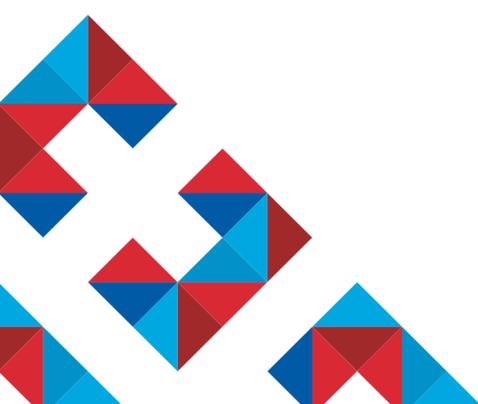


**ERASMUS** 

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UK ACROSS EUROPE

# Learning Networks Event Report

5 December 2018



**Erasmus+**

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 5 December 2018 we held our ninth Learning Networks event at etc.venues – Maple House in Birmingham. Delegates from across the UK took part in workshops on Employability, Widening Participation and Project Management and Implementation, hearing from National Agency staff and case study speakers who provided real-life examples of their experience in each thematic area.

At the previous Learning Networks event, three notable feedback comments were identified and taken forward to shape the December event.

### *You said:*

- There needs to be a stronger focus on the cross-sectoral element of the event;
- The workshop sessions need to be longer; and
- There needs to be more opportunity to network during the day.

### *With this feedback in mind:*

- We made the cross-sectoral reach of Learning Networks clearer in our pre-event promotion and during the sessions.
- The length of time given to the workshops was increased to two sessions of an hour and a half each.
- Networking and ice-breaker activities were included at the beginning of the day, when starting the workshops and as part of the impact workshop at the end of the day.

## Workshops

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

Workshop	Case study speakers	National Agency staff
Employability	Rebecca Finn, EuroApprentice Teodora Agarici, EuroPeer Neil McManus, Leicester College Mary Brown, University of Nottingham	Sonia Shakir, Ecorys UK
Widening Participation	Graham Nicholls, Plymouth & District Mind Ana Indi Amona, Birmingham City University	Simon Chambers, British Council
Project Management and Implementation		Bill Burson, British Council

## Employability

The theme for this workshop was employability through the eyes of Erasmus+ participants. Throughout the day, they looked at three key perspectives: the participant, research and beneficiary organisations. The group focused on how EU placements allow young people to present themselves differently to employers, including recommendations from participants for project managers and other participants on what skills and experiences they feel make them more employable in today's labour market.

Sonia Shakir asked the group to consider what they thought were the key skills employers are looking for in young people and shared [STEM Learning's 'Top 10 employability skills' poster](#). They also heard from Sara Southam from the UK NA's Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) team about TCA-funded research into employability skills.

### Case studies

EuroApprentice Rebecca Finn and EuroPeer Teodora Agarici shared their experience as Erasmus+ participants, explaining what activities they took part in, what they felt they had learned as a result and how this makes them more employable in today's labour market.

Neil McManus from Leicester College and Mary Brown from the University of Nottingham also shared how they ensure the employability skills of their participants are improved by taking part in the project. They considered identifying skills gaps, measuring the skills acquired and the impact on participants.

### Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- Hold regular employer events to find out what skills are needed and design programmes that offer these skills;
- Explain clearly the benefits of volunteering or taking part in a placement abroad, outline the additional skills participants would not gain by staying in their country;
- Consider working with employment offices or job centres to create a joined up process for young people.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the [Employability theme webpage](#).



## Widening Participation

The Widening Participation workshop focused on how to make the learning from projects last, by embedding good practice and innovation so that it can be taken up by staff and participants in future projects.

Simon Chambers also asked the group to consider what they would like to see in the future in terms of programme-level support for widening participation. Discussions ranged from increased opportunities to involve parents and carers, who may be reluctant or nervous about sending their child abroad, to additional ring-fenced funding for people in recovery.

### Case studies

Graham Nicholls gave examples of the international partnership projects run by Plymouth & District Mind, focusing on those that support individuals with mental health issues to enter or return to employment. He noted that these individuals often face a 'revolving door of employment', where they are given support to enter the job market and once they have a job, the support is removed. They may then struggle to cope and may have to leave the job altogether.

Graham emphasised the importance of project sustainability. For Plymouth & District Mind, one of the best ways to achieve this has been to focus on internal change – for example, through staff training and development. Graham also pointed to the importance of involving a wide range of local stakeholders in the development of a project in order to ensure the project responds to actual needs, and creates interest and engagement in project activities and results.

Ana Indi Amona from Birmingham City University talked about obstacles to inclusion that students at the university may face – specifically, obstacles to participation in international experience. Ana emphasised that such obstacles may also be faced by individual staff members - something that is not always considered when planning projects.

Ana shared examples of changes and improvements in the way the university works, which have been made as a result of involvement in international partnership projects. These have included offering shorter periods of international experience (for example, summer schools at partner universities in East Asia) and increasing the level of pastoral support for individual participants – before, during and after their placement.

## Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- Consider widening participation at every stage of the life of a project;
- Encourage your staff to see themselves as learners and support them in pursuing their own learning needs;
- Build confidence among individual learners, together with their families and employers, before participation;
- Be attentive to individuals' differing needs and consider the use of additional funding to support these needs;
- Be willing to do things differently as an organisation – you won't achieve institutional change without it.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the [Widening Participation theme webpage](#).



## Project Management and Implementation

The Project Management and Implementation group focused on pre and post-mobility. The group looked at best practice in mobility, particularly on ensuring participants and staff get the most out of international placements.

Looking at three time periods – pre, during and post-mobility – participants from multiple sectors examined the complex issues and potential pitfalls that surround the process of supporting staff and learners to undertake overseas placements. They also identified effective practices that can make mobility as rewarding and impactful as possible.

### Top tips

Following workshop discussions, these top tips were outlined:

- Establish clear roles and responsibilities with partners, ensuring you are in regular communication and have emergency contact details;
- Involve participants from an early stage so that activities meet their actual needs;
- Have contingency plans in place for drop outs in terms of partners and participants;
- Create basic translation sheets particularly for those with health needs or allergies;
- Ensure receiving environments are able to cater for special needs and requirements;
- As many participants will have never shopped or cooked for themselves, prepare them with recipes and price information;
- Use text, Facebook groups or WhatsApp to check in with participants, share information and keep them updated on developments at home;
- Certificates of attendance can be issued by local mayor or dignitary for added prestige and media interest;
- Use an incentive such as a voucher to combat low returns of participant reports or outcome questionnaires.

All the presentations and resources from the group are available on the [Project Management and Implementation theme webpage](#).

## Dissemination for Impact

In the afternoon, we were joined by UK NA Impact Assessor, Steven Murray for a workshop on identifying and targeting stakeholders for impact. This was an opportunity to network with delegates from across the thematic groups and gain an insight into how to effectively communicate with stakeholders to improve dissemination plans.

Find out more about the impact workshop in our [stakeholder communication blog post](#).



## Next steps for Learning Networks

The next Learning Networks event will be held in spring 2019. We have a dedicated mailing list providing members with the latest news and updates. To sign up, visit our [Learning Networks webpage](#).

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

- The autumn/winter event held in November or January rather than December;
- Consider discussing cultural awareness;
- Case studies in all workshop sessions.