought? Please write down all portals/apps that you found. Are they run in English or your local language (or maybe both)?</li> </ol> <p>Webinar: May 14, 15:00–16:30.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Follow the tasks in the given order, attend the webinar

<b>Title</b>	<b>BEST+ Webinar: Let’s make it go viral!</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>This is the second webinar for the BEST+ training in Lodz.</p> <p>Please make sure to be ready a few minutes before the start, to make sure that everything works well. Also, please have with you notes that you prepared within the task “Let’s make it go viral! Introduction”- we will discuss your findings.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	Discuss the findings of the prior online assignment

<b>Title</b>	<b>Visualization of students’ mobility</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>Please describe your view on how students visualize their mobility, what they wish to experience, what they expect and what they are afraid of. Please prepare a short writing (15-20 sentences). The aim of the task is to prepare the basis for</p>

	discussion during the physical training in Lodz. As an inspiration, please view a short film prepared by UL exchange students. Please upload your answers.
<b>Activities</b>	View a short film and do a short writing exercise in preparation for discussion.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Effective communication</b>
<b>Task description</b>	Basic communication skills are necessary for successful interaction, both with students and partner institutions. To get a wider view on the topic of effective communication, please read two articles: "Effective Communication leads to Understanding" by Vince Fitzpatrick and "Effective e-mail communication" by the Writing Center of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a short exercise, please fill in the missing words and phrases in the letter (for self-verification you will find the answer key below), then find synonyms of all phrases used (please search for more examples using favorite dictionaries). Additionally, please find enclosed a mini dictionary for your use. The task allows to practice using suitable language for official correspondence.
<b>Activities</b>	<i>Fill in the missing words and phrases in the letter.</i>

<b>Title</b>	<b>Difficult situations</b>
<b>Task description</b>	Being responsible for international students at your institution, you assist them during the process of admission for studies, preparing appropriate documents, finalizing their stay and other. Nevertheless, it is common that you face situations that require non-standard student service, which involves you or your institution. First, please read two stories where UL staff was involved in difficult situations concerning international students and then please describe 2-3 situations (15-20 sentences each) that could be presented in a similar way. If possible, please think of solutions to these situations. The descriptions will be used during physical training for discussion and workshop. Please upload your answers below.
<b>Activities</b>	Read two stories, think of solutions and prepare in writing for discussion.

<b>Title</b>	<b>The psychological aspects of belonging to groups</b>
<b>Task</b>	During that activity we will focus on benefits of being a member of a community. People feel more secure when they know that

<p><b>description</b></p>	<p>they have others around them who share their goals and care about their progress. That is one reason why it can be so stressful for students to make decision of applying for student exchange programs and move to a different country for mobility. It is important to remember how hard it is for students to be far away from the formal and informal groups they belong to every day. From the same reason, it is a fundamental task for us as administrative staff and teachers to give students opportunity to belong to the groups and feel as a part of the group in our universities.</p> <p>Task 1 During our lives, we are members of different groups and communities. As a warm-up task to the topic “The psychology of the group”, please fill out the template below describing two periods of your life – TEENAGE YEARS and NOWADAYS.</p> <p>Task 2 Read the article about the psychology of groups and answer the following questions: As human beings, are we able to exist without belonging to a group/community? How important is for you to be a part of your group/community? As you compare different periods of your life, which group(s) do you find the most important for your well-being?</p> <p>Task 3 Please describe, in 5-7 sentences, one example of activities from your university thanks to which you can support group identity building among incoming students from different countries and cultures. Give us 3 strong and 3 weak sides of that activity from your point of view.</p> <p>Task 4</p> <p>1) Match correct explanation to the name of group development stages;</p> <p>2) As you can see two descriptions are missing, try and describe the missing stages in short.</p>
<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<p>Fill out the template, read the article and answer the questions: do a short writing exercise.</p>

<p><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>BEST+ Webinar - International Student Experiences - digitising management</b></p>
<p><b>Task description</b></p>	<p>This BEST+ Webinar has been recorded as a follow-up of the BEST+ International Student Experiences course in Lodz and gives an overview of how digital tools can be used to improve the experience of international students.</p> <p>It gives an introduction to the Erasmus+ mobile App of the European Commission, which supports students in guiding them through the mobility.</p>

	<p>Furthermore, it explains the Erasmus+ Dashboard, a mobility management tool, which institutions can use to prepare targeted information for their incoming and outgoing students through the Erasmus+ App.</p> <p>Lastly, it explains the rationale behind the Online Learning Agreement and Erasmus without paper in a more holistic approach and how those tools can help to save time of managing mobilities and use those resources to rather support and tend students with other issues.<a href="https://youtu.be/XoZfzyrF7SQ">https://youtu.be/XoZfzyrF7SQ</a></p>
<b>Activities</b>	Reflect of how some existing digital tools can be used to improve the experience of international students.

## PHYSICAL ON-SITE TRAINING BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<b>LODZ EVENT DAY 1</b> Learning session 1 & Learning session 2
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1</b></p> <p>(1)Introduction - get to know each other &amp; Introduction to the topic</p> <p>(2) Reflections on virtual course content</p> <p><b>Learning session 2</b></p> <p>(1)Building connections &amp; Trust with international students</p> <p>(2)Student Organisations &amp; the benefit of student volunteers</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p><b>Learning session 1</b> - Lecture &amp; discussion by facilitators, followed by reflections on virtual course content.</p> <p><b>Learning session 2</b> – Lecture &amp; discussion by facilitators.</p>

<b>Title</b>	<b>LODZ EVENT DAY 3</b> Learning session 3
<b>Task description</b>	<p><b>Learning session 3</b></p> <p>(1) Integrating international students in the local community</p> <p>(2) Digital Erasmus+ administration</p> <p>(3) Action-plan building &amp; wrap-up</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Learning session 3</b> – Lecture followed by Social activities in Lodz

## FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES' BUILDING BLOCKS

<b>Title</b>	<b>BEST+ Webinar - International Student Experiences - digitising management</b>
<b>Task description</b>	<p>This BEST+ Webinar has been recorded as a follow-up of the BEST+ International Student Experiences course in Lodz and gives an overview of how digital tools can be used to improve the experience of international students.</p> <p>It gives an introduction to the Erasmus+ mobile App of the European Commission, which supports students in guiding them through the mobility.</p> <p>Furthermore, it explains the Erasmus+ Dashboard, a mobility management tool, which institutions can use to prepare targeted information for their incoming and outgoing students through the Erasmus+ App.</p> <p>Lastly, it explains the rationale behind the Online Learning Agreement and Erasmus without paper in a more holistic approach and how those tools can help to save time of managing mobilities and use those resources to rather support and tend students with other issues.<a href="https://youtu.be/XoZfzyrF7SQ">https://youtu.be/XoZfzyrF7SQ</a></p>
<b>Activities</b>	Read the follow-up material

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Blended mobility proved a success*

In order to evaluate the satisfaction of the participants with the blended mobility, the questionnaires were distributed to assess the impact of the mobility. The feedback collected from participants e.g. in the Joensuu event, reflected a general feeling of satisfaction 66.67% "very satisfied" and 33.33% "satisfied".

The questionnaires included items regarding contents, implementation and future use. Another questionnaire, serving internal quality assurance, has been distributed amongst participants' consortium partners in the project with very satisfactory results regarding management, intellectual outputs results and meetings.

### *Blended mobility promotes community feeling*

Blended learning challenges course designers and facilitators to find alternative ways of interaction substituting for face-to-face communication, as interaction is an essential element for learning. Preliminary activities together with the online webinar and the online discussion forum proved very successful in the development of on-line interaction and a community feeling for course participants.

### *Blended mobility motivates participants to become change makers*

After graduating the blended mobility course some participants have reported acting as agents of change in their institutions with an increase in their motivation levels, which means that participation in blended mobility can make changes for the better in the institutions of the participants.

### *Blended mobility makes the course affordable*

Participants also mentioned that the shortened time abroad (3 days instead of a week) made the course more affordable, as it is usually very difficult for staff members to miss duties for a whole week.

### *Assignments including self-reflection activities promote blended learning*

Self-evaluation forms for reading and learning also proved very helpful tools for participants to monitor their progress and gain a feeling of self-improvement in the topics covered by the course.

### *Blended mobility augments the professional qualification*

Participants reported feeling safer in the work environments when discussing topics related to the training as now they can quote relevant authors and readings giving support to their opinions.

*Preliminary tasks should be kept as short and simple as possible*

The Best+ project has explored the fact that employees of higher education institutions do not often have the opportunity to allocate part of their working time to staff training. Because of this fact, it is recommended that preliminary tasks of the course are kept as simple and short as possible. The experiences from The Best+ Intercultural Competences course indicate that a shorter dialogue is often better than a longer one, in order to tackle the issues of the course effectively and spark conversation in the group. Thus in the context of Antal and Friedmans' (2008) model for teaching intercultural competences, it would be useful to stress that participants need to write only a few lines of dialogue from their personal intercultural communication conflicts.

*All preliminary readings should be processed also in the face-to-face learning event*

In the Best+ Intercultural Competences course, some preliminary readings were added in order to contextualize the importance of intercultural skills in the higher education setting. The readings sparked lively questions and conversations in the learning group, but the organizers' recommendation is that preliminary readings used in blended learning should be processed also in a face-to-face learning situation and embedded in the over-all course structure. However, it should also be noted that the processing of the possible readings takes time from the analysis of the personal dialogues and from the rehearsal of new communication strategies.

*The facilitators of the course should avoid giving answers to communication conflicts*

Antal and Friedman (2008) note that the facilitators of intercultural competence training should avoid the urge to explain or to give answers to the communication conflicts that the participants present in their personal cases. The rationale of the course is to give tools and space for the participants to find their own answers to these problems and renew their own behavior. Antal and Friedmans' (2008) observation proved true also in the Best+ Intercultural Competences course, where the participants asked for answers to different conflicts, but where they had very productive discussion when looking the conflicts from different angles instead of settling for one solution only.

*Every learning session should include sufficient time for general discussion and questions*

As mentioned above, the process of analyzing the personal cases and communication conflicts sparked a lot of discussion in the learning group. The recommendation of the organizers is that there should be sufficient time for general discussion with the whole learning group and between the small teams in every learning session, in addition to lectures and assignments. A practical way to spark discussion is to present a few personal cases for the whole group. It is not necessary to go through all the teams and their personal cases in every session. Rather, it is more useful to present only one or two personal cases and discuss them more profoundly with the whole group. The general topics of the learning session can be approached in discussion through these selected cases.

## REFERENCES

- Alammary, A., Sheard, J., & Carbone, A. (2014). Blended learning in higher education: Three different design approaches. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 30(4), pp. 440-454
- Al-Huneidi A., Schreurs J. (2013) Constructivism Based Blended Learning in Higher Education. In: Lytras M.D., Ruan D., Tennyson R.D., Ordonez De Pablos P., García Peñalvo F.J., Rusu L. (eds) Information Systems, E-learning, and Knowledge Management Research. WSKS 2011. *Communications in Computer and Information Science*, vol 278. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg
- Ariane A. & Friedman V. (2008). Learning to negotiate reality: A strategy for teaching intercultural competencies. *Journal of Management Education*, 32(3), pp.363-386. SAGE Journals.
- Berger N., Musavi-Lari. (2011). An experiential exercise in diversity awareness. *Journal of Management Education*, 25 (6). SAGE Journals.
- Cano & Ion et al. (2013). *Handbook of Research on Transnational Higher Education* (2 Volumes). India: IGNOU
- Dauksiene E., Tereseviciene M. (2011). Virtual mobility for lifelong education. <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/virtual-mobility-for-lifelong-education.pdf>
- Dervin F. and Layne H. 2013. "A guide to interculturality for international and exchange students: an example of Hostipitality?" *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol. 8 No. 1 : 1-19.
- Driscoll M. (2002). Blended Learning: Let's Get Beyond the Hype. [https://www-07.ibm.com/services/pdf/blended\\_learning.pdf](https://www-07.ibm.com/services/pdf/blended_learning.pdf)
- European Commission (2011). Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems, 567. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0567 FIN:EN PDF>
- Dziuban, C., Graham, C.R., Moskal, (2018) P.D. et al. Blended learning: the new normal and emerging Technologies. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 15: 3
- European Commission (2013). Erasmus Charter for higher Education 2014-2020 – Annotated Guidelines, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/opportunities/higher-education/doc/charter-annotated-guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/opportunities/higher-education/doc/charter-annotated-guidelines_en.pdf)
- Friesen N. (2012). Report: Defining Blended Learning. [http://learningspaces.org/papers/Defining\\_Blended\\_Learning\\_NF.pdf](http://learningspaces.org/papers/Defining_Blended_Learning_NF.pdf)
- Goeman, Poelmans & Van Rompey (2018). Framing blended learning, teaching and education. *ICERI2018 Proceedings*, Seville, Spain, pp. 1676-1680
- Graham, C. R. (2013). Emerging practice and research in blended learning. In M. G. Moore (Ed.), *Handbook of distance education*, (3rd ed.,). New York: Routledge, pp. 333–350
- Harvey S. (2003). Building Effective Blended Learning Programs. *Issue of Educational Technology*, Volume 43, (number 6), pp. 51-54.
- Hofmann, J. (2014). Solutions to the top 10 challenges of blended learning. *Top 10 challenges of blended learning*. Available on [www.cedma-europe.org](http://www.cedma-europe.org)
- Hope et al. (2017). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology*, Fourth Edition (10 Volumes). Mehdi Khosrow-Pour, D.B.A. USA: Information Resources Management Association.
- Kartashova V. N. (2009). Computerised lingvotrainer as means for self-education of students in higher education. In Balashov (Ed.), *Current Issues of Linguistic Education* (pp. 67-72). Samara: Samara Humanitarian Academy.
- Kennedy D. (2006). Writing and using learning outcomes: a practical guide. Cork: University College Cork. <http://hdl.handle.net/10468/1613>
- Kintu M. J., Zhu Ch., Kagambe E. (2017). Blended learning effectiveness: the relationship between student characteristics, design features and outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*. SpringerOpen.
- Manzoor et al. (2015). *Handbook of Research on Applied Learning Theory and Design in Modern Education* (2 Volumes). USA: IGI GLOBAL
- McLeod S. (2010). Kolb's learning styles and experiential learning cycle. *Simply Psychology*, [www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html)
- Messelink, H.E. & Van Maele J. & Spencer-Oatey H. (2015). Intercultural competencies: what students in study and placement mobility should be learning. *Intercultural Education*, 26 (1).

- Rosenberg M. (2001). *E-Learning: Strategies for Delivering Knowledge in the Digital Age*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Silvio, J. (2003). *Global Learning and Virtual Mobility*. T. Varis, T. Utsumi, & W. R. Klemm (Eds.). *Global Peace Through The Global University System*. Hameenlinna, Finland: University of Tampere.
- Wang S.-K., Hsu H.-Y. (2008). Use of the Webinar Tool (Elluminate) to Support Training: The Effects of Webinar-Learning Implementation from Student-Trainers' Perspective, *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, pp.175-194
- Webinar [Def. 1]. (n.d)..Merriam-Webster Online. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/webinar>