

Widening Participation notes

28 June 2019

Case studies

Christine Bissex-Foster from [The College Merthyr Tydfil](#) shared her college's experience of VET mobility projects, specifically supporting with young people from areas of multiple deprivation. Christine's top tip: "Always get the buy in of your senior management and heads of division before applying for funding for groups. If staff are not committed, getting students to go is difficult. The backing of Senior Management is essential when issues arise." This presentation is available to [download on our SlideShare channel](#).

Manju Patel-Nair from [HEC Global Learning Centre](#), Tower Hamlets, presented on two of her organisation's projects. The first was a Key Action 3 youth dialogue project titled 'Tafahum' which looked at co-creating a safe, collaborative, shared community that is inclusive for long-term residents and new arrivals. The second was a Key Action 2 schools partnership project called '@ The Heart of Communities' focusing on learner-led active citizenship initiatives for community cohesion.

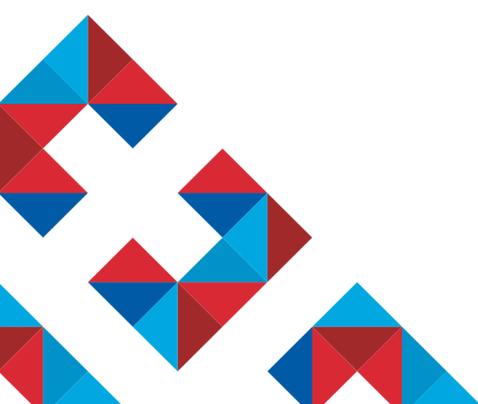
Simon Chambers and Manju Patel-Nair's workshop

Simon opened the discussion by inviting the members of the workshop to share 'practice', be it 'good practice' or related to any setbacks, difficulties, or challenges during the implementation of their projects. He suggested the group approach widening participation from three perspectives:

- learner/participant response to activities (linked to evaluation);
- organisational impact (changes to the partnership or organisational procedures); and
- a shift in outlook/attitudes towards inclusion on a more general (personal and professional) level.

Manju Patel-Nair addressed evaluation and described how their collaboration with an external evaluator from Global Learning has proven useful for the partnership and the project. During the advance planning stages, partners were presented with the full evaluation framework including the methodologies used, such as the theory of change and impact studies. The organisation also thought it more effective and time-efficient to have this induction conducted by the expert herself instead of staff involved in the project, who might have been less knowledgeable. Partners were also asked to contribute actively during the planning days and to organise sessions.

Manju sees incubating innovation as key; therefore, this was facilitated by modelling possible



activities to partners through the involvement of local young people/potential participants during the planning stage. Overall, she focused on the importance of honesty and transparency in a partnership – making sure expectations are communicated clearly and that finances are managed professionally by appointed staff.

Manju informed the group that online, free resources are available for those who wish to get more familiar with [the long table method](#) developed by the artist and academic Lois Weaver. Manju finds it a great and highly customisable tool to ‘equalise’ participants and facilitate dialogue, especially between groups where conflict or sensitive issues are at stake (e.g. youth-police dialogue).

Sian Holleran from Collegeswales added that their college has also succeeded in widening participation through cross-sector, community-focused activities, bringing together for example primary school pupils, local police, and the elderly. Although this can at times prove challenging, it has also proven more effective than the usual route of cross-curriculum collaboration within their sector.

Jo Silverwood from Meadowhead School Academy Trust referred to their Key Action 2 project ‘Full STEAM Ahead: Creating teenage ambassadors of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths across Europe’, which focuses on widening participation in STEAM subjects for schools.

They strive to collaborate with different businesses and organisations and to attend events, so that their participants can experience a wide range of environments, for instance through visits to an Aerospace Centre or workshops organised by the University of Bonne. She also went back to the topic of evaluation methods, and brought to attention the issue that paper-based questionnaires can sometimes fail to motivate younger participants.

Tips from the workshop for innovative evaluation methods included:

- Empowering, task-based evaluation carried out by participant, such as peer interviews or creating videos;
- [Kahoot!](#) – a free online quiz creator;
- [Padlet](#) – a free online platform where responses can be added in real-time;
- Shorter/fewer questions;
- Art as a means of evaluation;
- [Two stars and a wish method](#); and
- Motivate young people using small prizes.

On the topic of organisational impact, Manju highlighted the importance of creating sustainable links, so that once these are established across different community groups within the framework of Erasmus+ activities, further collaboration is possible beyond the project lifetime as well.

Sandy Watson from HMP Oakwood prison gave other examples of the major and long-lasting organisational, as well as personal and professional impact Erasmus+ projects can have. Based on examples taken from Denmark, several inclusion practices have been implemented in their own institution in the UK, such as permanent family lounges, barbecue days, and family days. This has not only positively impacted their target group, but has also inspired the work of employees at the

organisation, who are now playing a more active role in management and thus contributing to better company cohesion.

Sandy also referred to a completely different mentality learned from their Danish partner, which could be summed up by asking 'Why wouldn't we do it?' instead of 'Why would we do it?'. This new approach of challenging existing structures has proven quite effective in her work since and has also transformed their internal management practices completely, resulting generally in more openness towards what she called 'normalisation'.

Maria Mylona from the University of Westminster added that based on their experience of a project supporting refugees in Greece, mutual trust between partners and other local and international stakeholders is key. Seeking the help of mediators between stakeholders can enhance this.

Making sure the project is grounded in a strong initial needs analysis based on participant input is also paramount, as well as showing flexibility during later stages of a project (respecting the relevant eligibility criteria for the key action and within the bounds of permitted contractual changes), in order to allow for the coordinator to better address unforeseen participant needs.

Basma Kamel, a volunteer from Merseyside Expanding Horizons confirmed the importance of integrating needs assessment into the project lifecycle and later building activities on the identified requirements. One of their projects is titled 'Emotional Employment – Alternative skills and resources for job searching', where initial sessions for job seekers and advisors are held in order to identify skill gaps, based on which the organisation then goes on to develop tailored learning courses.

Helene Turley from the University of Wolverhampton provided the final comments by reiterating that Erasmus+ projects have the potential to facilitate or widen the scope of dialogue between different groups in the community, and thus lead to better community cohesion.

Gavin Askew and Christine Bissex-Foster's workshop

Christine Bissex-Foster from Merthyr Tydfil College provided analysis of the college's previous Erasmus+ projects, with data provided for each vocational division (motor vehicle engineering, childcare, business studies etc.) and the impact of Erasmus+ participation compared to students who had not taken part. Each division showed a noticeable improvement in success rates for those involved in the programme, with 100% of construction and IT students that took part in an Erasmus+ placement achieving success; an increase of 11% and 13% respectively.

These success rates have been used for future planning across divisional teams and to attract new participants across the college, however Christine is still looking at how best to engage participants with Special Educational Needs after experiencing a number of dropouts at a late stage.

Encouraging full time teachers to accompany students on their placements abroad has been a challenge, particularly in the UK where the visibility of Erasmus+ is not as high as in other EU member states. The college now looks to engage with part time staff members who may work in security or catering as a means of ensuring that the students are accompanied by a familiar

presence on their trip. This has worked successfully and has added a positive European dimension to the college and the local community.

Gavin opened the discussion by inviting members of the workshop to share their organisation's experience of widening participation. The group were encouraged to share the difficulties and setbacks that they have encountered when working around this subject area. The workshop aimed to present and discuss these issues as well as identify viable solutions to counteract such difficulties.

The groups began looking at flexibility present around special needs requirements and how to encourage wider participation across sectors. Alejandra Vicencio from Northumbria University provided an example where a participant was keen to take part in Erasmus+, but could not find a university to meet their needs. To address this, Northumbria collaborated with another university that had participants with similar obstacles and together they were able to prepare and host participants with suitable wellbeing and safeguarding mechanisms in place.

Shelia Cunningham from Middlesex University noted that for participants with complex special needs or severe physical disabilities more flexibility is needed, particularly around the requirement for work experience as well as duration, accommodation etc. She also identified the complexities of the funding rules in the programme, which makes it difficult for participants to understand what kind of financial support they are entitled to. The group agreed that a less rigid approach to eligibility criteria and funding requirements would encourage widening participation across the board.

Stakeholders also reviewed how to change negative labels that prevent Special Educational Needs and additional support students into something positive. A key element appeared to be personal and direct contact with staff, where capacity allows. Potential participants tend not to identify themselves, as 'with fewer opportunities' or 'widening participation', so posters or promotional campaigns asking to sign up will not gain maximum participation.

Elsewhere, discussions focussed on how students and participants from BAME backgrounds could be involved further in the programme, with suggestions amongst the group to put forward more case studies and show trailblazers in relatable target groups. Organisations are encouraged to engage with Erasmus+ communications team – through Twitter, Facebook or email – to submit positive projects for promotion. A number of case studies are available on the Erasmus+ website and are regularly promoted through the [#InspiringInclusion](#) hashtag; such experiences can be submitted at any time and do not have to be after Final Report submission.

Ernie Brennan from the National Children's Football Alliance praised the partnership-building element of the Erasmus+ programme and shared some positive examples of his cross border consortium. Cooperating with partners across the EU has allowed organisations to share best practices, knowledge of the youth sector, methodologies etc.

Ernie noted that in contrast, it has been challenging to work with in country partner organisations due to the high level of rules and regulations around young people, special needs and safeguarding. The multitude of risk assessments and safety regulations means that it is often difficult to engage with local and national partners. Moving forward, the group agreed that there should be more

positive and informative resources available to persuade local partners to get involved in the programme.

A number of delegates from universities highlighted the unique and impacting opportunities on offer to their student population, thanks to the Erasmus+ programme. Without such funding streams, students with fewer opportunities or special needs would be at a distinct disadvantage from their peers.

Erasmus+ has successfully fed into a number of university strategies around inclusion and widening participation and the programme is able to complement the studies of many students. For young people with fewer opportunities, involvement in the programme has boosted their personal and professional development when entering into the labour market.

Statistics for Youth participation, and particularly working with young people with fewer opportunities, were recently made available through the RAY (Research based-Analysis of Youth) network, and [published on the Erasmus+ website](#). Participation in Youth Exchanges and Mobility of Youth Worker activities showed a rise in personal development (65%) and engagement in non-formal learning opportunities (48%) for participants with fewer opportunities, compared to those without (50% and 39% respectively).

For more information about the Widening Participation network, [please visit the website](#).