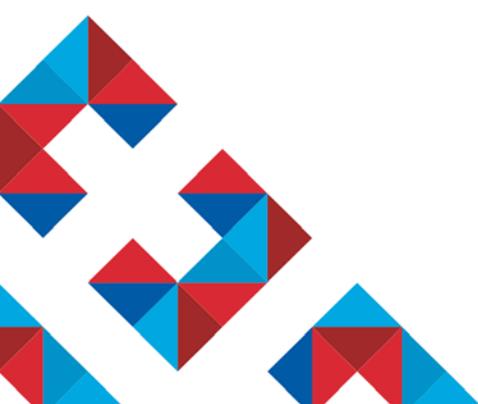


ERASMUS 

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UK ACROSS EUROPE

Learning Networks Event Report

23 May 2018



Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.
The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.

Event summary and feedback

On 23 May 2018 we held our eighth Learning Networks event. The venue was ect.venues in Manchester. The event was a relaunch of the initiative following the Learning Networks Consultation at the end of 2017. Delegates from across the UK took part in workshops on Employability, Widening Participation and Project Management and Implementation, hearing from National Agency staff and beneficiary topic speakers who provided a practical perspective on their thematic areas.

At the Learning Networks Consultation event in Birmingham 2017, three notable feedback comments were identified and taken forward to shape the first Learning Networks event of 2018.

You said:

- The Widening Participation and Employability workshops remain popular, but Measuring Impact could be included as part of these workshops and a workshop around project management could be introduced;
- Include a sector-specific networking element to the day; and
- Hear more from case studies and experts and give delegates the opportunity to get involved.

With this feedback in mind:

- We introduced Project Management and Implementation as a new workshop, to allow delegates to discuss challenges around project management and share best practice.
- An optional networking session was included at the end of the day, with the opportunity to meet sector-specific delegates and National Agency staff.
- Each workshop was led by a member of the National Agency alongside a beneficiary content lead; an individual whose organisation has a proven track-record of excellence in the relevant thematic area. They were also joined by two case study examples who shared project-related best practice in these areas.

Workshops

Delegates took part in one of three workshops, making their selection when they registered for the event.

Workshop	NA staff	Content lead	Case study speakers
Employability	Sonia Shakir, Ecorys UK	Paul Guest, Consultant	Ann Stanley, Lincoln College Russell Yates, Manchester Metropolitan University
Widening Participation	Simon Chambers, British Council	Joe Hemington, Merseyside Expanding Horizons	Khatuna Tsintsadze, Human Rights Focus Nicole Belle, Kairos Europe
Project Management and Implementation	Bill Burson, British Council	Irene Leon Alemany (British Council lead)	Mary Russell, Royal National College for the Blind Jane Tarr, Novalis Trust

Employability

The theme for this workshop was 'Apprenticeships', specifically considering how Erasmus+ activity can help change the perception of apprenticeships in the UK and how employer awareness of the value of Erasmus+ can be increased. Sonia Shakir and Paul Guest introduced the topic of apprenticeships in Erasmus+ and asked the room to consider current perceptions of apprenticeships, challenges they face as project co-ordinators, the benefits of Erasmus+ and tools and strategies for overcoming challenges.

Case studies

Ann Stanley from Lincoln College spoke about the benefits of engaging apprentices in Erasmus+ work placements through their 'Opportunities and Challenges' project. She acknowledged the issues they face when trying to encourage Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to give their apprentices time off to take part in these placements, but highlighted the benefits the participants gain, including soft skills.

Russell Yates from Manchester Metropolitan University shared his Key Action 3 policy reform project, 'SME Gap'. He highlighted the importance of dissemination events to engage employers in Erasmus+ funding and advised delegates to tell their audiences that employers are happy with the outcomes of getting involved with Erasmus+. He also encouraged the room to find out whether their local Chamber of Commerce is involved with Erasmus+ funding.

Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- use 'business-friendly' sessions like breakfast meetings, webinars and bite-sized materials;
- follow the [Careers and Enterprise Company](#) and join the [Enterprise Advisor Network](#);
- create cost/benefit scenarios;
- promote real experience, create case studies;
- get employer input from an early stage and at a strategic level; and
- do placement outcome assessments.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the employability theme webpage: www.erasmusplus.org.uk/learning-networks-topics/Employability



Widening Participation

The Widening Participation workshop theme was ‘Supporting social mobility’, focusing on sharing examples of projects supporting social mobility and considering how organisations can support and reach out to those with fewer opportunities by sharing practices and tools. Simon Chambers and Joe Hemington introduced the topic and encouraged discussions around common shared issues and how to overcome barriers to participation.

Case studies

Khatuna Tsintsadze from Human Rights Focus shared some moving participant quotes as part of her case study presentation on their project ‘Turning Point: Inclusion of BAME Young ex-offenders’. This project aims to empower young people with key competences and provide them with opportunities to get involved in decision-making processes and make positive change through active citizenship. Their tips for widening participation include speaking to young people in their own language and ensuring young people are involved in decision-making around the project itself.

Nicole Belle from Kairos Europe gave another example of supporting social mobility, but with a different target audience. Their project, ‘Southern European Migrant Dilemmas’, works to help British participants who work with migrants to better understand the complex issues surrounding non-EU refugee and migrant communities. Nicole highlighted that by improving the knowledge and understanding of those working with migrants and refugees, they are then able to better support their needs and improve their access to employment, thereby supporting the social mobility of these individuals.

Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- use ‘experts by experience’ – ex-participants are the best ambassadors;
- use social media to engage with young people, particularly to spread a student-to-student message;

- capture experience messages through video/blogging;
- refer to the [UUKi toolkit on widening participation](#);
- promotion of projects by practitioners who young people trust or identify with e.g. ex-offenders; and
- use mechanisms young people already engage with e.g. five-a-side football.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the Widening Participation theme webpage: www.erasmusplus.org.uk/learning-networks-topics/Widening-Participation

Project Management and Implementation

The Project Management and Implementation group focused on the practical management of mobility and international partnership management. Led by Bill Burson and Irene Leon Alemany, this workshop investigated which working practices were most effective and suitable for adoption by Erasmus+ beneficiaries in two specific areas: mobility of learners and international partnership management.

Case studies

Mary Russell from The Royal National College for the Blind started the session by explaining her college's approach to supporting the mobility of learners through their project 'Growing Respect and Opportunities in the Workplace and in the Home for Visually Impaired People'. Mary highlighted the importance of being adaptable and understanding the challenges your partners will also be facing, while expressing the importance of planning for every eventuality. In terms of practical tips, Mary also recommended keeping money handling to a limit, reconciling on a daily basis and ensuring medical information is always on hand and shared with the relevant people.

Jane Tarr shared Novalis Trust's project, 'Learning in a New Key: Engaging Vulnerable Young People in School Education', with a focus on overcoming challenges in partnership working. The main challenge they faced was how to communicate the goals of the project and their solution was to create collaborative visual representations of the project, to ensure that all partners were working from the same ideas. Jane also noted the importance of recognising that different interests across different sectors need to be satisfied. Her advice was to create project success criteria related to each sector and collect participant feedback against these criteria.

Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- utilise online/mobile communication and planning tools e.g. WhatsApp, Padlet, Facebook groups;
- undertake a pre-visit to identify any concerns, suitable accommodation, work with partners to find a work-around or alternatives where issues are identified;
- provide all participants with an "essential information credit card" to be kept in purses/wallets with all telephone numbers, addresses etc.;
- use Gantt charts and other practical scheduling tools to plan before, during and post mobility;
- schedule pre- and post-mobility meetings with partners and learners on mobility;

- use the application and planning documents for project management and monitoring purposes;
- schedule regular communication through various means – online, video call and face to face meetings;
- have fun and schedule down-time within international project meetings;
- include training on relationship management for project staff;
- work with partners before, during and after projects to ensure relationships are sustainable and well researched; and
- ensure partners are aware that there are specific triggers for funding release.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the Project Management and Implementation theme webpage: www.erasmusplus.org.uk/learning-networks-topics/Project-Management-and-Implementation



Next steps for Learning Networks

The next Learning Networks event will be held in winter 2018. We have a dedicated mailing list providing members with the latest news and updates. To sign up, visit our webpage: www.erasmusplus.org.uk/learning-networks.

Feedback from this event will be considered for future events. Comments suggested that delegates would like to see:

- longer workshop sessions;
- the ability to contribute to resources and 'how-to' guides; and
- a clear focus on the cross-sectoral element of the event.