

CO-CREATING ERASMUS+ AND THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

28 & 29 JANUARY 2020, ULB CAMPUS SOLBOSCH BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

B2 - Making the most of virtual cooperation

Summary of the discussion

The discussion was focused on how to best use technology and online platforms to boost cooperation in the education, training and youth sectors and provide more flexible mobility opportunities such as blended mobility. Participants took part in a mapping exercise where they provided a range of good practice examples and identified challenges in virtual cooperation. Participants discussed the presented novelties of the next programme related to virtual cooperation, provided feedback and translated together the results of the mapping exercise into a list of key quality principles for virtual cooperation as well as solutions addressing the main challenges identified. Finally, participants voted for three priority ideas and created a “word cloud” to demonstrate the most important principles in virtual cooperation with the word “accessibility” being the one most often submitted.

Main outcomes/ operational conclusions

The feedback on the novelties of the next programme related to virtual cooperation was positive. Ensuring accessibility of online platforms used in virtual cooperation and the inclusiveness of the actions themselves to a wide range of participants and organisations is essential. Participants with disabilities must be able to easily access and use online platforms. Participants pointed out the need for including accessibility as a requirement in the supported actions as well as providing funding mechanisms to achieve so. Special attention must also be paid to language barriers, ensuring that the right conditions are set for people to communicate effectively. In this regard, translations (also into sign language) should be provided and organisers of online learning exchanges and teamwork should be mindful of using simple and straightforward language.

Participants highlighted that clearly defined learning outcomes are essential to ensure a high quality learning activity online and to facilitate recognition for participants. In higher education, the main challenge will be to develop curricula to support blended mobility activities for students awarding ECTS credits as part of a student’s degree. Providing financial support (lump sums) to higher education institutions to organise blended intensives programmes would be very useful as well as having a collective online space for sharing of best practices. Participants also supported the proposal to offer blended mobility to individual students through bilateral agreements between higher education institutions on top of blended intensives programmes. Furthermore, these measures should be integrated into national curricula in order to facilitate implementation. In non-formal education, digital badges to support recognition was identified as a support measure to be taken. Participants also emphasised the importance of using existing quality assurance mechanisms in the different sectors to ensure quality and relevance of virtual cooperation. It is essential to improve the interconnectivity of online platforms and resources for all sectors and to ensure their user-friendliness. The idea to allow users to create an “online persona” to maintain contact with other users was suggested. Some participants underlined that IT infrastructure varies greatly between institutions, countries and regions and further support will be needed to ensure the accessibility of virtual cooperation to all education and training providers. In this regard, developing strong synergies with other EU funding mechanisms will be necessary. Under the new Erasmus programme, the concept of virtual cooperation should be “mainstreamed” and not only concern blended mobility (under KA1) or online platforms. Adding virtual cooperation as a priority under Key Action 2 capacity building projects could be a first step.