



Erasmus+

Capacity Building in Higher Education

EU Support to Higher Education Institutions Around the World



Contractor: Ard Jongsma

Education writer/journalist and co-founder of University World News

(www.universityworldnews.com)

Contract number: 2014-3663/004

Disclaimer

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission and/or the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The European Commission and/or the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) do not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this study. Neither the European Commission nor the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), not any person acting on the Commission's behalf and/or the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)'s behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

© European Union, 2016

For any use or reproduction of photos which are not under European Union copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holder(s).

© photos: Shutterstock.com (pg 6) & European Commission

ISBN 978-92-9492-376-9

DOI 10.2797/215579

This document has been produced within the framework of the EU funded Erasmus+ programme by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency on behalf and with the close support of the Directorate General for Education and Culture (EAC) of the European Commission.

Unit A4, Erasmus+: Capacity-building in Higher Education
Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
Avenue du Bourget, 1
B-1049 Brussels - Belgium

Erasmus+

Capacity Building in Higher Education

EU Support to Higher Education Institutions Around the World

Ard Jongsma

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4 - 5
I. Possible Themes of Past Capacity-building Projects	7 - 15
a. Developing new curricula	8 - 9
b. Services to support students	10 - 11
c. Building bridges between higher education institutions and the world of work	12 - 13
d. The very broad themes of internationalisation	14 - 15
II. Tips for Project Design	16 - 17
III. Other Factors to Bear in Mind	19 - 26
a. Appropriate project management structure	20
b. Support from your higher education institution	21
c. Clear channels of communication	22
d. Suitable equipment	23
e. Dissemination plans	24
f. Realistic sustainability strategy	25
g. Quality assurance and accountability for results	26
Conclusion	27
Further reading	28

INTRODUCTION

Education has always been considered one of the cornerstones of international development. Building human capacities has proven a useful tool in alleviating global inequalities. Given the consequences – poverty, wars and migration among many others – there is an urgent need to act. The EU supports the modernisation of education policies, systems and institutions, to help improve the lives of millions worldwide. It supports the global exchange of ideas and knowledge to improve the overall quality of education on offer. Building the capacities of higher education institutions helps provide students with an education that is more aligned to the needs of the labour market and society. It better prepares them to tackle the challenges of the modern world. The EU supports the internationalization of higher education institutions around the world. The human interactions that result, promotes greater intercultural awareness and understanding between people from different countries and cultures. It broadens their minds to different ways of being, acting, and seeing. It promotes greater tolerance and less prejudice – more necessary than ever.



The EU funds capacity-building projects in higher education as a means to reach these goals. These are transnational cooperation projects between higher education institutions in Europe (so-called 'programme countries'¹) and around the world ('partner countries'¹). They work together in a project partnership to bring about change. The focus of the project can be at grass-roots level, working directly with professors, administrative staff and students. Building their skills, knowledge and expertise leads to a bottom-up approach to change in higher education institutions. EU capacity-building projects can also work at a higher level with Rectors and governing bodies managing the institutions, to introduce new quality assurance systems and management processes throughout the higher education institution. EU capacity building projects also work at national level with Ministries of Higher Education. These projects focus on reforming policies in areas such as quality assurance, the recognition of degrees or qualifications frameworks. Whatever the level, the aim of these capacity-building projects is ultimately to improve the quality of education for its key clients – the students.

For almost 30 years, the Erasmus programme was a very successful European mobility scheme, for EU higher education institutions only. The new Erasmus+ programme launched in 2014 now welcomes countries from the entire world to participate in its activities. It no longer focuses exclusively on mobility but includes capacity-building activities targeting many countries worldwide.

For the past 30 years, the EU has funded education cooperation programmes with different regions of the world. It has worked with the ALFA programme in Latin America since 1994 and the Edulink programme in the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries since 2006. The Tempus programme initially started with Eastern Europe in 1990, and then expanded to the Southern Mediterranean, Russia and Central Asia and continued to operate as an independent action until 2013, when it was incorporated into Erasmus+. From 2002-2008, a similar programme, Asia-link, supported capacity-building in Asia. Since 2004, the Erasmus Mundus programme has financed Master scholarships worldwide. As a result, the EU has amassed a wealth of experience from thirty years of working on programmes in international cooperation in higher education.

¹ The Erasmus + Programme makes the distinction between 'Programme Countries' which are the 27 EU Member States and former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey and 'Partner Countries' which are countries in other regions of the world.

The aim of this brochure is to introduce those who are new to working with the EU, to its funding philosophy and expectations in the area of capacity-building in higher education. Past experience of working on these types of project will be shared, lessons learned and concrete recommendations. It is hoped that this publication will inspire you with project ideas with examples of existing projects that are scattered throughout the text. This will give you some thoughts of what you could develop in your higher education institution and in your country with EU support.

The first section outlines some broad thematic areas that it is possible to work on. It shares past experience from working on these in the framework of previously funded capacity-building programmes with concrete recommendations. The second section gives you some practical tips for designing your project. The last section focuses on aspects that will give your capacity-building project added value in the EU's eyes (and therefore more likely to win funding) and be successful.

DEFINITION OF ERASMUS+ CAPACITY-BUILDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION PROJECTS (ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME GUIDE)

Capacity-building projects are transnational cooperation projects based on multilateral partnerships, primarily between higher education institutions (HEIs) from Programme and eligible Partner Countries. They can also involve non-academic partners to strengthen the links with society and business and to reinforce the systemic impact of the projects. Through structured cooperation, exchange of experience and good practices and individual mobility, capacity-building projects aim to:

- support the modernisation, accessibility and internationalisation of higher education in the eligible Partner Countries;
- support eligible Partner Countries to address the challenges facing their higher education institutions and systems, including those of quality, relevance, equity of access, planning, delivery, management and governance;
- contribute to cooperation between the EU and the eligible Partner Countries (and amongst the eligible Partner Countries);
- promote voluntary convergence with EU developments in higher education;
- promote people-to-people contacts, intercultural awareness and understanding.

These objectives are pursued in the eligible Partner Countries, through actions that:

- improve the quality of higher education and enhance its relevance for the labour market and society;
- improve the level of competences and skills in HEIs by developing new and innovative education programmes;
- enhance the management, governance and innovation capacities, as well as the internationalisation of HEIs;
- increase the capacities of national authorities to modernise their higher education systems, by supporting to the definition, implementation and monitoring of reform policies
- foster regional integration and cooperation across different regions of the world through joint initiatives, sharing of good practices and cooperation.

I. POSSIBLE THEMES OF CAPACITY-BUILDING PROJECTS

The good news is that there are no limits to the thematic areas that you can work on (once it falls within the main priorities identified in the annual Call for Proposals).

Once your proposal demonstrates sufficiently that there is a specific need in your chosen area of work, it can be considered as one of the possible projects for funding. However, in order to give you some ideas, four broad areas have been chosen that were covered in the past by successful projects.

These four areas are:

- A. DEVELOPING NEW CURRICULA
- B. DEVELOPING SERVICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS
- C. BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THE WORLD OF WORK
- D. THE VERY BROAD THEME OF INTERNATIONALISATION.

Concrete recommendations for projects are also given, based on past experience.

A. DEVELOPING NEW CURRICULA

Persisting traditional views on higher education, particularly a resistance towards more student-centred approaches, often stand in the way of successfully implementing modern curricula. Curricular reform is not just a matter of changing the curriculum. It often requires a paradigm shift among all involved: the higher education institution administration, the teachers, the students, especially if stakeholders outside the higher education institution are to be involved.

Differences between education systems are often blamed for unsatisfactory transnational education project results, but intra-European cooperation in higher education was designed specifically to help overcome systemic differences. More often than not, differences in academic culture and differences of opinion on the role of higher education in society appear to be the real underlying challenges.

With EU assistance, many Partner Country higher education institutions have developed and adapted curricula to make them more relevant to the changing needs of their own labour markets and industries. They often faced challenges that are a direct consequence of globalisation. They developed flexible and modular interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes, that would be more in line with these changing requirements and helped improve the employability of graduates. Follow-up studies have generally been very positive about the achievements of these projects. In the vast majority of flagship examples, competence requirements for graduates were formulated by both national and international professional organisations dealing with

the accreditation of programmes. A steadily increasing majority were also recognised nationally.

In recent years, the vast majority of newly developed curricula in the Partner Countries have also lived up to the requirements of the Bologna Process, which is Europe's ambitious framework for improving the compatibility of all of its different higher education systems. The experience gathered in this process is obviously one of European cooperation's great strengths. As a result, the majority of newly developed curricula are compliant with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the three-tiered system of bachelor, master and PhD degrees. Most new curricula are also based on learning outcomes, are competence-oriented, are modularised and are adapted to independent lifelong learning and continual professional development.

Double and joint degrees that involve an obligatory study period at a partner institution have appeared to be some of the most effective tools for mainstreaming student and staff mobility. The benefits of joint and dual programmes are often underestimated. They inherently lead to strong institutional links with all the spin-off benefits of this. They promote mobility for students and often staff. They are a cost-effective way of offering courses for which the capacity at home is lacking. They offer greater visibility for the participating higher education institutions and they greatly support broader institutional internationalisation efforts. Finally, and perhaps most relevant in this context, they support the development of capacity at partner institutions through cooperation and the exchange of good practice.

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN CAMBODIA, NEPAL AND VIETNAM (ASIA-LINK PROGRAMME, 2005-08)

The aim of the project was to introduce innovative approaches to Master's degree-level education in aquaculture and aquatic resource management in Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam. The immediate target groups were higher education institution teachers and researchers in four key institutions. Through improvement of access to knowledge and appropriate teaching materials, students and ultimately millions of farm families deriving part of their livelihood from aquaculture, have benefitted. Activities consisted of an inception workshop and curriculum development workshop at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). This was followed by an in-service development phase with extensive support from AIT and EU partners, leading to integrated packages and a workshop for finalization, dissemination and the promotion of materials/modules.

The diverse experience of aquaculture in the countries of the region was shared through national and regional level workshops. Educational materials were developed that incorporate up-to-date scientific knowledge and social and environmentally sustainable farming practice. Special attention was given to the development of country-specific case study material, which allowed students to follow a learning process approach in their studies.

Several target groups benefitted from the project, such as 25 teaching staff at the partner institutions and 50 Master degree students per year. Approximately 300 other students engaged in the B.Sc programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- A good understanding of modern curriculum concepts is a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of new curricula. Developing this understanding through capacity-building projects should precede the introduction of new curricula. For example, a quality assurance system should be a mandatory part of curriculum development.
- It is important to assess local demand for new programmes beforehand. If there is little current demand for a specific type of graduate, assess whether this is because the specific socio-economic environment does not need them or because this environment does not yet know that it needs them. If the latter is the case, involve stakeholders from this environment in the project to raise awareness and generate collective ownership.
- If the main purpose of a project is to transfer tested and successful practice into a new setting, ensure that the courses, curriculum, innovations, units or systems that are being transferred can be adapted and localised. Keep in mind that the transfer of entire models from outside does not usually work.
- Structured training in soft skills (such as teamwork, public speaking etc.) as a standard part of curricula at higher education institutions is highly recommended.
- It is also recommended to use internationally recognised study credit models, such as the European Credit Transfer System, or at least models that can be directly compared to this one.
- Capacity building for representatives of public authorities should also be taken into consideration in the design of new curriculum development projects. Their full understanding of curriculum development activities can do much to secure full accreditation and national recognition of newly developed or modernised courses and study programmes.
- Make sure that joint study programmes will be recognised by all partners.
- Consider signing memoranda of understanding with foreign partner higher education institutions after the project ends. This increases the odds for sustainability and the potential for future dual and joint programmes between these institutions.



B. SERVICES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

There is also much potential for capacity-building projects to improve services to support students or to develop new badly need ones. As studies diversify, students need more guidance on what to choose. As education opens up to students from less affluent backgrounds and students with special needs, they too need extra services and guidance. As students start to take parts of their studies abroad, other forms of support are needed. As higher education institutions increasingly start to cater for new economic sectors, students need the support of people to lobby for them with prospective employers.

The development of many of these student support services is recent, even in the EU. In many of the transition countries, they are in their infancy. In many developing countries, they have yet to start.

At present, Ministries responsible for education generally offer little guidance on higher education student support services. Even more basic services that support the lives of students and enhance their learning experiences and outcomes, such as medical support, often lack completely.

Because of this, student support services offer an excellent opportunity for knowledge exchange between EU Member States and Partner Countries. Lessons have already been learnt from the projects that have chosen this direction in the past decade.



SUPPORT AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN MONTENEGRO – SINC@HE (TEMPUS PROGRAMME, 2011)

The SINC@HE project was designed to improve the quality and relevance of support and inclusion of students with disabilities. It created the conditions and standards needed to raise the quality of inclusion of students with disabilities in Montenegro to EU standards. New measures were incorporated into existing national and institutional legal and sublegal acts.

A long-term objective of the project was to strengthen values about the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. In order to provide a solid base for the implementation of newly developed inclusive standards, the SINC@HE project established a framework for improving support and inclusion and quality assurance at higher education institutions, that would be incorporated in regulatory documents.

Higher education institutions have to keep their staff informed and trained on the needs of students with disabilities. The SINC@HE project therefore provided extensive training for all levels of staff involved in the support and inclusion of students with disabilities.

The project brought together the Ministry of Information Society and Telecommunications, the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro, the Institute for Education and Rehabilitation of Persons with Hearing and Speech Disorders and the Association of Disabled Students SLOVENIA. Their involvement was considered the best guarantee of the sustainability of project results beyond its lifetime.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Most higher education institutions would benefit from strengthening one form or other of their student services. These could include support to international students, support to student involvement in higher education institutions' governance, library services, services that improve accessibility, health services, financial support services, and even cultural and sports services.
- Student organisations can be assisted in developing codes of conduct to strengthen their ability and capacity to address corrupt practice and interference by political parties.
- Ministries responsible for education can be assisted in elaborating comprehensive strategies for legal frameworks for student support services that higher education institutions should offer. External control bodies could be given the mandate to implement systematic monitoring of the delivery of student support services. This would be a measure for empowering the student population. It could also offer indicators for funding and the ranking of higher education institutions in this area.
- There is an untapped potential for projects aimed at aligning and complementing existing specific student support into comprehensive services for all students. Think about the possibility of scaling up a specific service offered by one faculty to the entire higher education institution.
- Student agreements detailing rights and obligations of students are recommended to be good practice at higher education institutions. Projects should consider how they can empower students through comprehensive student support that gives them a voice in shaping their learning environment and ensures robust channels for taking up student's aspirations and grievances.



C. BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THE WORLD OF WORK

Another popular thematic area for capacity-building projects is university-business cooperation. In a considerable part of the world, higher education institutions are still seen as the bastion of basic research and academic values and not as the engines for innovation, growth and employability. Further globalisation and the corresponding need to respond to broader knowledge demands from society and the economy are bound to change this. European experience with this change process can be a valuable asset in cooperation projects. Given recent socio-economic developments, closer cooperation in both directions between the worlds of work and learning is inevitable.

The lack of contact between higher education institutions and businesses is felt most strongly in teaching and research. Cooperation with industry for innovation and with employers for work requires higher education institutions to take a fresh look at relevant academic disciplines and of the mutual benefits entailed. There are clear benefits to closer cooperation for both higher education institutions and their stakeholders in society.

One example of how far higher education cultures in different countries are removed from each other may serve to illustrate this point. In several EU countries, industry partners take up half of the seats on higher

education institution's boards. This is still not the norm in many countries around the world.

One crystal-clear lesson from earlier projects that have succeeded in improving real higher education institution-industry relationships is that active involvement of non-academic partners in curriculum development and performance evaluation enhances the innovation potential of higher education institutions and the employability of their graduates.

Projects focusing on this area need not be exclusively on cooperation with industry. Opening up higher education institutions to civil society and to society at large also has strong potential for change. There is much to be gained for students and society by forging links with local NGOs, trade associations and local authorities where possible.

DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION-ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE FIELD OF LIFE SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGIES IN TUNISIA (TEMPUS PROGRAMME, 2012)

The main objective of the project was to contribute to the improvement of the relations between higher education institutions and enterprises and the improvement of the graduates' employability and knowledge transfer.

One of the main achievements reported at Sfax Higher education institution, Tunisia, was the requalification programme for unemployed doctors which has been developed and implemented. At the time, 400 doctors who were members of the association for unemployed doctors of life sciences (they have now over 700 members), have been contacted to participate in this requalification programme. 68 have answered, and 20 have been selected.

The exemplary example of Raida: Raida became a Doctor (Double degree, Montpellier II and Sfax) in 2010, and had every intention of becoming a professor. Two years later, supervising students in a research lab but actually unemployed, she heard about the project and started to think that something other than teaching could be possible. She applied to the requalification programme and was selected. She is now in the final stages of the creation of her own company, whose first aim will be the valorisation of a prickly pear extract in the form of powder she developed, and which can be used in the food industry, but also in cosmetics and health products. Thanks to the Tempus project, she received the training she needed, as well as the necessary support to fine tune and develop her business plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Improve communication between academics and entrepreneurs and between higher education institutions and enterprises. Communication with industry partners can be improved by organising training on communication techniques, carrying out needs analyses on issues related to entrepreneurship, organising events such as job fairs and innovation competitions on a regular basis and integrating internships or work placements into study programmes.
- Develop new curricula in partnership with industry. Expanding the role of commercial and industrial stakeholders in the curriculum.
- Widen the scope of higher education institution-enterprise cooperation. Consider the capacity of higher education institutions to provide applied solutions to enterprises, including the improvement of existing products and the development of marketing strategies, systems and processes to improve production.
- Transferrable skills and soft sciences (e.g. sociology, psychology, design and marketing) should also be made part of, or made a potential part of science and engineering curricula, so that these graduates are better adapted to labour market needs.
- A favorable legal, administrative and financial environment is needed, in which higher education institutions can conclude comprehensive agreements and contracts with industry, provide incentives to their staff, as well as to representatives of enterprises, and establish and operate dedicated structures. The support from national authorities is required to do this.
- Projects could focus on enhancing the value of learning, research and innovation for society. This can be done by promoting interdisciplinary courses, by involving external partners as co-producers of knowledge, and by exploring ways to assess the immediate and longer-term impact of learning outcomes through internal and external peer reviewing.
- One recommendation that is echoed throughout all partner regions is the need for tracer studies on the employability of students and career trajectories, to provide evidence on which to react. They can be supplemented with the establishment of alumni associations for monitoring longer-term outcomes and ensuring peer support.
- Ensure the sustainability of project results by establishing operational structures that sustain industry-HEI cooperation, such as liaison offices, incubators and observatories.



D. THE VERY BROAD THEMES OF INTERNATIONALISATION

All international cooperation projects address the topic of internationalisation in some way or other. International activities leave their trace in national and institutional policies and structures, in curricula, in individual staff and students and in research. However, some past higher education cooperation projects have specifically targeted the internationalisation of study programmes, entire institutions or indeed national policies.

The most frequent achievements of institutional internationalisation were found to be dedicated international offices or departments, the implementation of study credit frameworks such as the European Credit Transfer System, the introduction of tools and processes that are rooted in the Bologna Process², adaptations of the higher education institution mission to include an international perspective, and international staff and student recruitment plans. Beneficiary higher education institutions have also cemented institutional commitment to internationalisation by restructuring their senior management team to include dedicated positions overseeing international affairs.

Internationalisation has also increased the adoption of major international languages, such as English, as the language of study in new programmes or course modules. This increased fluency itself opened many international doors, both physically and often mentally.



Even if internationalisation is not directly specified as the main project objective, it is simply in the nature of cooperation among higher education institutions from different countries. It will impact the international perspective of all partner institutions and so the recommendations below are relevant for all projects.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION LINKING INITIATIVES AND SYNERGIES IN EUROPE AND SOUTH AMERICA (ERASMUS MUNDUS, 2013)

ULISES was a two-year project (2013-2015) which brought together nine partners from four European countries (France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain) and three South American countries (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay). It aimed to contribute to the development of the Common Area of Higher Education of Latin America, Caribbean and European Union (ALCUE).

The project resulted in the following outcomes;

- Improved accreditation mechanisms in the region and bi-regional accreditation schemes;
- Advanced discussions about the impact of the Erasmus Mundus programme in the region and its relation with the mobility schemes operating in the region;
- Contributed to the interdisciplinary policy debate and mutual understanding of its importance among different stakeholders of both regions;

The project involved academic staff, policy makers, decision makers, managers and administrators. The multiplying effects of the project will benefit other stakeholders such as higher education inspectors and advisors, as well as the research and industry community in both regions. It consolidated the long term partnership between the EU and MERCOSUR and promoting joint efforts to generate links between research, higher education institutions and industries in the MERCOSUR sub-region.

² More information on the Bologna Process can be found here: <http://www.ehea.info>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Consider carefully what structures are needed to support the increased international activity at partner institutions. Do they have an international office? Can they accommodate international students? Should a senior higher education institution official be given specific responsibility for international affairs? If such structures and functions exist, do they have the required capacity? Consider how they can be strengthened further.
- Make sure to support the development of language capacity of students and staff, as this is a prerequisite for developing international links.
- Consider the introduction of study credit models, such as those based on or derived from the European Credit Transfer System, to make courses more accessible to international students and more acceptable to foreign higher education institutions.
- Because international students must quickly adapt to different academic and social approaches to teaching and grading, they require a high level of support from international offices, both before arrival (welcome kit, accommodation, visa issues) and during the study programme. Make sure the capacity to give this support exists or is developed.
- Peer learning and study visits for exposure to good practice are valuable tools for capacity-building in internationalisation.
- A clear financial strategy is necessary to promote internationalization. New sources of funding need to be found, that rely not only on the funding of international organisations.



II. TIPS ON PROJECT DESIGN

EU projects are funded on the basis of annual Calls for Proposal which involves an open competition between applicants from all over the world. The process is highly competitive and selective. Only the best-quality proposals are funded.

The success rate varies from action to action, from year to year. Getting involved in EU project management is a risky business. The funding is grant-based, which means that some co-funding from your institution will be necessary. Designing an EU project and writing the proposal is time-consuming and requires an initial investment of the university's resources. Therefore, it is worth getting the basics right before investing heavily in the finer details.

This section will now look at the basic practicalities of project design. Many of the problems that arise in projects could have been avoided if they had been addressed properly at this stage. Here are some quick tips.

In a nutshell, project proposals should answer the following six questions:

A. WHY IS YOUR PROPOSAL IMPORTANT?

A project proposal must present the rationale of the project as clearly as possible. It should be based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the target groups concerned.

B. FOR WHOM IS THE PROPOSAL IMPORTANT?

When drafting a proposal, it is essential to always keep in mind its final beneficiaries and to demonstrate that the activities proposed and the expected final results match their actual needs. This can be supported by a detailed and comprehensive needs analysis and declarations of representatives from these target groups at all stages of the project's implementation.

C. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

A project should have clear objectives and bring about measurable change. A baseline study should be carried out to record the situation before the project begins. A monitoring and final evaluation strategy will ensure that the achievements are measurable and can easily be demonstrated.

D. BY WHOM WILL IT BE IMPLEMENTED?

A project proposal should demonstrate that the applicant organisation and its partners have the capacity and expertise required to reach the objectives and to deliver the expected results. When projects are implemented in cooperation with other organisations, the proposal must demonstrate that the partnership is appropriate in terms of geographical coverage, complementary experience, type of organisations and representation of the target groups. It is strongly recommended in designing new projects, to assign clear roles and responsibilities to each and every partner involved in the project and to develop and agree on a common action plan.

E. WHEN WILL ACTIVITIES HAPPEN?

Depending on the specific action, projects will have a limited duration and applicants must demonstrate that their timetable is realistic and fits the funding period.

F. HOW WILL THESE ACTIVITIES HAPPEN?

Proposals need to include a description of the methodologies that will be used for managing the project and for delivering its outputs. A detailed description of strategies and plans for monitoring, quality assurance, dissemination, impact and sustainability will be crucial, not only for the evaluation of a proposal, but also for its implementation. What will happen after the project is finished and how will you strive to make this happen? It is also critically important to include a plan for promoting the sustainability of results.



III. OTHER FACTORS TO BEAR IN MIND

Once it comes to the stage of actually managing your EU-funded capacity-building project, what are the key things that contribute to its success?

A number of factors have been identified below, with concrete recommendations to help you ensure they are in place before you begin.

- A. APPROPRIATE PROJECT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE
- B. SUPPORT FROM YOUR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
- C. CLEAR CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION
- D. SUITABLE EQUIPMENT
- E. AMBITIOUS DISSEMINATION PLAN
- F. LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY
- G. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS



A. APPROPRIATE PROJECT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Poor project management can impact otherwise well-designed projects negatively. The project management structure should be clearly defined from the word go. Lack of clear decision-making mechanisms between project partners and conflict resolution mechanisms in cases of dispute can lead to project breakdown.

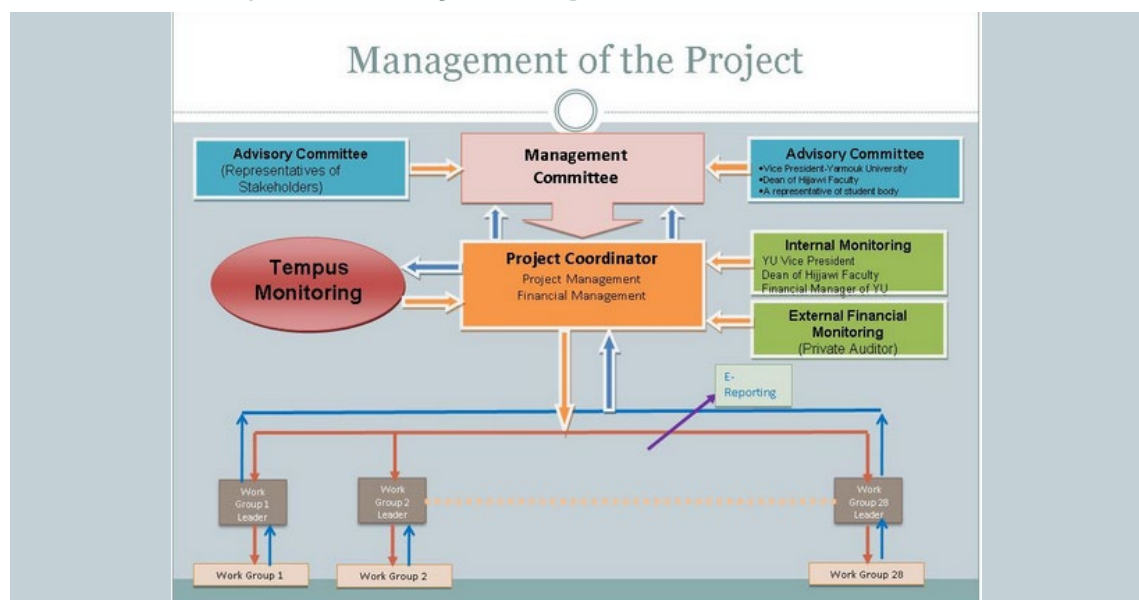
EUROPEAN PROJECT CENTRE, TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF DRESDEN, GERMANY

Capitalising on the experience it has acquired in EU-funded projects, the Technical University of Dresden has created a European Project Centre within the university. This unit offers dedicated support services to staff in the university, who would like to work on EU-funded projects. The team is experienced in European project management. The focus of their work lies on the administrative management of EU funded actions. The team helps find the best-matching funding programmes for staff and open calls for their project ideas and advice on project finances. They ensure that the formal requirements of the funding bodies are met. In addition to individual advice, the European Project Centre also organises events and seminars in which they keep university staff informed about topics related to the programme and about future calls.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Agree on a clear division of responsibilities with the entire project team. Do this before the start of the project.
- One of the partners will act as the project coordinator. It is important, however, that different tasks are assigned to different project partners. Experience has shown that this greatly enhances a shared sense of ownership of the project.
- Ensure that there is a clear internal reporting system which includes all partners, so that problems can be identified and resolved quickly.
- Ensure that there is a democratic decision-making system in place for resolving differences of opinion on how the project should progress. A clear conflict resolution strategy is necessary. It should be agreed in writing by all partners before the project begins.

Technical University Dresden's Project Management Structure



B. SUPPORT FROM YOUR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Lack of support from the higher education institution's management will put the implementation and sustainability of project's results at serious risk. Lack of institutional buy-in has, over the years, proven to be one of the greatest threats to the project's implementation and continuity. Without support from higher education institution management, most projects will come to a grinding halt after the funding period has ended, greatly reducing their impact.

education institution's administration, cuts the project off from other resources and expertise. The project will miss out on an opportunity to significantly broaden the scope of its capacity-building potential throughout the institution.

It is also critically important to involve more than just one higher education institution department. Failing to involve the relevant departments from the higher

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL CHAIR OF INNOVATION (TEMPUS PROGRAMME, 2008)

Hassan II University in Casablanca, Morocco, was interested in developing relations with enterprises to valorise its research and foster innovation. It decided to create a Chair for Innovation at the university. The university's management believed a Chair was the most sustainable structure to valorise research.

The Chair for Innovation is operational. A Call for Applications has been launched to select the director, and the higher education institution has provided the premises and the equipment. Seminars have been organised for professors on how to prepare a patent application, to help them acquire the necessary competences and raise their awareness about the workload it represents.

The Chair for Innovation has led to the introduction of an innovation culture and sent a strong message from the presidency of the university to those who still think that the university should not work with the outside world. Since its establishment, the number of patents submitted by the higher education institution has increased considerably. In 2012, it ranked first among Moroccan higher education institutions in terms of the number of national and international patents registered. Patents are prepared and monitored by a Committee established within the framework of the project, which includes a representative of the National Patent Office. They also put a mechanism in place to ensure that a proportion (initially 70%) of the royalties is channeled to the lab and staff at the origin of the patent. This Chair has thus contributed to a change in mentalities among HEI staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Knowledge of and commitment to the project from the highest authorities in the higher education institution is a precondition for project funding. However, once the project starts, it is necessary to actively involve central management in project activities, to encourage them to take responsibility for project results.
- Use other departments and services in higher education institution to provide expertise. Involve them in the project. Extend the opportunity to them to pick up some of the capacity-development fruits. Think of the international office for logistical support, the central departments for self-evaluation and quality assurance and language departments for language training.
- The support of the relevant finance department is key to the success of the project, as sound financial management is key to successful project implementation.
- The coordinator should also ensure that its higher education institution's rules allow receiving and disbursing amounts in Euro currency and that the EU rules around tendering for equipment can be complied with by the relevant departments in the higher education institution.

C. CLEAR CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Clear communication between project consortium members is the key to a successful project. There are a number of potential obstacles to good communication on any international cooperation project.

The first obstacle may be related to languages. Working with different countries requires working in a language different from your mother tongue. This may entail different challenges since people involved in the project often need to use their second or even third language. It is often the case that nobody on the project will be using their native language. Across all regions, language barriers are some of the most frequently cited problem, both in project management and in internationalising higher education institutions. Supplementary language courses are almost universally met with great enthusiasm and support. However, in reality, it can sometimes be difficult to invest in language learning, given time-consuming project management demands.

Even when a common project language has been mastered by all, cultural differences abound. Working with people from different cultural backgrounds can be enriching. New ideas can bring new solutions to old problems. However, cultural difference can be a challenge. People from different cultures can see the same situation in very different ways. People's expectations of what should happen can vary. Misunderstandings are commonplace and can impact on how project activities are implemented. Extra efforts need to be made to communicate clearly in such a context.

A clear internal communication strategy developed and agreed by all partners is vital. A wide variety of electronic tools facilitate long distance communication from Skype, to video-conferencing to electronic web-portals for sharing project documentation.

AN INDUSTRY-ORIENTED MSc. PROGRAM IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS ENGINEERING (TEMPUS 2010)

The aim of this project was to modernize an existing Master of Science program in wireless communications, to introduce new tracks that meet the needs of local and regional telecommunications industries and provide international recognition for programs in the area of wireless communications.

The project set up a very clear system for intra-project communication. This was even mentioned on the project web-site;

- Communication among the contact persons of the partner institutions will be done mainly through emails, however, phone calls, written correspondences, etc. can also be used.
- All formal correspondence with and within the project shall be documented by the coordinator.

The project created an electronic documentation system with a password protected web-portal that could be accessed by all partners through the project web-site. As was written on the web-site;

All developed material, reports, minutes of meeting, etc. shall be submitted in a timely manner electronically. Signed hardcopies, where required, shall be sent to the coordinator by courier or registered surface mail with proof of receipt as appropriate, for inclusion in the official project filing system.

One of the key factors that made this project a success was the excellent communication between the project partners. Everyone was very clear on what was expected of them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Decide in advance what the common project language will be. Ensure all staff allocated to the project has sufficient language skills. Look into the possibility of providing language courses for them, before the project begins.
- Consider involving central services in project language training. They often have little international exposure and need it most. Their support for the project could be greatly enhanced and they would have a better sense of involvement.
- Strongly consider developing the local capacity to provide language training, rather than providing direct training by international project partners. This will obviously greatly enhance the sustainability and reproducibility of results. It can also generate much local support for the project.
- The best way to overcome intercultural misunderstandings is through 'over-communication'. Take nothing for granted. Question everything, to ensure everyone is on common ground and has the same understanding of the situation before beginning activities. Check the results periodically, to ensure everyone has understood correctly.
- Give participants the space to spend free time together and learn about each other's culture during informal project activities such as coffee-breaks, free evenings and study-visits. The more one understands about a culture, the easier it is to communicate and work with people from that culture.
- Electronic tools such as Skype, video-conferencing and web-portals and Sharepoint systems should be taken advantage of, to ensure smooth communication and reporting throughout the project.

D. SUITABLE EQUIPMENT

The provision (or upgrading) of equipment has always been a greatly appreciated part of EU projects. It can make a significant difference to their success. It has highlighted to higher education institution authorities, the importance of the provision of such equipment, to keep up-to-date with the latest developments in the field. It could be used subsequently to make a case for a different prioritisation of the budget, in future requests for equipment.

However, capacity-building projects can never have equipment upgrading as a project's prime objective.

Equipment purchases have to be relevant for the project and support the development of people and their skills, not just supporting university infrastructure.

The achievements of some past projects have collapsed, the moment project funding ceased because critical equipment servicing and subscriptions could not be maintained. If a project outcome is dependent on project funding for continued operation it cannot be considered sustainable.

IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (TEMPUS PROGRAMME, 2008)

During the project, five higher education institutions in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova were supported to implement a modern curriculum in the area of environmental management, thanks to the supply of equipment such as computers, video projectors, servers, printers etc.

General and ICT equipment was purchased and installed in the target higher education institutions for two purposes: (1) as office equipment in order to facilitate project management and partners' communication as well as for organisational and dissemination activities, where access to the internet was particularly important, and (2) as equipment for the teaching and learning process.

Computers and other ICT equipment were installed in so-called interactive classrooms and available to academic staff and students. In these classrooms, the equipment was used to develop interactive teaching and learning materials and PowerPoint presentations and further development of textbooks. The equipment was also used for video conferences for distance learning for teachers and students and for the preparation of Master dissertations. The improved internet access for all students meant that electronic publications and knowledge databases were more readily available. The use of GIS and GPS technologies in education process enhanced the scientific work of academic staff and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Discuss thoroughly what equipment is needed to ensure that the project outcomes can be met.
- Before purchasing the equipment, make sure the continued maintenance and insurance can be funded after the cessation of the project.
- When writing equipment purchases into a project proposal, ensure that the logistics of transportation and customs paperwork and additional taxes can all be completed within the project's timeframe.
- Decide who will benefit most from using the equipment and ensure they have access to it. A balance needs to be struck between allowing access to the greatest number of people, without leading to excessive wear and tear that will prevent those who need it most from using it in the long term.
- Find ways to ensure the equipment stays in the higher education institution and does not 'disappear' after the project ends.



E. AMBITIOUS DISSEMINATION PLANS

While the total number of higher education institutions that have been involved in EU-funded capacity-building projects is significant over time, most projects are carried out within individual departments and faculties. Coverage of the project thus remains modest. It is self-evident that local projects that remain isolated do not benefit the broader higher education environment of an institution or a country. Raising awareness and disseminating results is extremely important. However, finding ways to disseminate project results to a broader audience and mainstream achievements has always been a challenge. After two and a half decades of success stories and less successful efforts, the conclusion must be that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to effective dissemination.

Obligatory involvement of the higher education institution's management in departmental projects

worked in some scenarios. Parallel projects with one leg focusing on innovation at departmental level and another leg focusing on the policy requirements for these innovations to set root in a whole system, worked in other scenarios.

In many countries, curricula for instance must prove their worth for an extended period of time before they can be considered for national approval and replication elsewhere. During this period, which often extends beyond the duration of a project, it is of paramount importance to disseminate information about the benefits of new curricula or programmes to stakeholders and prospective students. Active student recruitment can be the best promotion.

MASTER PROGRAMME ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY (EDULINK PROGRAMME, 2013)

Building an engineering Master programme on energy efficiency in the EU and four African higher education institutions was the aim of PEESA, an EDU-link curriculum project that involved technical higher education institutions from Germany, Namibia and South Africa. The programme included an online 'train the trainer' component, to prepare future teachers. This proved to be a very valuable means of dissemination of the project and reached many hundreds of teachers in these countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- For projects to benefit more than a small local community, such as a department or a faculty, it is important that they reach out beyond their own self-imposed boundaries. Results must be shared with colleagues.
- If the project's objectives include policy or legislative changes, the project must reach out to policy makers and influence them with its results.
- Collect evidence of spin-off effects. Explore ways to evaluate and record these. Build this into project proposals. Post-project tracer studies that look at changes to the higher education institution culture or the future careers of involved staff and students are one option.
- Higher education institutions should develop clear visibility and promotion plans in order to secure the enrolment of future students in their newly developed study programmes, to gather support from the required authorities and other stakeholders.



F. REALISTIC SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

One of the aims of capacity-building is to bring about change. A project whose results dissipate as soon as funding stops is normally a failed project, however useful it may have been while it lasted.

However, projects also take place in a sea of change. The policies and international strategies of higher education institutions change. In times of financial crisis, mergers of universities are in vogue. Staff moves on to other higher education institutions. Experience has shown that if the project has been a 'one-man show' and has not been embedded in some way in the higher education institution, it will not survive these changes.

One of the most proven means of ensuring sustainability of newly developed Bachelor and Master Degrees has been ensuring their recognition. This can often depend

on the number of students enrolled and the success of the project on the labour market. Support from those in positions of power to influence others in the higher education institution can also significantly contribute to sustainability. If a project leaves a physical infrastructure in its wake, such as a new centre or office, this can also considerably contribute to sustainability.

Even the best project results can be difficult to mainstream or even simply get recognised nationally. Sometimes, unclear and changing legislation thwarts projects. However, what appears to be important is the extent to which existing legislation may, or may not, be stretched to accommodate positive project results. As such, the elasticity of legislation is often a much better indicator of sustainability than the actual legislation itself.

ADVANCED MSC PROGRAMME IN ECOLOGY FOR VOLGA-CASPIAN BASIN (TEMPUS PROGRAMME, 2009)

Through a 2009 Joint Project, EU higher education institutions helped a group of Russian technical higher education institutions in the Volga basin to develop a two-year advanced MSc programme in ecology and nature management. The group of higher education institutions from Samara, Saratov, Volgograd, Astrakhan and Kazan successfully applied for a license from the Ministry of Science and Education of the Russian Federation, so the diploma is now nationally recognised.

All the involved higher education institutions were successful in achieving the second important project objective: the establishment of centres of professional competences in the fields of environmental safety. The work of these centres is based on capacity development activities in ecology, environmental and quality management and cooperation with employers to ensure that student competences are in line with labour market needs and, therefore, increase the employability of graduates. They have ensured the sustainability of the project.

An important project spin-off was that Astrakhan State Technical Higher education institution together with its chamber of commerce established a Research and Educational Centre of Professional Competence. It develops and implements short training programmes for employees of enterprises. These centres have helped make the project sustainable.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Sustainability measures should not be an afterthought. Sustainability should be considered right from the beginning of a project's design. Long-term benefits cannot always be foreseen, but just as with start-up companies, a 'business plan' should detail the long-term prospects. How will the activities be sustained financially after the project ends? Who will staff the new centres and offices set up under the project?
- The feasibility of the project's objectives from a legal point of view should be tested before embarking on the project. If there are insurmountable legal barriers, starting or even designing the project is a waste of time and money.
- Careful consideration needs to be given to the timing of sustainability measures on the project. If a project foresees a new curriculum, the accreditation of this curriculum must be sought before the project ends. If a project seeks to establish a new Chair or unit, finding continued funding for this Chair or unit must be a key element of the project proposal and achieved in a timely manner.
- Recognition of a degree and robust student enrolment are some of the best indicators of potential sustainability or curriculum development projects. Focus on these.
- All the project stakeholders, from partner institutions and organisations, to supervising authorities, to donors, need to devote appropriate attention to the sustainability of the projects' results and outcomes.
- Consider signing memoranda of understanding with foreign partner higher education institutions to continue project cooperation after the project ends.

G. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

A certain level of autonomy is necessary for capacity-building projects to be implanted in higher education institutions and to be a success. However, higher education institution and faculty autonomy is a hot issue in many countries. Some lack it. Excessive centralisation seems to feed a vicious circle. A lack of autonomy does not encourage capacity building in responsiveness, innovative practice and accountability.

When a certain level of autonomy is given, always strive for excellence. You must be able to prove your success

and be accountable for it. Quality assurance is a major tool for accountability and it is a popular theme in capacity-building projects at institutional and national level. There is always room for improvement!

Quality Assurance mechanisms must also be built into the project management framework to ensure that obstacles can be identified and overcome early on in the project and mistakes don't repeat themselves and bring the project down with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

- Greater accountability can be achieved through the introduction of comprehensive systems for monitoring quality and better data collection through external and internal evaluation. Try to involve the full range of stakeholders in quality control, including authorities, industry and labour market partners.
- The employability and career advancements of graduates can be used as a robust indicator of the quality of learning at higher education institutions. This could also be one of the key performance indicators for national planning, supplementing output statistics as data sources about the quality and relevance of learning.
- Consider, for the same reason, capacity-building among education authorities who need to learn to implement external quality monitoring systems.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this brochure has given you an insight into the EU's objectives and approaches in capacity-building in higher education. We hope it inspires you with ideas and that the recommendations will be helpful for designing and implementing your project.

Past experience has also shown that for some projects, the most significant impact can be surprisingly different from the original objectives. Capacity developed among people or links forged with overseas higher education institutions may eventually leave a much more profound impact on a higher education institution than the one or two curricula that were developed. This is no lucky coincidence but a broadly recognised characteristic of EU external support to higher education and indeed one of its greatest long-term successes.

Programme evaluations going back more than a decade also show that many individuals who have benefitted from capacity-building through EU projects, move up the academic ladders or even entered the political arena, with the help of newly acquired skills and networks. Hopefully, these activities will benefit you in your career too.

The Erasmus+ programme offers a number of opportunities in the field of capacity-building. If you have been inspired by this publication, we encourage you to delve deeper into the Erasmus+ Programme Guide, which provides detailed information on actions such as Capacity-building in Higher Education, Knowledge Alliances, Sector Skills Alliances, Jean Monnet and Joint Master Degrees, which might be of interest to your higher education institution. The EU looks forward to working with you!



FURTHER READING

Erasmus+ Guide for Applicants - Guide for Applicants (Programme Guide):

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-b/three-key-actions/key-action-2/capacity-building-field-higher-education_en

EU Funding opportunities for capacity-building in higher education projects:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/key-action-2-cooperation-for-innovation-and-exchange-good-practices/capacity-0_en

HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

Free publications:

- one copy:
via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>);
- more than one copy or posters/maps:
from the European Union's representations (http://ec.europa.eu/represent_en.htm);
from the delegations in non-EU countries (http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm);
by contacting the Europe Direct service (http://europa.eu/eurodirect/index_en.htm) or
calling 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (freephone number from anywhere in the EU) (*).

(* The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

Priced publications:

- via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>).

Priced subscriptions:

- via one of the sales agents of the Publications Office of the European Union (http://publications.europa.eu/others/agents/index_en.htm).

Erasmus+ :

Capacity Building in Higher Education

EU Support to Higher Education Institutions Around the World

The aim of this brochure is to introduce those who are new to working with European Union funding, to the philosophy of Erasmus+ 'capacity-building in higher education' projects. European Union experience of working on these types of projects will be shared. Examples of existing projects are scattered throughout the text to inspire you with good project ideas. Lessons have been learned from past experience and this brochure gives concrete recommendations to help make your projects an even bigger success.

The first section outlines some broad thematic areas that it is possible to work on in this field. It shares past experience from working on these in, the framework of previously funded capacity-building programmes and makes concrete recommendations in each area to help you avoid old pit-falls. The second section gives you some practical tips for designing your project. The last section focuses on aspects that will give your capacity-building project added value in the EU's eyes (and therefore more likely to win funding) and be successful.

Contact us

For more information please consult our website

www.eacea.ec.europa.eu

eacea-info@ec.europa.eu

