



TEACHING AND LEARNING IN BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES

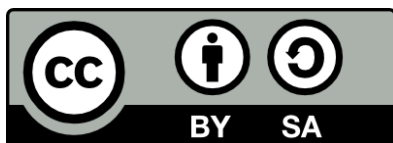
UNIC TEACHING GUIDE
FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATORS

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IN A NUTSHELL

A Blended Intensive Programme is a strategic combination of virtual collaborative learning with a short physical mobility. This teaching guide gives practical hints how to structure the teaching and learning setting of a BIP. Good reasons to engage in BIPs are to realise a more participative educational setting, to discover and experiment with innovative methodologies in teaching, and to broaden the perspective on the teaching topic. A good methodological design is the foundation of your successful BIP implementation, and encompasses good communication between all involved partners, collaboration between teachers and students and planning well ahead.

Organisational procedures and requirements within UNIC and contacts are listed in the guide ‘Organising BIPs in UNIC’.



What is a Blended Intensive Programme?

A Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) is a very specific form of Blended Mobility. It involves a “strategic combination of phases of online learning with periods of short physical mobility.” (O’Dowd & Werner 2024)

Before defining a Blended Intensive programme, it will be defined more generally what blended mobility is.

Blended Mobility describes a combination of physical and virtual exchange settings. Mostly, the physical parts are shorter and are enhanced by virtual collaborative activities of the participants.

In blended mobility settings, the virtual part can take place before, during and/or after the short physical meeting (Tan et al. 2023, 47-48).

The Virtual component is often seen as preparation of the physical activity. Students can be prepared linguistically, they can prepare tasks that are accomplished at the physical meeting, they can activate and align prior knowledge and skills and learn interculturally about their respective partners to be able to successfully interact during the physical meeting. If the physical stay is organised as a kind of summer school or conference, students can prepare virtually their contributions, prepare discussion rounds or workshops with their fellow students.

During a stay abroad, a virtual component can facilitate the experiences abroad, for example if students take part in an internship abroad, they can participate virtually in accompanying courses at their home university, get advice from their educators at home, or get peer feedback from their fellow students (who may also be abroad). The virtual part in this setting is mostly a facilitator for the success of the physical stay through reflection on misunderstandings and developing solutions for cultural struggles or difficult situations of the person abroad. **This contributes to a meaningful intercultural learning process.**



Organising a virtual component after the physical meeting is common and can also be interesting if a longer-term collaboration is aimed. The physical meeting can then serve as a kick-off of the project, where the future virtual teams get to know each other and prepare how they want to work together virtually in the upcoming time. That can be the preparation of virtual presentations or a virtual conference, where students can then present the products of their international virtual collaboration. **The preparation of written documents or multimedia artefacts like learning videos, audio files, apps, are interesting tasks for virtual international collaboration that students can develop after a preparation that they have done in person.**

It is also possible to combine these approaches and have the physical mobility bookended by virtual collaborative phases or organise the physical meetings in a hybrid format to involve students who could not join the activity on site.

BIPs



A **Blended Intensive Programme (BIP)** is a specific format of a blended mobility funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ Programme. As it is related to funding, there are several application, reporting, financial administration requirements that need to be fulfilled. A BIP requires the involvement of university administration, academics as teachers/educators as well as international relations offices.



Why should I engage in BIPs?

International mobility experiences have proven to be beneficial on many levels on the personal and academic growth for the individuals that have taken part in them, e.g. a positive impact on career development and intercultural learning (OECD 2024, 229). That is why **aiming for a broader range of students to participate is about justice in education, to give equal chances to all to acquire the associated competences.**

The objective of combining virtual and physical mobility is to increase the success of all students, home and international. Confrontation with and reflection about intercultural differences and similarities is key in a globalised world and experiences in international virtual teamwork and collaboration improves digital skills, necessary to tackle the challenges of the 21st century (European Commission 2024).

To enhance mobility experiences for underrepresented groups and to overcome fears and anxieties, short term mobilities and virtual formats can be designed in a meaningful way for all participating students and serve as bridge to longer exchange formats as well. By practicing foreign language use, gaining experiences in intercultural communication and learning curiosity in the safe space of their home university, students (and teachers) can develop confidence and mitigate reservations against international exchange (European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. 2021, 7).

Furthermore, a BIP exchange generates interesting perspectives on the teaching topic. The confrontation with another cultural framing of the disciplinary field leads to a deeper reflection of what is considered to be common sense in the scientific community and leads to a gain of new perspectives (European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. 2021, 7).



Teachers/Educators as well as students can engage in the establishment of long-term partnerships, that can be extended to research as well, e.g. by applications for research grants of the participating teachers.



Research shows that BIPs can be integrated in a wide range of subjects (O'Dowd & Werner 2024, 805). Innovative ideas and development of new ways of thinking, generating new questions for research are an enriching aspect of international exchange within the curriculum. This is of course true for all formats of international mobility; however integrated formats generate a stronger impact on curriculum development and organisational learning in the discipline.

How can I realise a BIP in Higher Education?

BIPs are organised by (at least) three partner teachers based in three different Higher Education Institutions in different countries.

“A final important outcome of the survey is related to the importance of good methodological design of the BIP programmes.” (O'Dowd & Werner 2024, 814)

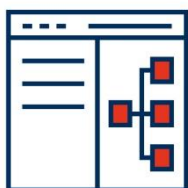
Hence a BIP is a teaching cooperation and requires a close and regular collaboration between the participating academics and their respective student groups. At best, a BIP activity is integrated in a course/module of the regular curriculum to involve all students of the respective local study programmes. It should be noted that the activities have an added value to the

existing offers, i.e. innovative methodology, specialised and interesting topic, or a new perspective.



“Start planning early”
(O’Dowd & Werner 2023)

Tie first contacts one year in advance. You need time to get to know your partner teachers, their way of and views on teaching and learning. You also need time to submit papers and applications. You can use checklists for virtual exchange (Tan et al. 2023, 91) to get an overview of differences and similarities of your course organisation, so that you can find an aligned procedure.



“Provide a clear and transparent structure and organisation” (O’Dowd & Werner 2023)

For the learning activities of your students in the blended setting a good description and explication of the combination of the different formats and the learning outcomes is more necessary than in formats that do not involve international peers. Students need this to develop a clear idea of the process and the tasks to be completed over time, with deadlines and concrete responsibilities.

Think of a useful link between the virtual and the physical part of your BIP. Create a relation between both activities and make that clear to your learners. It is a difference if your students need to participate in an online lecture or engage in virtual small group work.

The host university is responsible for awarding at least 3 ECTS credits to ALL participating students for their engagement in the BIP project. Even if the responsibility is at the host partner, all partner teachers should collaborate to create meaningful activities, tasks and assessment for the allocation of the ECTS points. Travelling alone does not make a good basis for crediting.

If there are any, do also think of how non mobile students can be integrated meaningfully, e.g. by offering participation via recordings or hybrid sessions.



**“Recruit more students
than the minimum
requirement”**

(O’Dowd & Werner 2023)

Since short term cancellations occur frequently, you should be sure to get the funding and recruit a bigger number of participants. Currently, as status of March 2025, 10 students must at least be mobile i.e. travelling. That is why it is useful to integrate the BIP in compulsory elective courses, where usually many students participate.

Since the rules and timelines of grant allocation are nationally different, and at each university the grants are limited to a specific number, it is absolutely crucial to involve your international relations offices as soon as the first ideas about organising a BIP emerge. In many UNIC partners’ cases, the funding must be applied at least one year ahead.



**“Involve the international
office in planning”**

(O’Dowd & Werner 2023)

In research, administration and financial problems are identified as the key challenges of BIP organisers (O’Dowd & Werner 2024, 809), so a good, early and clear communication between all local actors is central.

“Facilitate collaborative & interactive methods (esp. online)”

(O’Dowd & Werner 2023)



Erasmus+ rules involve collaboration in the virtual part as a mandatory requirement (European Commission 2025, 48).

The benefits of BIP Programmes are described as mainly related to the work in internationally mixed teams, e.g. building networks, engaging in intercultural learning and collaboration, being exposed to different cultural perspectives on the disciplinary field (O’Dowd & Werner 2024, 811). This highlights the need for a **clear pedagogical structure and task design**, in order to reach high level learning objectives.

Virtual Exchange related recommendations involving get-to-know tasks,

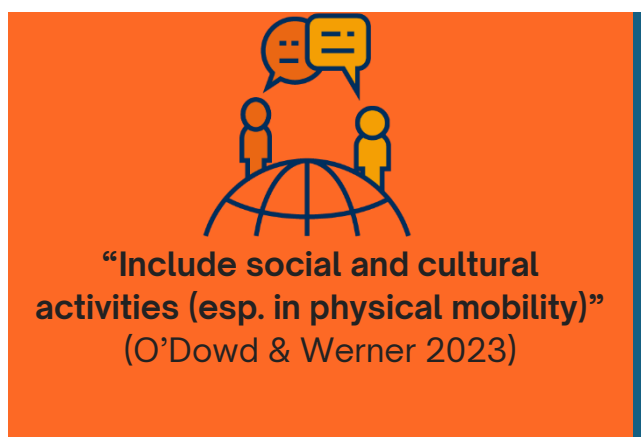
“Maintain close communication with partners & students and develop a good working relationship with your partner teachers and international offices” (O’Dowd & Werner 2023)

comparison tasks and collaborative tasks (O’Dowd & Waire 2009) can be useful for designing meaningful virtual parts of a BIP. This is also beneficial for the development of digital literacy, that is trained during virtual communication, synchronous and asynchronous online activities, while conducting video-conferencing sessions, and while experimenting with and finding one’s role in small virtual teams.

The European Commission furthermore recommends the integration of **Challenge Based Learning** approaches in BIPs, that imply interdisciplinary collaboration as well as an involvement of university external partners, e.g. NGOs or companies (European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. (2021), 8).

Moreover, BIPs are described as an occasion to test and develop innovative teaching methods in a joint curriculum, create new learning opportunities for students, and focus on transversal skills (European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. (2021), 8).

Get-to-know tasks and informal communication is key in small group work and international teams, all while contributing to a good learning atmosphere. In reference to studies about in-person group development (Tuckman 1965), collaborative group work needs to pass by a couple of stages, which allow gradually and step by step for more complex task processing.



The fundament of all group performance is a trustful and reliable communication and relation between the group members. In order to prevent misunderstandings and frustrations, a close, regular and reliable communication between the involved stakeholders (academics, students and internationalisation management) is key.



Steps

Organisational steps and steps in learning design must be conducted in parallel in the BIP planning process. The European Commission lists 10 steps for the administrative part of the BIP organisation (European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. (2021), 11).

In the **UNIC Handbook on Physical and Virtual Mobility**, 10 steps of Virtual Exchange planning with examples are described, that can be used for the learning design of the virtual BIP part (Tan et al. 2023, 42).



How can I find partners?

Partners are key in a BIP activity. Apart from local partners as International Relations Offices, the main partners of a BIP are the organising educators.

Within UNIC, you can find partners via the [UNIC Virtual Campus](#), via your local UNIC managers, and via participation in [UNIC events](#), like e.g. the [UNIC InterTeach workshops](#) for professional development of university teachers.

Beyond UNIC, the network [UNicollaboration](#) has a matchmaking service, and the [COIL connect network](#) does also display partner inquiries. Both networks are also organising partner fairs. As BIPs are part of the ERASMUS+ funding scheme, funding is only possible for ERASMUS+ programme countries (BIP partners must have a separate Erasmus+ Inter-Institutional Agreement), even if non-European partners may be involved.



Where can I get help?

In the UNIC Handbook on Physical and Virtual Mobility, all contact persons of the UNIC partner universities are listed (Tan et al. 2023, 58). In general, local International Relations Offices are the right contact for teachers interested in BIP activities.

Centres for Teaching and Learning support in matters around the learning design of the BIP activities, be it virtual or on-site. In UNIC, all CTLs can be contacted via the [UNIC CTL Information Hub](#).



Resources

European Commission (2025): [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#).

European Commission (2024): [Transversal Skills. Factsheet](#).

European Commission/DG EAC/Unit B.1. (2021). Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027 Call 2021 – [Higher Education Mobility Handbook](#).

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022): *Blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility KA131*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/467485>

O'Dowd, Robert & Waire, Page (2009): Critical issues in telecollaborative task design. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 22(2), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588220902778369>

O'Dowd, Robert & Werner, Sina (2023): [BIP Infographic](#).

O'Dowd, Robert & Werner, Sina (2024): The First Steps of Blended Mobility in European Higher Education: A Survey of Blended Intensive Programmes. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Volume 28, Issue 5, November 2024, Pages 798-817. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153241235704>

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Tuckman, Bruce (1965): Developmental sequence in small groups. In: *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), 384-399. DOI: 10.1037/h0022100