

LLP Skills Mobility Workshop
17th November 2011, 2-4 pm
Facilitated by Elva Duggan & Bridget Kelly

The workshop began with a brief explanation of the planned activities from the facilitators. All participants then introduced themselves to the group, giving their names, organisations and previous experience of mobility projects.

The first activity involved the participants splitting into three groups and discussing what the word 'mobility' meant to them. One member of each group then presented their results. The thoughts of each group were written on post-it notes, and eventually synthesised into three main categories:

Intercultural experience: Culture, language, sense of European identity, comparison of other countries, new ideas.

Personal attributes: Self-motivation, experience, confidence, friendship, fear, excitement, support, autonomy, listening, responsibility for own learning, social skills, observation.

Work abilities: Communication, ICT, organisational, managerial, CV enhancement.

This icebreaker worked well to get the participants exchanging ideas, and brought into focus the subject of mobility skills. It also emphasised peer learning, which was one of the overall objectives of the workshop.

The participants remained in their groups for the main activity of the day, which was to discuss three different areas of mobility projects:

The X-Factor: What makes a mobility project special?

The T-shirt: When a participant goes on a mobility project, what (skills, experience, results) do they bring back besides a t-shirt from the country visited?

Road Bumps: What obstacles or problems can prevent a mobility project from running smoothly? What solutions can be suggested?

Each table was designated for discussion of a particular topic and was marked with a relevant picture (an x, a t-shirt, a winding road). The groups moved from table to table in 'relay' style when instructed, and discussed a new topic. The pictures helped to remind them quickly of which topic was under discussion at each table, and focus attention on that issue. One 'anchor' person in each group stayed behind at the table to pass on the thoughts of the previous group, which worked well in most cases. The participants remained active and involved throughout the discussions and took the opportunity to share relevant personal experiences. The small groups of 4-5 people meant that all participants had the chance to contribute.

After almost an hour of discussion, each table synthesised the thoughts about their particular subject and the 'anchor' person presented these to the main group.

The X-Factor

The group identified several aspects which lead to successful projects:

1. Establishment of a good relationship with the host partner. In addition to making administration of the project easier, a fully committed partner will go the extra mile in

organising a high quality work programme and cultural activities. These add value to the placement period and enhance the participants' experience.

2. Establishment of a project management system with relevant checklists. These make the duties and responsibilities of all stakeholders clear, and lead to smoother administration.
3. Eagerness to learn from all involved. This leads to a positive attitude to the project.
4. Selection of a duration and timing for the placement period which is fitting to the needs of participants.
5. Adequate funding for the project. Participants may feel negatively towards projects which operate with the bare minimum of funding, perceiving them as 'scrimping and saving'.
6. The use of journals and other reflective methods. These encourage participants to really evaluate the personal impact of the mobility project on them.
7. Adequate cultural and linguistic preparation. These assist participants in making the most of their time abroad and truly interacting with the host country.
8. Formal recognition of the preparation as well as the placement period where possible. For example, participants undertaking FETAC courses can complete their mobility preparation as part of the FETAC Level 5 Transnational Experience Module or FETAC Level 4 Cultural Studies Module.

The T-Shirt

The group produced a list of specific benefits a mobility project can bring to the participant, the sending organisation and the wider community.

Benefits to the participant:

1. Intercultural experience through exposure to another country
2. Increased self-confidence, maturity and motivation through living and working independently
3. Development of language skills
4. Increased employability and enhanced CV
5. Formal recognition of the training period e.g. through Europass, FETAC certification
6. Development of interpersonal and social skills, and formation of friendships with those in the participant group as well as in the host country

Benefits to the sending organisation:

1. Development of organisational, communication and time management skills through administration of the programme
2. Establishing relationships with the partner organisations and the National Agency develops capacity for co-operation and collaboration with similar agencies and organisations
3. Participation in a project enhances the PR profile of the sending organisation

Benefits to the wider community:

1. The experience gained on a mobility project will be spread by the participants and staff involved to their own network of family and friends, as well as to fellow professionals

The Road Bumps

The group identified several potential 'bumps' and outlined suggested solutions.

Bump:

Participants' expectations not met

Solutions:

1. Increase level of preparation and research so that participants are aware of what to expect. This can be done using the internet and doesn't have to involve large costs.

2. Provide participants with a clear outline of the duties involved during the mobility placement, and a job description if applicable, prior to the mobility period
3. Manage participants' expectations throughout the preparation period so they don't develop unrealistic ideas of what they will experience

Bump:

Lack of commitment from partner organisations

Solutions:

1. Formalise understanding of the role and responsibilities of each partner in writing
2. Build on the relationship with the partner by maintaining contact throughout the project's life cycle, rather than just during the set-up and placement periods

Bump:

Bad behaviour/lack of commitment from participants during placement

Solutions:

1. Draw up a Code of Conduct outlining the responsibilities of participants which they must sign before departure
2. Ensure that the work programme is very full and that some night time activities are arranged. Keeping the participants busy helps to prevent bad behaviour.

Bump:

Lack of commitment from participants in submitting reports

Solutions:

1. Payment of the final 20% of the bursary can be withheld from the participant until they have submitted all the required reports.

Bump:

Difficulty of negotiating administration / red tape involved in the project

Solutions:

1. Contact Léargas staff, who can provide guidance on these issues

Bump:

Emergency situations occurring, especially during the placement period

Solutions:

1. Establish a crisis management plan in the planning stages, and ensure all partners are clear on the course of action

Bump:

Participants become ill during the placement period

Solutions:

1. Ensure all participants have their European Health Insurance Card (formerly known as E111) and health insurance prior to travel.
2. If necessary, require all participants to submit a doctor's health certificate prior to travel so that organisers are aware of any medical issues

Bump:

Participants become homesick during the placement period

Solutions:

1. Ensure all participants have access to friends and family through Skype, Facebook, text messaging etc and encourage them to make use of these facilities

Bump:

Bad weather occurs during placement

Solutions:

1. Research the likely weather conditions during the placement and advise all participants well in advance so that they bring the correct clothing

The thoughts of all the groups were written on post-it notes and placed on a cut-out of an astronaut, representing the adventurous spirit of mobility. This was used to relate the thoughts of the group to the rest of the conference attendees at the wrap-up session.