



# Blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility KA131

*Pre-published version for use by Erasmus+ National Agencies and beneficiaries*

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## **PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

The purpose of this document is to provide future and current beneficiaries of KA131 funds within the Erasmus+ programme with guidance and inspiration on how to organise and implement high quality blended mobility opportunities, both for outgoing and incoming Erasmus+ participants. It outlines the rationale for this novelty introduced in the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme and the potential benefits of blended mobility for students, staff and their higher education institutions. It provides a snapshot of existing policy literature on the subject, summaries lessons learned from past projects, including KA2 Strategic Partnerships that experimented with blended mobility, and showcases good practices that can prove to be success factors in the organisation of blended mobility.

This document is a living document, and as new evidence emerges and eligibility and funding rules in Erasmus+ evolve, this document may be updated. It has to be read as a complement to the Higher Education Mobility KA131 Handbook and the 2022 Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which set the funding and eligibility rules for all types of mobilities, including short-term blended mobility within KA131. This document is intended to inspire and motivate institutions planning to implement blended mobility activities within KA131 and as such is not a mandatory reading for beneficiaries but an additional support tool.

## **BENEFITS OF INTRODUCING BLENDED MOBILITY**

Blended mobility was introduced as a novelty in the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme's higher education mobility action KA131 in order to enrich and diversify the experience of students and staff who would learn or train or teach abroad. Moreover, given the bigger budget allocated to the programme in the new multiannual financial framework 2021-2027, Erasmus+ aims to capture a much higher share of the population and fund more mobilities than in the past, so the blended mobility options will facilitate accomplishing this objective.

Research has already shown that all mobility experiences, regardless of length, have a positive impact on students, for example when it comes to employment (Van Hees, V., & Montagnese, D. (2020), p.18). As the general objective for the new Erasmus+ programme is to boost learning and training opportunities in Europe and worldwide and to include more people in this experience, blended (short-term) mobilities can be an important first step for students who are hesitant to go abroad.

Institutions can build on their own previous experiences with virtual and distance learning, both as a result of the pandemic and also during the years prior, and use the tools that have already proven successful. Some institutions or individual teachers might have experience with virtual learning, COIL courses and using collaborative platforms to work with students from different institutions. Blended mobility activity within Erasmus+ offers the opportunity to build on those relationships and expertise to create a more structured and more inclusive mobility format with a guarantee of quality afforded to it by the regular Erasmus+ programme quality assurance mechanisms.

## INCLUSIVENESS

The Erasmus+ programme sets inclusion as one of its horizontal objectives and the new mobility options were integrated in KA131 as novelties in the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme precisely in order to better accommodate the different needs and situations of a diverse student population. At its core, blended mobility creates new learning opportunities for people who could not participate in a mobility programme before, in particular, students from different backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities.

Several publications stress this inclusion aspect of blended mobility opportunities. The Inclusive Mobility project<sup>1</sup>, for instance, recommends institutions to encourage the mobility of students with disabilities and to “[c]ommit to providing a variety of mobility programmes to suit different needs and aspirations”, including virtual types of mobilities.

These different types of student mobilities can act as a first step towards longer mobility experiences and can build up student confidence (Gallagher, L., & Ryde, D. (n.d.), p.12). The virtual component of blended mobility can also prepare the students for the physical mobility for example by facilitating friendships, contacts and supporting social networking (Erdei, L. A. & Káplár-Kodácsy, K. (2020), p. 77). The results of EVOLVE’s study on virtual exchange confirm this: around 60% of students who had participated in a virtual mobility were interested in physical mobility as a result of their virtual exchange course (EVOLVE Project Team (2020b), p. 34).

The new Erasmus+ programme allows students to benefit from the mobility already in their first year and short-term blended mobility is suitable for this purpose. When students can be encouraged to participate in short blended programmes early in their student career, they will be more likely to participate in full semester programmes later in their studies.

Staff can also benefit from blended mobility for instance by participating in a virtual component before their physical mobility to build their confidence, self-efficacy and intercultural sensitivity, which can lead to a better quality mobility and in turn to an increased number of applicants and participants (see recommendations from the project "[Teach with Erasmus+](#)" (TWE+)<sup>2</sup>).

Blended mobility can additionally encourage internationalisation at home. This can be a good introduction for local students that are hesitant to go on mobility and might encourage further participation in mobility activities later in their studies. Participation in blended courses as local students allows for an international experience at home through interaction with international students and staff throughout both the virtual and physical components of the blended mobility.

## FLEXIBILITY

Blended learning and blended mobility formats can boost mobility numbers by respecting varying academic systems in different countries in a more flexible manner than physical mobility. The flexibility

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<sup>1</sup> <https://inclusivemobility.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://teachwitherasmus.eu/>

offered by blended solutions can for example serve to overcome differences in the academic calendars of different institutions (Gaebel, M., Zhang, T., Stoeber, H. & Morrisroe, A. (2021), p. 24). In addition, and in line with the opening of KA131 to international mobility, participants can go on a blended mobility (that is not part of a blended intensive programme (BIP)) to third countries not associated to the Programme too, which in turn translates into even more mobility and cooperation possibilities and flexibility. Currently, blended intensive programmes can only take place in EU Member States or third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme.

In a survey conducted by the “How Long is Too Long” (HLiTL) project, participants stressed that blended mobility allows students to simultaneously reap the benefits of both physical and virtual mobility, financial savings, flexibility and access to new ways of studying and teaching. (Universidade do Porto (2020), p. 21).

Blended short-term mobility programmes might also work well for students in highly specialised fields or training for regulated professions. They get the benefit of cooperating internationally on relevant topics and build their professional networks while not compromising the structure and timetables of their highly regulated study programmes. This may also be very relevant for doctoral students following very individualised study paths.

Blended mobility courses can also be a good way to encourage more cooperation between higher education institutions and other non-HEI actors, such as companies, municipalities, regional authorities, SMEs<sup>3</sup>, etc.

## **INNOVATIVE WAYS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Blended mobility offers opportunities for new ways of learning, teaching and training that can lead to the development of new types of competences. Both stand-alone blended mobility and participation in blended intensive programmes can lead towards adopting innovative education practices and flexible learning pathways such as multidisciplinary programmes, group or team learning and assignments, short courses potentially leading to micro-credentials and better upskilling or reskilling opportunities.

Blended mobility courses can also allow institutions to explore more direct cooperation with enterprises, organisations, municipalities and other stakeholders through challenge-based learning approaches where students can work together across disciplines, in particular in the context of the blended intensive programmes. Students are able to address topics or challenges in cooperation with different stakeholders and improve their critical thinking, problem solving, and creative and entrepreneurial skills (for example through living labs<sup>4</sup> as mentioned in the European Strategy for Universities<sup>5</sup>).

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<sup>3</sup> Small and medium-sized enterprises

<sup>4</sup> Living labs in universities enable students, staff and researchers to cooperate with other key stakeholders to solve societal challenges and encourages application of knowledge to the real-world context, enhances skills of those involved, increases connections between people, and provides more opportunities to connect with society.

<sup>5</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>

Blended mobility can also be a means to boost the participating higher education institutions' digitalisation efforts and train their students and staff members in digital skills.

A study conducted by the EVOLVE project on the attitudes of students towards "virtual exchange" showed overall a positive response. The majority of students thought that the exchange was a "valuable part of their higher education course and should be continued in the future" (EVOLVE p. 32). They furthermore found that "a major factor influencing students' general virtual exchange appreciation appears to be their perception of the virtual exchange being an opportunity for developing transversal and discipline specific skills" (EVOLVE – impact on student learning, p.33).

Being involved in organising blended intensive programmes or other short-term blended courses for incoming mobile students that are on individual blended mobility, gives the opportunity to higher education teaching staff to experiment in designing innovative programmes in multidisciplinary subjects. The institutions can also use this occasion to offer modules or programmes in English, if they otherwise were restricted in doing so, and on topics that would expand their expertise.

In conclusion, blended mobility serves the purpose of promoting and implementing quality mobility, while at the same time achieving all the horizontal priorities of Erasmus+ such as inclusion, digitalisation, sustainable development and active civic participation. In short, through the new blended options, the main objective of the Erasmus+ programme, which is the development of the participants' professional and personal skills by learning from abroad, can be more easily accomplished.

## **HOW DOES BLENDED MOBILITY IN ERASMUS+ WORK?**

Under the previous Erasmus+ Programme, physical mobility of a short duration was not possible for students in KA1 but only for staff and in KA2 strategic partnerships. In line with the horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme, and to accommodate the need expressed by the sector to introduce blended mobility options, mobilities of shorter physical duration were introduced as a novelty. They are always combined with a virtual component to make sure that the overall experience is long enough to be meaningful in the same way that long-term physical mobility traditionally is. The only exception to this rule are doctoral students, for whom it was decided to allow short-term mobility for studies also without the virtual component due to the nature of their studying. The introduction of short-term blended mobility options does not, however, preclude any long-term mobility to be organised in a blended format, although the Erasmus+ programme offers grants only for the period spent physically abroad.

Blended mobility within Erasmus+ combines a physical mobility with a virtual learning component, before, during and/or after the physical mobility. Blended mobility can be organised for student mobility for studies and traineeships from all study cycles as well as for staff mobility of any type. Blended student mobility can take place in combination with either a short-term or a long-term physical mobility abroad. It can be a bilateral/stand-alone mobility by an individual participant, or a group mobility of several participants from the same home institution to a host institution offering for instance blended intensive programmes. In both cases, the cooperation between the two institutions needs to be underpinned by an inter-institutional agreement to guarantee the quality of the study and teaching mobility.

The individual support grant for blended mobility is calculated based on the period physically spent abroad while respecting the set minimum duration of the physical component of a blended mobility, which is as follows:

- Short-term physical mobility for students (studies and traineeships): 5 days
- Long-term physical mobility for students (studies and traineeships): 60 days
- Staff mobility to EU member states and third countries associated to the programme: 2 days
- Staff mobility for training to EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme to take part in a blended intensive programme: 5 days
- Staff mobility to third countries not associated to the programme: 5 days

A blended mobility can be organised as a part of a blended intensive programme or not. Blended mobility can also be organised as “BIP style” courses, where partners can explore new ways of teaching and learning in a blended format without the need to meet all the requirements needed for Erasmus+ BIP funding. The Erasmus+ programme offers funding opportunities for the organisation of blended intensive programmes but institutions can also organise and fund different types of blended courses and programmes themselves, and send participants on a blended mobility to those courses and programmes that are not Erasmus+ supported blended intensive programmes.

For student mobility for studies, the virtual component should complement the study programme of the student and promote online cooperation and teamwork. The physical mobility component in a blended mobility should be a period that allows for meaningful interaction with other students and group integration in the host institution, in addition to participation in educational courses, and its content should be connected to the virtual component and mutually reinforcing. For student mobility for traineeships, blended mobility can for example take place with a short-term physical period abroad that is well integrated with the students’ tasks at their host organisation and the virtual component of the traineeship mobility should allow for meaningful online interaction with team members.

Staff members can use blended mobility to engage in both teaching and training activities. For training activities, online courses and workshops can be combined with physical interaction among the participating staff abroad, putting into practice the skills they trained in an environment that is relevant to their field of expertise. Staff mobility for teaching may combine virtual teaching modules with on-the-spot intensive seminars. Blended staff mobility can furthermore serve to increase cooperation between higher education institutions at faculty level.

When coordinating blended intensive programmes, higher education institutions can apply for organisational support to implement the programmes. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide and the Higher Education Mobility KA131 Handbook provide the funding rules and requirements to receive the organisational support.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>[Higher Education Mobility Handbook - Erasmus+ & European Solidarity Corps IT Documentation - EC Extranet Wiki \(europa.eu\); 2022 Programme Guide-corrigendum-1 en.pdf \(europa.eu\).](#)

## HOW TO IMPLEMENT BLENDED MOBILITY SUCCESSFULLY?

In order to receive students and staff members on blended mobility, higher education institutions need to develop suitable mobility programmes or courses. These courses can be “blended intensive programmes” and receive financial support from Erasmus+ for the set-up and organisation of the course. Alternatively, incoming students can be integrated into existing courses in case they are offered in a blended fashion to both international students and local students.

Institutions should develop short-term blended courses for incoming students that are in line with the institution’s educational offer, expertise and interests. Organising blended courses and blended intensive programmes should serve to accomplish the institution’s internationalisation strategy, addressing the European higher education priorities, such as digitalisation, sustainable development and inclusion, and enhancing the institutions’ cross-border activities. Local students should also be able to participate in blended courses that are offered to incoming mobility participants. However, they do not receive financial support from their home institution from Erasmus+. Involving local students in these blended courses is an opportunity to encourage internationalisation at home, and allows non-mobile students to work in an international environment.

The Erasmus+ programme rules regarding participant selection, the provision of information and support, exchanging mobility documents, quality assurance, recognition and meeting the ECHE requirements, apply to blended mobility as for any other type of Erasmus+ mobility.

It is very important that institutions commit to recognising different ways of learning during a mobility, both the virtual component and the physical component. An option to do so is by recognising participation in blended intensive programmes through micro-credentials and corresponding ECTS credits, provided that the notional workload needed to achieve the learning outcomes can be assessed. It is expected that the credits students gain from their participation in blended intensive programmes are recognised as a part of their degree but this is ultimately up to the sending institution. In any case, the programme has to award at least three ECTS credits to students.

When organising blended mobility opportunities, institutions need to keep both the virtual and physical components in mind. The two should complement each other and must not be seen as entirely separate courses.

For the virtual component of a blended study mobility, institutions should keep the following advice in mind:

- Clear and comprehensive agreements have to be made between participating institutions about grades, recognition and quality assurance.
- The virtual component may have specific practical challenges that organisers need to be aware of, such as time zone differences, unaligned academic calendars and variance in technological resources.
- Creating an easy and functional online learning environment is crucial to ensure effective cooperation and learning opportunities.



- The online environment can be used to share theoretical insights and promote individual learning that provides a basis for the physical interaction, for example the virtual component can take place before the physical mobility as a preparatory phase where the members of the group get to know each other and materials can be shared.
- Teachers and staff have to be well prepared to host online classrooms and be trained in diverse online pedagogical approaches.
- The virtual component should allow for cooperation between participants from the different participating countries, for example in small groups to allow for meaningful interaction.

For the physical component of the blended mobility, the following should be taken into account:

- The physical mobility should as much as possible allow for group work, discussion and intellectual exchange instead of only lectures.
- With the theoretical basis of a virtual preparatory component, the physical component can be well-suited to put the acquired theoretical knowledge into practice, for example in laboratory work, field work, visits and interviews.
- Many existing examples of blended mobility show that the physical mobility component is specifically well-suited to connect to the local environment, for field trips and to engage with local businesses, civil society actors etc.
- The programme of the physical component needs to be well-defined and well prepared beforehand, leaving enough time for social interaction and networking.
- For physical mobility as part of a blended mobility project, different practical arrangements have to be put in place compared to regular mobilities, especially concerning housing and access to the host institution's facilities and other student support.

Blended study programmes and blended intensive programmes should not only give access to educational material in the form of online lectures or videoconferencing, but also support online cooperation through cooperative exercises and discussion through suitable online platforms. This is to ensure that participants benefit from the virtual component as well as the physical component and are able to improve their digital and online cooperation skills.

In order to make sure teaching staff is ready to develop and deliver high quality inclusive virtual components, teaching staff must be trained in digital pedagogical competences, as they need to feel confident in their skills in order to deliver quality programmes to participants.

The development of sustainable blended learning courses needs to be a mix of bottom-up and top-down approaches. Existing virtual exchange courses have, according to a study conducted by the EVOLVE project, so far mostly been bottom-up initiatives driven by highly motivated staff who have wanted to positively impact student learning outcomes (EVOLVE Project Team (2020a), p.10). The project also found that while the motivation of these highly driven individuals was an essential component, there

was still a great need for more institutional support at all levels in order to create sustainable virtual courses (EVOLVE Project Team (2020a), pp. 10-11).

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) encourages institutions to support teaching staff and programme coordinators to develop different types of courses and they note that “[t]he decision for organizing physical, blended or online mobility is to be made by teaching staff. This will be based on the objectives of the course, student characteristics and on principles of international course and curriculum design” (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), Henderikx, P. & Ubachs, G. (2019), p. 38).

Staff participation and expertise are essential to making blended mobility successful. It is therefore important that the university management takes steps towards making the development of blended courses or programmes easier and more accessible for teaching staff and provide adequate support and incentives. Institutions could examine the possibility of internal recognition of blended mobility activities, for example through the reduction of teaching hours or points for internal promotion, to encourage teaching staff to take the time to develop different kinds of blended courses. Individual teaching staff that have successful previous experience with virtual courses or short intensive programmes can also be targeted specifically and encouraged to develop new courses.

International office staff is also important to encourage the development and creation of blended learning and mobility courses for students and staff members. They play a coordinating role to entice teachers and staff members to develop blended options within academic curricula. Mobility officers could offer regular presentations and workshops to staff members where the Erasmus+ programme and the various opportunities the programme offers regarding blended mobility are presented.

## **POSSIBLE BLENDED MOBILITY SCENARIOS**

Several examples of different blended mobilities are outlined below for inspiration:

### **1. A BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME FOR STUDENTS**

An Erasmus+ institutional coordinator sends information to academic staff within the institution to advertise blended intensive programmes. A business studies academic is working on how small businesses can lead the way in the implementation of the sustainable development goals and wants to introduce this idea to more students but is not able to create a full new course yet. To develop the idea further, the academic gets in touch with colleagues from three other universities and they decide to organise a blended intensive programme in the form of a summer school which will focus on innovative ways to include the sustainable development goals in the daily operations of small businesses. The institution of the academic includes the blended intensive programme in their Erasmus+ grant application after discussing it with the academic and coordinating with the Erasmus+ offices of the partners. The minimum number of participants in a blended intensive programme is 15 mobile learners but all partners decide to send 10 participants to minimise the risk of not reaching the minimum number of participants. The institution of the academic which will host the programme will also send involve 10 local participants but they do not count towards the 15 minimum as they receive no funding. The programme starts with a seven day physical programme which includes a visit to several local

businesses. After the physical component, the students cooperate online to develop their ideas and hand in a final report, which is assessed by the staff. The whole programme awards 3 ECTS credits.

## **2. A BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME FOR STUDENTS IN COOPERATION WITH OUTSIDE STAKEHOLDERS**

An SME or a municipality approaches a university with a topic or a challenge they would like students to work on. The university contacts some of their partner universities and eventually applies for funding to organise a blended intensive programme. The programme is open to students from various disciplines and allows students to improve their problem-solving skills, along with their entrepreneurial and cooperation skills. The teachers also come from different disciplines within the BIP partnership and the programme additionally invites speakers from the enterprise/municipality and other organisations working on the topic of the programme. The intensive programme starts with two weeks of physical mobility where the participants visit the enterprise/municipality to get to know it and have a better understanding of the topic of the programme and the challenge they will be working on. They furthermore get the chance to get to know each other and attend workshops and seminars that will prepare them for their online work. After the two weeks of physical mobility, the virtual component continues every other week for three more months under the guidance of teachers from the BIP partnership where the participants cooperate online across disciplines and countries on solutions, always staying in regular contact with the enterprise/municipality. Finally students submit their final report and present their work to the enterprise/municipality and receive 5 ECTS credits.

## **3. A BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME FOR ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

A higher education institution has developed a very good orientation programme for their incoming mobile students. They want to share their best practices with colleagues from their European University Alliance and decide to organise a blended intensive programme on administrative support for mobile students. They apply for the organisational support for a blended intensive programme and organise the programme with the seven institutions that are in the alliance. They then invite staff from international offices in the alliance but also open the programme up to other partners who might be interested. The programme starts with two online half-days where participants get to know the university and how the new incoming procedures were developed. The next week has a 5-day physical mobility where staff exchange best practices, an invited speaker gives a talk, there is a workshop with the student union, a presentation on inclusion with the participation of outside stakeholders and more. Finally, once the participants return home there is a final online workshop to sum up the experience and lessons learned.

## **4. A BLENDED SHORT-TERM STUDY MOBILITY**

A student in education sciences is interested in going on a mobility. The student sees that a partner institution is organising a blended course on the multicultural classroom before the start of their regular semester that the international office advertised specifically for education students. The student is interested in the course as their home institution does not offer courses on this topic and applies through the international office. The student goes on a physical mobility for two weeks to get to know their fellow students and to get an introduction to the course material and themes and once the physical component has finished the student does a group project online with the other students and attends a few online seminars for two more weeks. For this blended mobility, the student receives 5 ECTS credits and takes one less course at their home institution as they get the course recognised.

## **5. A BLENDED SHORT-TERM TRAINEESHIP FOR STUDENTS**

A communications student sees a traineeship opportunity advertised by a private company. The company is looking for a communications trainee to revamp their social media and other communications channels and help draft a new communications strategy for the company. The company offers flexible working conditions for their employees and does not require their trainees to be present at the office physically all the time. The student then agrees with the company to do a blended traineeship. The student first goes on a short-term physical mobility to the company for three weeks to get to know the company, the new colleagues, and to attend a training course for new staff members. After the physical mobility, the student returns to their sending country where they continue working for the company remotely, continually communicating with other staff members and working collaboratively with them online for two more months. The trainee takes part in virtual team meetings and their attendance could be part of the evaluation criteria. The student receives an Erasmus+ grant for the duration of the physical mobility but may also receive a remuneration from the company in addition.

## **6. A BLENDED LONG-TERM TRAINEESHIP FOR STUDENTS**

A student does a 5-month physical traineeship and works virtually on finishing assignments during the next month in the home country.

## **7. A BLENDED STAFF MOBILITY FOR TRAINING**

A staff member virtually engages with colleagues in the receiving institution before the physical mobility to receive training on how to use a tool they are unfamiliar with. During the physical component of the mobility, the staff member receives a hands-on training on the use of the tool and does job shadowing for a couple of days before returning home.

## **8. A BLENDED STAFF MOBILITY FOR TEACHING AND TRAINING**

A teacher takes part in both a teaching and training mobility at a partner institution. Before the physical mobility, the teacher takes part in a virtual training where the teacher meets with various colleagues at the partner university online where they do a virtual job shadowing and get training from colleagues in the use of a specific software. The following week the staff member travels to the partner institution and delivers classes for a whole week in cooperation with their colleagues they cooperated with virtually the week before.

## **EXISTING EXAMPLES OF BLENDED MOBILITY**

The following section serves to provide examples of blended mobility projects from the past and present that may be of inspiration when implementing blended mobility projects. Institutions that are already involved in international cooperation activities, such as those in the European Universities, or successful KA2 and KA3 projects, are encouraged to build on those relationships and develop blended mobility courses for their students and staff members.

## 1. EXAMPLES FROM EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

European University alliances are examples of close cooperation among higher education institutions internationally and are an excellent testing ground for new models of teaching, learning and training provisions. Many of the current European University alliances have committed to offer a diverse range of mobility options to their students, including blended and virtual<sup>7</sup> options:

- **CIVIS** European University alliance, now offers wide variety of blended courses ([CIVIS courses – CIVIS - A European Civic University](#)) to which students from any partner institution and from multiple study levels can apply and receive funding to cover their travel costs. They combine, for example, online preparation classes with physical summer schools, leading to the awarding of a small numbers of ECTS credits.
- **EUGLOH**, the European University alliance for global health, offers **Blended Staff Mobility** opportunities ([Blended Staff Mobility Opportunity for EUGLOH Partners – 15-16 February 2022 | EUGLOH](#)) to its partners, combining a webinar, five virtual workshops and an optional physical individual exchange. Please note however that to be eligible for Erasmus+ grants, the physical component has to be mandatory.
- The **EC2U** European University alliance offers **Research Seed Mobilities**, offering grants for short-term physical mobilities within the framework of the existing Virtual Institute for Quality Education ([EC2U Research Seed Mobilities \(uni-jena.de\)](#)). The main objective of the VIQE research seed mobility programme is to actively promote in-depth research cooperation among researchers and research groups of the seven EC2U universities. The physical mobility, combined with the virtual exchange platform of the institute can allow researchers to work together, form EC2U research clusters, develop research seed projects and then apply for additional national and EU funding.

## 2. EXAMPLES FROM ERASMUS+ KA2 PROJECTS

Erasmus+ funds in KA2 have facilitated several successful projects engaging in blended mobility. In some cases, these projects have shared good practices, recommendations as well as challenges surrounding blended mobility.

- **EMBED** (2017-2020) was an Erasmus+ funded strategic partnership “European Maturity model for Blended Education” that was developing a monitor to map blended learning practices ([results \(eadtu.eu\)](#)). They have published guidelines to organise blended courses, with online materials, that stress the need for solid quality assurance, flexibility and a well thought-through choice for tools and inclusiveness.
- The 2016-2018 **BlendEd Mobility project** ([Homepage | Blended Mobility](#)) was an Erasmus+-funded project in which students from 11 universities and university colleges worked together on an innovative, interdisciplinary project, tackling a challenge in cooperation with a company.

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that KA131 does not fund fully virtual mobility

BlendEd mobility provides toolkits, guidelines on blended mobility course set-up and on cooperation with industry as well as contacts for targeted consultancy. Strengths of blended mobility are cost effectiveness, international exposure, enhancement of employability for young graduates and networking opportunities.

- The **C-Extended** Blended Mobility Handbook ([Blended Mobility Handbook \(europa.eu\)](#)) draws similar conclusions. The C-Extended project (2017-2020) focused on designing, testing, monitoring and evaluating an Interdisciplinary/Intersectoral/Blended-Mobility Scheme (IIBMS) targeted to master level students in a core scientific ICT-related domain, leveraging on the competences present in the partnership. The C-Extended handbook highlights the importance of the diversity of online pedagogical approaches and of professional production of online content and of evaluation of online learning data, providing a step-by-step approach.
- The **EUCERMAT** project (2015-2018) provided a very specific blended mobility approach, aimed at education in ceramic and material science. It has provided a handbook for teachers, researchers and course administrators on blended mobility: [EUCERMAT IO2 Manual on Blended Mobility.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#). The course combined 50% theoretical online teaching units with 50% offline practical sessions in laboratories at the participating institutions. The manual lists specific tools to engage learners actively in online teaching. This project shows that blended mobility can be a great format to combine hands-on practical learning with theoretical teaching, done online.
- **CARPE**, the Consortium of Applied Research and Professional Education, comprising seven universities of applied sciences, set up the **ESSENCE** project: European Sustainable Solutions for Existing and New City Environments ([essence | Internationaal project \(husite.nl\)](#)), between 2014 and 2017. The project has provided teacher trainings on blended learning, listing relevant online teaching methods, and offered students the opportunity to work with local municipalities on specific challenges. It funded their accommodation costs and offered 2.5 to 10 ECTS credits. This project shows how short, intensive blended programmes offer added value to students by combining international mobility with local engagement.
- The **Innovative ICT Solutions for the Societal Challenges** ([INNOSOC | Sociallab \(fer.hr\)](#)) project set up a transnational multidisciplinary intensive study programme in the field of innovations based on ICT targeting societal challenges defined by the Europe 2020 and Horizon 2020 programme in 2016 and 2017. The project had a preparatory virtual mobility phase and a physical mobility component implemented through three two-week workshops hosted by three different partner universities, including both student and staff mobility.
- The **2017-2020 EPIC, project, Improving Employability through Internationalisation and Collaboration** ([Events – EPIC \(agu.edu.tr\)](#)), sought to increase employability through closer collaboration between students and industry, by encouraging the use of new teaching methods, and by promoting international collaboration among students on various topics. It has combined online modules for students and staff with on-site seminars, lasting five days during which expenses were covered with Erasmus+ grants. Additionally, students could set up a Blended Learning Seminar, to meet physically if it is beneficial to their project work.

- The strategic partnership ‘**E-CUL-TOURS: Managing Cultural Heritage in Tourism**’ brought together 4 higher education institutions, one small or medium-sized enterprise and the European Projects Association to address issues linked to cultural heritage in relation to tourism for master students of Tourism management ([Blended mobility Bergamo - E-cul-tours \(ecultours.eu\)](http://ecultours.eu)). In this context, the project has organised two blended mobilities to Stralsund and Bergamo, in which five students and one teacher from each institution first entered online materials via the online ‘Learn Platform’ and afterwards went on a five-day physical mobility. The project offered online tools and virtual conference rooms.
- The **giCASES** Erasmus+ knowledge alliance implements a Blended Academic International Mobility project that connects students to companies, boosting their employability ([Blended Academic International Mobility – giCASES](#)). Undergraduate higher education students are engaged in an international team with students from several study areas and countries in Europe to develop a product for a company during their capstone project course. Task forces are organised for each task. Regular meetings are performed where tasks are assigned to each task force participant, while a 4 months’ virtual cooperation is established.

### 3. EXAMPLES OUTSIDE OF ERASMUS+

Outside of the Erasmus+ programme actions, inspiration can be found in the following blended mobility examples:

- The **Nordplus** programme has supported since 2010 various shorter mobilities such as this blended course, with two weeks of physical mobility in two different countries and 4 weeks of online learning ([Intensive courses - Department of Education - Uppsala University, Sweden \(uu.se\)](http://uu.se)). Note that in Erasmus+ KA131, it is not possible to organise two separate short-term mobilities during the same blended intensive programme.
- The **Winter School “International & comparative studies in adult education & lifelong learning”** at the Julius-Maximilians-University Würzburg offers students a course with both virtual a physical components ([Home - Adult Education Academy \(uni-wuerzburg.de\)](http://uni-wuerzburg.de)) Participants work on international and comparative topics of adult education and lifelong learning. As a blended learning activity, the Adult Education Academy comprises an online preparatory phase, two weeks on-site in Würzburg and an optional subsequent online follow-up that can be chosen by doctoral students and colleagues from the field. A description of the different parts of the programme can be found in the Innovative Models for Collaboration and Student Mobility in Europe, EADTU, report (p. 48).

## CONCLUSIONS

As with other forms of mobility, the success of blended mobility projects relies a lot on the time participating organisations invest in the preparation of the project. A clear description of activities, an up to date course catalogue, clearly defined project goals and motivated teachers and staff that are trained in digital delivery of courses are key to make blended mobility projects happen.

While some programmes and courses have been developed thanks to self-motivated teaching staff, the university administration, international offices and mobility coordinators have an important role to play in the preparatory phase of blended mobility, coordinating actions and organising workshops to train staff.

Universities can access various resources on virtual exchange and blended mobilities to help the development of blended mobility courses. Universities are also encouraged to work with their close partners on developing a variety of blended courses that can be offered to both students and staff members. It is essential that institutions commit to developing more varied courses to students and include blended courses in their international strategies.

As highlighted above, blended mobility projects provide a unique chance to create more inclusive, flexible and innovative mobilities under Erasmus+. Under the teleworking circumstances caused by the sanitary crisis, blended mobility has often been a necessity, leading to an ad hoc switch to online learning and a lot of improvisation. It is important that the lessons learned from the pandemic will not be lost and that the digital skills acquired will be used to further high quality blended mobility options in the future. The Erasmus+ programme is equipped to make this a reality.



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