Quick guide for schools #3

After: building on achievements

This factsheet describes how you can enhance your project's impact after all activities have been completed, in order to bring about lasting benefits to your school and your partners.

A practical guide for school leaders

Erasmus+

Building on achievements

Recognising achievements

This is the time to ensure that school staff and pupils get the recognition they deserve for their achievements during your project. Usually, formal recognition of what participants have achieved will have already taken place by now.

Recognition may be given by issuing a Europass mobility certificate at the end of the experience. In every country (EU and European Economic Area), a National Europass Centre coordinates all activities related to the Europass documents. It is the first point of contact for any person or organisation interested in using or learning more about Europass (for more information, visit the Europass website: http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu).

Recognition may also be given by awarding certificates of achievement. These can be produced by the organising school. Certificates normally include the participant's name, the dates of the activity, your project title, organisational logos, the Erasmus+ logo and a list of learning outcomes achieved.

You could enhance recognition by linking it to dissemination activities. For example, you could ask a high profile community figure, such as the town mayor, to present certificates at a celebratory event attended by journalists.

Alternatively, a specific national method of recognising achievements may have been agreed. For example, if your school was involved in a Staff Mobility (Key Action 1) project, the sending and receiving organisations should have agreed how the mobility would be recognised or accredited as some countries have national or regional procedures to award credits for professional development activities. If so, your school would need to seek guidance from the relevant national or regional authority.

In focus
Validation and accreditation essentials

To recognise the value of mobility, it is important to take steps to ensure the validation and recognition of learning, i.e. to demonstrate any new knowledge, skills or qualifications gained by participants as a result of their time abroad.

If participants took part in a structured course, ask the course provider to issue a Certificate of Attendance containing all the necessary information about the content and duration of the activity.

If participants undertook a learning activity or teaching assignment in a host organisation, it is good practice to provide the host with a validation record to sign, containing:

- the Erasmus+ logo, the participating organisations' logos or your project logo (if applicable);

- the title of your project;

- the name of the participant;

- the location of the training or activity;

- the dates of the training or activities;

- the number of hours involved;

- the signatures of the organiser or the training leader.

A transcript of outcomes should also be attached to show what participants have learned.

We encourage the use of Europass to validate participants' experiences. For more information, visit: https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu

The final evaluation

After your project, you are in a position to review the successes and challenges your school has experienced and identify lessons for future Erasmus+ activities.

When you conduct the final evaluation, you will want to understand the impact of the European project on your school and all those involved against your original objectives. So if, for example, you aimed to increase the number of pupils and school staff involved in international cooperation, you would want to know the number of pupils and staff involved in cooperation activities before your project started and compare it with the number involved after it ended.

The process should be straightforward, provided the evaluation data was carefully planned and collected over the course of your project. It is important to emphasise that the success of the final evaluation is mainly determined before and during your project, when the evaluation is designed and implemented.

The scope of the final evaluation will depend on the nature and size of your project. For example, a small project involving only two schools might conduct a simple self-evaluation.

Meanwhile a large partnership involving schools, libraries, museums, science centres and universities may wish to appoint an external organisation (from a university or consultancy, for example) to evaluate the diverse spectrum of outcomes associated with more complex projects.

Remember, if you can include Erasmus+ monitoring and evaluation within your school's existing performance management practices, it will be much easier to measure the programme's contribution to the whole school's objectives.

In focus
What to evaluate after your project is completed?

A healthy evaluation should identify the outcomes of your project in the following key areas:

Performance against objectives

- Which objectives were achieved?

- Which objectives were not achieved or partially achieved, and why?

It is important to cover not only organisational objectives, but also any objectives linked to the Erasmus+ priorities specified in your application.

The impact of your project

What did people/organisations involved learn from your project? Try to cover all direct and indirect beneficiaries and organisations:

- Pupils;

- School staff;

- Your school;

- Stakeholders;

- Partner organisations.

Can you identify change (e.g. in the community, for individuals, in behaviour, in attitudes, opinions, etc.) as a result of your project? If so, what are the changes?

Successes, barriers and possible improvement

- What worked well during your project?

- What did not work so well?

- What were the main drivers for success?

- What were the main barriers to success?

- What were the key learning points?

- What could be improved in future Erasmus+ projects?

Long-term impact

- Have any specific changes been made in your school as a result of your project (new teaching or management practices, for example)?

- What have you done to ensure long-term impact (publishing new curricula online, running internal training sessions for non-participating staff, publicising and distributing research findings, etc.)?

- What, if any, follow-up activities are planned (perhaps European opportunities will be extended to more pupils, or perhaps you intend to follow up with a larger scale project)?

Try to incorporate the outcomes of your evaluation into your dissemination activities by considering opportunities for sharing your evaluation results as widely as possible.

' At the end of the project outcomes were reported to colleagues and staff at school: having in place a permanent self-evaluation questionnaire was helpful in this process.'

Annemie Lauryssens, School International Relations Coordinator, Belgium

Reporting

All funded projects need to report on their activities. The plans for project reporting should have been discussed and agreed before your project and refined during its implementation.

Interim or monitoring reports should have been built into your project timeline at key points e.g. after attendance at a specific course, teaching assignment or job shadowing (if engaging in a Key Action 1 project) or after activities, events or meetings (if engaging in a Key Action 2 project). Content from the interim reports will be incorporated into the final report.

The main coordinator is responsible for submitting the final report. However, asking project participants to contribute to the reporting process develops a sense of joint ownership of this important requirement. All contributors should have been identified at the start of the project.

There are some specific reporting requirements for all Staff Mobility (Key Action 1) participants as well as for those taking part in long-term mobility activities in Strategic Partnerships (Key Action 2). They are required to complete and submit a participant report at the end of the period abroad, which will contribute to your project's final report.

It is important to familiarise yourselves with the requirements of the Grant Agreement that was signed at the start of your project. Also, remember that if the final report shows that your project has been poorly implemented, or that agreed activities have not been carried out, your school may have to partially reimburse the EU grant.

Suggestion
Report writing essentials

Be comprehensive

If you have not managed to deliver all of the activities or products you specified in your application, or if certain activities or products have only been partially completed or developed, it is important to make this clear. The best strategy, in this case, is to justify why this was and, where possible, to describe how you compensated for the shortfall in other ways.

Be structured, clear, and understandable

Evaluators are only human and may misinterpret aspects of your report or undervalue your achievements if information is not clearly presented and well structured. Careful preparation and editing will save you from having to provide clarifications and help those assessing your application get a correct picture of your project.

Be balanced

Try not to shy away from presenting aspects of your project that did not go according to plan. The assessors will not look favourably on a final report that reads like a marketing brochure, containing nothing but success stories. They will want to see how you responded to and learned from the inevitable challenges that arise when delivering international projects.

Refer back to your funding application

Your project is assessed based on what was promised in your application for funding. Therefore your report should explicitly address what was promised in your application and explain and justify any deviations.

Demonstrate the benefits of European collaboration

The assessors will want to see evidence that all the partners contributed to your project proportionately. They will also be assessing whether your project effectively exploited the benefits of working internationally. Try to demonstrate the extent to which your project achieved more than would have been possible had you been collaborating only with organisations in your country.

Provide documentary evidence

You will not have to submit detailed financial reporting. However, you must prove that the activities have taken place. If your expenditure is more than the grant, your organisation will be responsible for the additional amount. Bear in mind that the unit costs are designed to cover a large part, but not the entire cost, of your project.

Dissemination and exploitation activities after your project is completed

Dissemination is something that takes places throughout your project and not only at the end. However, at the end of the project, dissemination is especially important since you will have complete information about the outcomes of your project, including:

- the total number of pupils and staff who benefitted;

- participants' feedback;

- links established with partner and stakeholder organisations;

- new products and curricula developed;

- recommendations for practitioners.

These tangible results form the basis for the most compelling communication and dissemination materials, particularly if you have collected testimonials, photos, videos and case studies to help you tell your story.

At this stage, you should re-visit the dissemination plan you designed before your project and implement the activities you specified. There may be other ad hoc publicity opportunities (an unforeseen exhibition or conference, for example), so do pursue these too.

In focus

Examples of dissemination activities after your project is complete

- A school exhibition, hosted by the participants to showcase their work to teachers, pupils, parents, journalists and staff from local schools.

- A promotional video or photo slideshow to show the unique benefits of working at your school, arising from your involvement in Erasmus+.

- An invitation to a local education correspondent to run a feature on your school's European projects – complete with participant interviews and photos.

- Uploading your project's products (curricula, research reports, etc.) to the Erasmus+ dissemination platform.

Bear in mind that other schools and stakeholders are as interested in the process that led to the learning outcomes as in the results themselves. For example, they not only want to learn about what was achieved, but would also like to know about the key things that enabled your school to achieve what you did.

The Erasmus+ Programme Guide also refers to exploitation. This means ensuring that the positive outcomes of your project are extended to as many potential beneficiaries as possible, long into the future. Your reports, presentations and other dissemination activities may need to be tailored for different audiences so that learning can be transferred to new areas within and beyond your school to influence future projects, practice or policy.

For example, you may disseminate different learning messages to teachers, pupils, parents, other school leaders, policymakers, community members, local businesses, museums, libraries and universities.

In all dissemination activities you have an obligation to acknowledge the support received from the EU by including the official Erasmus+ logo and graphic identity. More information about this can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/communication/services/visual_identity/

A dissemination platform for Erasmus+ projects

A new dissemination platform has been established for Erasmus+:
http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/

 It is designed to be used:

- as an information tool for the public to provide relevant and interesting content;

- as a database of all funded projects (project summaries, work in progress, links);

- as a repository of all project products, for the benefit of schools and other organisations across Europe;

- as a space to showcase exemplary practice by Erasmus+ projects (selected every year at national and European level).

Preparing for future Erasmus+ projects

Now that you have completed your project, re-visit your school's development plan or your European Development Plan and think through how you can ensure that recommendations and lessons learned are implemented, sustained and shared as widely as possible.

One effective way to do this is to regularly monitor and evaluate the extent to which outcomes and lessons from your project are sustained and acted upon, as part of your school's strategic planning activities.

Some schools even appoint a team member who is responsible for ensuring that new ideas and working methods are implemented, and to maintain relations with European partners.

An advantage of using eTwinning to communicate with partners during your project is that you can retain your online space for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, well beyond the life of the funded project.

Now is a good time to reflect on how you might expand your ambitions concerning support from Erasmus+. You may choose to develop a new funded project in relation to another area of school development or expand your networks within the same area of development through eTwinning.

❛ Since all partners made good friends during the project years, the connections are well maintained. Project leaders keep in contact and send their greetings frequently. Plans to organise school visits during the spring break are already being written.'

Krista Kuusk, Project Coordinator, Estonia

In focus
Some possible directions for new projects

Think about how you could develop follow-up Erasmus+ projects or activities to:

- develop new curricula or revise existing teaching materials;

- implement changes to organisational practices;

- extend participation in Erasmus+ to more staff and more departments or subjects;

- experiment with different kinds of activities (e.g. trying Strategic Partnerships or staff mobility after experiencing eTwinning);

- work with different countries/kinds of partner (e.g. schools, businesses, museums, libraries).