

2.2 Blended Intensive Programmes

2.2.1 Definitions and concepts

In addition to mobility of individuals, the KA131 also supports blended intensive programmes (BIPs), which encourage groups of higher education institutions to jointly develop programmes of learning, teaching and training for groups of students or teaching and administrative staff and use innovative and digital ways of delivering it.

The concept of the blended intensive programmes has been inspired by the intensive study programmes under the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020), the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) and its predecessors, as well as the learning and training activities “short-term joint staff training events” and “blended mobility of learners”, piloted under the Erasmus+ Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships action (2014-2020).

Blended intensive programmes aim to open up more opportunities for learners to take part in blended mobilities. They will foster the development of transnational and transdisciplinary curricula, as well as innovative ways of learning and teaching, including online collaboration, research-based learning and challenge-based approaches in order to tackle societal challenges.

BIPs can be part of the HEIs’ curricula or complementary to them. They can be an entirely new programme or they can be an enhancement of an existing programme with additional features such as the delivery mode in a blended format.

In addition, BIPs can be a good opportunity to reach out to new groups of students, for example those in study fields where mobility opportunities have been limited or those who lack confidence to go abroad alone, potentially paving the way for their participation in long-term individual mobility later in their studies.

2.2.2 Good practice with organising BIPs

Based on guidance from the intensive study programmes under the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education action and the experience with Erasmus intensive programmes pre-2014, the following good practice elements emerge:

☑ BIPs should have an **added value** compared to existing programmes or courses:

- consisting of specialised content not taught somewhere else, or
- not taught/delivered in this way somewhere else;

- enable the students or staff to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied.
- ☐ They should encourage **transdisciplinary** and **multinational** teaching and training and benefit from special learning and teaching conditions not available in a single institution.
- ☐ They should ensure transnational participation: individual participants or groups from at least three countries.
- ☐ They may include **challenge-based** learning where transnational and transdisciplinary teams work together (transdisciplinarity: linking more than one subject / study area).
- ☐ They have to comprise **full-time** workload for learners.
- ☐ They can allow members of the teaching staff to exchange views on teaching **content**, new curricula approaches, to test innovative teaching methods that could eventually become part of a newly devised joint course or curriculum in an international classroom environment.
- ☐ They should provide significantly new **learning** opportunities, skills development, access to information and to state-of-the-art research results and other knowledge for the participating teachers and student/learners.
- ☐ The **ratio** of teaching/training staff to students/learners should guarantee active classroom participation.
- ☐ A **balance** should be kept between the participation of transnational and national students/learners and teaching/training staff.
- ☐ In addition to the learning outcomes on subject-related competences, it should help develop **transversal** competences.
- ☐ The number of teaching and training **hours** must ensure that the majority of time spent abroad is related to education and training, and not to research or any other activity.
- ☐ Participating institutions should plan to send a sufficient number of participants in order to ensure reaching the minimum requirement, even with cancellations/drop outs.

2.2.3 Different partnership roles

A blended intensive programme partnership is defined as follows in the Erasmus+ Programme guide:

A blended intensive programme has to be developed and implemented by at least 3 higher education institutions (HEIs) awarded with an ECHE coming from at least 3 Programme Countries.

In addition, any other HEI or organisation located in a Programme or Partner Country may participate.

The term "organisation" referred to in the above rule may, for instance, mean enterprises, NGOs or research organisations. They can also participate and receive participants for specific assignments and practical work and training during the blended intensive programme. Or they can send trainees as "invited staff from enterprises" to participate in the BIP.

The partnership can be formalised through a multilateral inter-institutional agreement, if the parties wish so. Once the institutions start renewing their inter-institutional agreements digitally via Erasmus Without Papers, the mobility of students for BIP will be included in the study mobility covered by these IIAs. The participating HEIs can divide the responsibilities and tasks between them.

What are the different roles in a blended intensive programme partnership?

- **Coordinating higher education institution:** This HEI, awarded with an ECHE, coordinates the organisation, receives and manages the organisational support for the blended intensive programme. The coordinating HEI is by default the receiving HEI (host) for the student and staff mobility, unless otherwise decided by the partnership. Other options include the situation where the coordinating HEI may be the sending HEI (in the case where the receiving HEI is another HEI from the partnership) or just be the coordinator without a role in mobility (where other partner HEIs assume both the hosting and the sending roles). There can be only one HEI coordinating the whole of the BIP.

There are two approaches:

- If the coordinating HEI applies as an individual institution, they are the applicant for Erasmus+ KA131 funding and become the grant beneficiary.

- If the coordinating HEI is a coordinator or a member of a mobility consortium, the consortium coordinator applies for KA131 funding on their behalf and the consortium becomes the grant beneficiary. The mobility consortium coordinator can be any type of organisation. The coordinating HEI can be any HEI in the consortium.

- **Receiving higher education institution:** This HEI, awarded with an ECHE, receives the BIP participants either at its premises or at a different venue/hosting organisation in the same country in which it is located. The receiving HEI has to be part of the blended intensive programme partnership. The coordinating HEI is by default the receiving HEI (host) for the student and staff mobility, unless otherwise decided by the partnership. The receiving HEI can also be part of the same mobility consortium as the coordinating HEI, if relevant.

- **Sending higher education institution /organisation:** Any HEI awarded with the ECHE. A sending HEI can be any HEI from the blended intensive programme partnership or outside it. It can be expected that the majority of participants come from sending HEIs which are part of the partnership. Invited staff can come from any organisation in Programme Countries. The coordinating institution can be a sending institution too if the venue of the activity is in another country.

- **Co-hosting organisation:** In addition to the (main) receiving HEI, there may also a co-hosting organisation. This organisation can be an enterprise, association or public body (in the same country) hosting participants for practical training as part of the programme. This organisation can also be an HEI.

2.2.4 Blended intensive programme participants

Participants in a blended intensive programme fall under two categories:

1. Participants attending the blended intensive programme to learn or be trained can be any:

- Higher education students (EQF levels 5 to 8); or
- Higher education staff (teaching or administrative staff).

2. Participants (involved in) delivering the programme can be:

- Teachers and trainers from the receiving HEI;
- Teachers and trainers who are incoming staff from other HEIs; or

- Trainers who are “invited staff” from non-HEI organisations such as enterprises, associations or research institutes).

The programme defines the minimum participation as follows:

The minimum number of participants in a blended intensive programme is 15 (not including teaching/training staff involved in the delivery of the programme) in order for the programme to be eligible for funding.

As a minimum, a BIP needs to involve 15 participants who go on an Erasmus+ funded physical mobility from sending institutions to the receiving institution to attend the programme. Additional students beyond the minimum 15 participants can join from any Programme Countries or could come from the coordinating (if in the same country as the receiving HEI) or receiving HEI. The local students from the receiving institution are not eligible for an Erasmus+ grant, as they do not take part in a physical mobility abroad and are therefore not counted towards the minimum of 15 participants. Additional participants could also come from HEIs in Partner Countries but as they will not be funded through Erasmus+ they do not count towards the minimum of 15 participants. .

The group of participants can be composed of students and staff (learners) in the same BIP. While there is no maximum participation in terms of learners, the efficiency of learning and training and the organisation of the programme has to be taken into account when designing the blended intensive programme. As a guiding figure, under the Lifelong Learning Programme, the maximum number of students participating in an intensive programme was 60.

As the coordinating HEI receives the Erasmus+ funds for organising the programme, the participants must not pay tuition/course fees. The organisers may, however, charge fees for extra-curricular activities, such as cultural visits, not directly related or relevant to the topic of the programme.

2.2.5 Quality assurance in blended intensive programmes

The quality of the programmes is ensured by the recurring project life cycle during award, implementation and reporting, but not during the application stage (as in other actions).

During KA131 project implementation, the NAs may monitor the implementation of programmes.

At the final reporting stage, the grant beneficiary will report on the implemented blended intensive programmes as part of the final report. The assessment of the final report will therefore take account of the successful implementation of the programme(s). If programmes are badly implemented, it will be reflected in the final score of the KA131 project and negatively influence the future grant allocations for this action to recurrent beneficiaries. This in turn should create a virtuous circle to encourage good practice and successful achievement of the planned blended intensive programmes.

2.2.6 Overview of necessary steps from the idea to the closing of the project

☐ **Idea:** An HEI, either individually or as part of a mobility consortium (in this case together with the consortium coordinator), develops the idea of a blended intensive programme in terms of content, target audience and partnership. This is the coordinating HEI. The concept development requires the cooperation between the international office and the faculties/departments, where a person will be assigned as blended intensive programme coordinator.

☐ **Partner search/participants:** The coordinating HEI finds partner HEIs in at least two other Programme Countries, the minimum configuration to receive Erasmus+ funding for the organisation and delivery of the programme. The coordinating HEI has to make sure that, together with the partner HEIs, they will have enough Erasmus+ or other funds to cover the mobility grants for the minimum number required of the BIP's participants who are learners (not teachers or trainers ensuring the delivery of the programme). In the case of mobility consortia, the coordinating HEI who is a consortium member will need to coordinate the funding and management issues with the consortium coordinator.

☐ **Funding of the programmes:** The coordinating HEI submits a funding request for organisational support for the planned blended intensive programmes to its Erasmus+ national agency under the annual call for the KA131 action, either as an individual HEI grant application or as part of a mobility consortium grant application. The national agency will solely use the criterion of management capacity to check whether or not to award the organisational support funds to the applicant ("Does the HEI correctly estimate its capability and capacity to organise this programme?").

☐ **Mobility grants:** On their part, the sending HEIs include in their overall KA131 grant application to their national agency the anticipated demand for mobility grants for students and staff to participate in one or more BIPs (see the two steps above). For student mobility for studies and for staff mobility for teaching regarding mobile participants in BIPs, inter-institutional agreements have to be signed with the receiving HEI before the mobilities take place.

☐ **Grant award:** The coordinating HEI is informed about the awarded funding for organisational support and the number of granted BIPs (either directly by the national agency or through the consortium coordinator, if relevant).

☐ **Contract:** A grant agreement for a KA131 project is signed between the Erasmus+ grant beneficiary (individual HEI or mobility consortium) and the national agency. Funding for organisational support for the granted blended intensive programmes is included in the overall project grant, each programme being identified with an identifier in the budget of the grant agreement.

☐ **Project data:** After the grant agreement signature, a KA131 project is created in the IT Beneficiary Module (BM). Within such a project, each granted blended intensive programme is listed as a separate activity. This allows the beneficiary (coordinating HEI or consortium coordinator together with the coordinating HEI) to manage the BIP and related data and to report on its achievement.

☐ **Organisation:** The partnership develops, prepares and organises the blended intensive programme. The coordinating HEI supervises and reports on the delivery of the physical and the online activities.

☐ **Mobilities:** The sending HEIs enter the mobilities of the blended intensive programme participants in their respective granted projects in the BM and link them to the relevant BIP (to be selected from the active BIP list in BM). As a result, the beneficiary/coordinating HEI will see the incoming participants listed as part of the blended intensive programme data and will have direct access to their participant reports.

☐ **Reports:** After the blended intensive programme has taken place, the beneficiary (coordinating HEI or consortium coordinator together with the coordinating HEI) reports in the interim and final beneficiary report on the achievement in terms of funding and in the final report on the achievements related to the content and cooperation arrangements within the partnership.

In the following sections, the details of these steps are explained.

2.2.6.1 Application for funding

Erasmus+ funding for blended intensive programmes consists of organisational support and mobility support. Funding has to be requested in a distributed manner by the involved HEIs according to their role through the KA131 grant application:

- The coordinating higher education institution applies for organisational support for each blended intensive programme as part of its overall grant application;
- The sending higher education institutions in Programme Countries apply for mobility grants for their students and staff as part of their overall grant application;
- The receiving higher education institution in Programme Countries applies for mobility grants for invited teaching/training staff from enterprises/organisations as part of its overall grant application.

The coordinating HEI can be also a sending HEI if it is different from the receiving HEI and/or located in a different country. If the venue is located in the same country, the support for in-country mobility has to be borne by the HEI or participants, but not by Erasmus+ funds.

The coordinating and receiving HEIs can jointly organise accommodation and catering, as well as local transport and other activities for all or part of the participants. They can charge participants for these services (excluding tuition fees). The use of the services will, however, not be mandatory for the participants.

The details of the application are provided below.

An institution can apply for organisational support for any number of distinct BIPs in one project cycle, however, the number of requested and granted blended intensive programmes has to be proportional to the organisational capacity of the coordinating HEI.

However, an HEI can apply for only one edition of the same BIP (with the same title, learning outcomes and partnership composition) per call year. Coordinators can reapply under the following call for the same BIP in order to receive funding for it.

If the same BIP (with the same title, learning outcomes and partnership) is organised more times during the same KA131 project under call 2021, (including a rotation of the coordinator), it will not be eligible to receive additional Erasmus+ funding and therefore will not be recorded in the programme support tools (Beneficiary Module). In the latter case, however, the participants of the additional BIP editions are sent to the receiving HEI through blended short-term mobility and recorded as such. "Zero grant" BIPs are not envisaged for the moment.

2.2.6.1.1 Application by the coordinating HEI

The coordinating HEI applies for funding for the organisational support for one or several distinct blended intensive programmes under KA131.

The applicant indicates in the KA131 application form for each requested BIP the indicative/estimated number of participants, which are not teachers/trainers involved in the delivery of the programme, i.e., the number of learners expected to participate (students or staff). The minimum number of these participants has to be 15. There is no maximum number as such but funding is capped (see below).

The indicative number of participants will be used by the NA to award funds for the organisational support of the BIPs to the grant beneficiary. It can be amended (adjusted) collectively at the interim reporting/funding redistribution stage or through an individual grant agreement amendment. The organisational support sum for the programmes is calculated as 400 EUR per participant, with a minimum of 15 participants (i.e., a minimum of 6,000 EUR), up to a total of 8,000 EUR (i.e. the funding is capped with 20 participants).

In this action, organisational support for BIPs is intended to cover costs related to the preparation, design, development, implementation and follow-up of the programme and delivery of virtual/remote activities as well as the overall management and coordination. Costs may include: production of documents or educational material, rental of rooms, rental of equipment, field trips, excursions, communication activities, translation and interpretation, preparatory visits and administrative tasks.

2.2.6.1.2 Sending HEIs and HEIs funding mobility participants

The prospective sending HEIs or receiving HEIs, located in Programme Countries, should include the following categories in their funding request of mobility grants to participate in a blended intensive programme:

- ☐ Participants (students and staff) sent from the sending HEI;
- ☐ Invited teaching/training staff by the receiving HEI from enterprises/organisations delivering the programme.

In the KA131 application form, under mobility activities, the estimated number of participants (students, staff) participating for learning or training purposes must be filled in under the following activity types:

- ☐ Students: "Student mobility for studies"
- ☐ Staff (learners): "Staff mobility for training"

The estimated number of teachers/trainers involved in delivering the programme must be filled in under the following activity type:

- ☐ Staff: "Staff mobility for teaching"

2.2.6.2 Venue

The programme states as follows:

The physical activity can take place at the receiving HEI or at any other venue in the country of the receiving HEI.

A venue outside the receiving HEI can for example be a seminar hotel or accommodation during a field trip, a research institution, an enterprise or any other organisation that provides benefit to the blended intensive programme and helps participants achieve the expected learning outcomes.

2.2.6.3 Identifying the BIP and participants - encoding in the IT system Beneficiary Module

The Beneficiary Module (BM) will display the list of granted blended intensive programmes with their Blended Intensive Programme ID (counter) and the number of participants (learners) as part of a KA131 project.

The beneficiary will need to enter the following data for each BIP:

- ☐ Title of the blended intensive programme.
- ☐ Type of participants targeted (students, staff).
- ☐ Subject/topic of the programme.
- ☐ Objectives and description of the programme
- ☐ Learning and teachings methods and expected learning/training outcomes
- ☐ Virtual component description
- ☐ Field of education targeted (students)
- ☐ Education level targeted (students)
- ☐ Start and end date of the physical activity
- ☐ Number of ECTS credits awarded
- ☐ Main teaching/training language
- ☐ City of the venue

BIP partnership and the roles of each partner. The eligibility rule for a blended intensive programme partnership (3 HEIs minimum) is checked in the BM before a mobility can be encoded by the sending HEIs.

When encoding the blended mobility of the mobile participants, the sending HEI selects the blended intensive programme from a list in BM (and thus the related receiving HEI). Teaching mobility can be blended or only delivered in a physical mode. The encoded mobilities will be visible to the coordinating HEI and listed as part of the BIP's data in the BM.

2.2.6.4 Interim reporting

During the interim reporting stage, the number of blended intensive programmes funded and the number of participants (learners) and the resulting funding can be adjusted (increased or decreased).

KA131 funds cannot be transferred from mobility grants to organisational support for BIPs but require a grant agreement amendment based on the beneficiary's request in the interim report. However, vice versa, unused BIP organisational support may be transferred to mobility grants.

2.2.6.5 Final reporting

As a precondition for submitting the final report, the blended intensive programme has to be eligible. The following three eligibility criteria for a BIP, defining the minimum set in terms of participation, have to be fulfilled:

1. Minimum number of **countries**: 3 Programme Countries;
2. Minimum number of **institutions**: 3 HEIs from the countries above;
3. Minimum number of **participants**: 15 participants (on a funded Erasmus+ mobility and not involved in delivery of the programme).

In concrete terms, the blended intensive programme is ultimately validated if the minimum number of participants (learners) is completely and correctly encoded and if these participants have submitted their participant report. The first two criteria above are already the precondition for encoding the participants.

The beneficiary, in cooperation with the coordinating HEI in case of a mobility consortium, will report succinctly on the achievement of the Blended Intensive Programme.