

Model for Core Curriculum with Integrated Mobility Abroad: a Practical Guide to Designing Degree Programmes



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Introduction

- Purpose is to provide practical advice about designing a degree programme whose core curriculum integrates a period of trans-national mobility
- The Guide is still in draft form: how can it be improved and made more fit for purpose? Is there:
 - ▶ anything omitted that should be included?
 - ▶ anything included that should be omitted?
 - ▶ anything that is unclear or not clear enough?

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Why mobility?

- Fostering personal and professional development
- Enhancing employability in a global environment
- Meeting the needs of the global labour market
- Promoting global citizenship
- Creating opportunities for beneficial learning experiences, both planned and unplanned
- Increasing the pleasure and satisfaction of learning
- Other reasons...?

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1. Identifying what is required

- Importance of comparability for recognition
- Secured by the use of common reference points: e.g. *Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA*, national and sectoral qualifications frameworks, the Tuning Project and Socrates Thematic Networks
- Importance of carrying out a needs analysis and involving relevant stakeholders

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2. Profiles of degree programmes

- Profile should inform potential employers about the skills and competences that the institution plans to foster
- Mobility should become a standard element of the degree profile
- Refer to the “Dublin Descriptors”/*Framework for Qualifications*:
 - ▶ Knowledge and understanding
 - ▶ Applying knowledge and understanding
 - ▶ Making judgements
 - ▶ Communication
 - ▶ Learning skills
- Use section 4.2. of the Diploma Supplement to inform employers
- Draft the profile statement at an early stage and revise later

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3. Quality and quality processes

Quality tools

- ensure that programme meets needs of students and other stakeholders and provides effective ways of learning
- monitor and measure the quality of learning and provide evidence to demonstrate accountability and on which to base judgements that enhance learning
- include checklists, evaluations, questionnaires and focus groups
- measure both qualitative and quantitative data
- applied by both internal and external bodies

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Quality Culture

- Sources of guidance include the *European Standards and Guidelines*
- Developers should agree and express the values and principles that signal their commitment to quality and create a foundation for a “quality culture” (EUA)
- Quality as a shared value and collective responsibility rather than a top-down managerial process relying on control and inspection
- Internal quality processes provide an essential counter balance to the requirements of external accountability

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External quality processes

- Professional bodies add value by offering accreditation or quality branding and may provide a useful external view of the partnership or network
- *European Quality Charter for Mobility* - key reference document for education and training stays abroad
- Sets out ten principles designed to ensure a positive mobility experience
- Meeting the quality challenge of developing a programme with integrated mobility that adds value, meets the needs of stakeholders and reflects student diversity, demands creativity and innovation

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4. Planning a study programme with integrated mobility

- Starting point is the institution's strategic plan
- Curriculum design needs to adopt the new Bologna learner-centred, competence-based approach and to cater for the student's personal and professional development
- Its interconnected units should form a continuum
- How far will the programme be based on re-designed existing modules?
- How far on new, specifically designed modules?
- Balance between obligatory core and optional modules?
- Allocation of credits across all the components?

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Questions relating to integrated mobility period

- How are students prepared for study abroad period?
- Who gives counselling on academic and practical issues?
- Who is in charge of contacts with each partner?
- Who is responsible for accepting the learning agreement before mobility and for giving academic recognition thereafter?
- Is mobility always a study period or can it also be a practical placement in a company? Learning outcomes likely to be different and will need careful consideration

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Co-operation with stakeholders

- Identify and consult stakeholders at start and throughout to get feedback on the programme's competence profile:
 - ▶ National ministry and accreditation agency
 - ▶ Current students and graduates
 - ▶ Employers, trade unions and professional bodies
 - ▶ Other social partners and parents
- Co-operation ensures the programme is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the labour market
- Stakeholders can also help define the programme's learning outcomes, assure quality and ensure professional recognition

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Success factors?

- Are they the same as for traditional programmes?
- Do institution and its staff already have a culture that values mobility?

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Programme	Institutional	External
Committed staff recognising value of mobility	Vision and mission Realistic efforts for implementation	General values and attitudes of society
Transparent information on curricula and mobility periods	Level of internationalisation Supportive structures Favourable general framework for recognition	Labour market – demand for generic competences developed during mobility
Student selection and proper guidance by academic staff	Tradition of study process support (admin framework in which programme is placed)	Availability of mobility grants and loans at national level
Competent use of facilities/ structures/opportunities for general preparation of students	Student support and counselling services	
Realistic and functioning schemes for financial support		
Support for dealing with mobility period anxieties		
Proper marketing strategies and tools. Student motivation		
Monitoring and evaluation of the programme that leads to adjustment and improvement		

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Issues for consideration

- If the competences acquired during mobility period are not used by employers, students may need persuading that such programmes give them added value
- Programme will not succeed unless the institution translates its fine words into consistent actions
- Requires a high level of commitment from teaching staff: capacity to communicate with partners from different academic cultures and respect for such differences; staff with first hand experience of mobility are well placed to recognise and meet the needs of the mobile student

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Partnership models

- Closed:
 - ▶ relies on well-established partnerships
 - ▶ mutual knowledge and experience facilitates programme administration and offers possibility of assessment at either the host or home institution
- Open:
 - ▶ any institution offering relevant modules is a potential partner
 - ▶ students can shop around
 - ▶ administration is more burdensome
- Both models require some procedures to be addressed at the planning stage:
 - ▶ language policy, division of responsibilities, institutional support

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Creating and maintaining a partnership

- Number, location, capacity and language of partners?
- How many students should be mobile at the one time?
- Benefits of co-operation for the partners?
- Academic profile and quality of potential partners, including their student support services?
- Adequacy of their resources and facilities?
- National HE system and degree structure?
- Communication issues within and between partners?
- Negotiation of detailed co-operation agreement
- Create a structured project and seek Erasmus funding

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Aims of the mobility experience

1. Enhancing learners' knowledge and understanding of their discipline by exposing them to a different system of learning and teaching
2. Fostering learners' awareness of the international dimension of knowledge
3. Giving learners access to techniques, equipment, technologies, expertise and resources other than those that are available in their home institution
4. Improving learners' competence in a second language
5. Providing an effective context for the development of learners' capacities for critical reflection and self-directed learning
6. Encouraging learners to become more resourceful, adaptable and self-confident
7. Developing learners' awareness of and respect for cultural diversity
8. Preparing learners to work successfully in novel situations and adapt their practice to take account of different social and cultural circumstances

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5. Learning outcomes

'By the end of the module, learners will be expected to be able to:

- 1. describe and explain how their knowledge and understanding of their discipline has been enhanced by their experience of studying in a different learning and teaching environment (aims 1,2 and 5)*
- 2. demonstrate improvement in their second language competence (aim 4)*
- 3. reflect critically on how their mobility experience has prepared them to work successfully in novel situations and to adapt their practice to take account of different social and cultural circumstances (aims 5,7 and 8)*

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Two aims only indirectly translatable (i)

- 3. 'giving learners access to techniques, equipment, technologies, expertise and resources other than those that are available in their home institution'*
 - about access to a new learning experience, not what the student actually learns from it
 - demonstrated by satisfactory completion of the other modules studied in the host institution
 - but could be reflected in learning outcome 1

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Two aims only indirectly translatable (ii)

6. 'encouraging learners to become more resourceful, adaptable and self-confident'
 - these desirable personal attributes are likely to be enhanced by a successful mobility experience
 - but hard to devise a valid and reliable way of directly assessing whether their development has taken place
 - as this development cannot be readily measured and assessed, aim 6 is not translated into a learning outcome
 - but there may be evidence of its achievement in learning outcome 3

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Achievement of the learning outcomes might be demonstrated by:

1. Writing up a **case study** or preparing and delivering an **oral presentation** that (a) describes and explains one particular feature of the way in which the learner's discipline is taught and/or applied in the host country that differs from the practice in the learner's home country and (b) evaluates the relative effectiveness of that feature.
 - ▶ Learning outcome 1
2. Keeping a **reflective diary** that (a) records week by week how the learner has responded to the challenges and opportunities of living and studying in the host country and institution and (b) sums up the learner's conclusions about the personal and professional value of the experience.
 - ▶ Learning outcome 3

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Learning outcome 2 - 'demonstrate improvement in their second language competence' - could be assessed:

- directly
 - ▶ testing learner before and after the mobility experience
 - ▶ requiring case study to be written in second language
- indirectly (where the language of instruction in the host country is the learner's second language) by their performance in the course.

NB Learners should be clear what learning outcomes a particular task is designed to assess so they know exactly what they have to demonstrate

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Assessment criteria

- describe what learners must do to satisfactorily perform the tasks that demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes: i.e. they specify how these tasks will be assessed
- are usually described in terms of 'threshold' standards: i.e. the minimum level of performance that will be judged to have demonstrated satisfactory achievement of the learning outcomes

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Assessment criteria for the case study

'The learner will demonstrate achievement of learning outcome 1 by being able to:

- *choose an apt feature to exemplify the difference in practice between the learner's host and home countries;*
- *provide a clear description of the feature chosen;*
- *give a cogent explanation of the reasons for the difference;*
- *make a reasoned evaluation of the feature's relative effectiveness (e.g. use of evidence, development of argument, formulation of conclusions).'*

- In the case of an oral presentation there may be additional criteria relating to the effectiveness of the delivery or the ability to answer questions

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Assessment criteria for the reflective diary

'The learner will demonstrate achievement of learning outcome 2 by being able to:

- *provide a clear description and analysis of the challenges and opportunities encountered;*
- *analyse and evaluate their own responses in a critical way;*
- *explain what they have learned from the experience about themselves and their host culture;*
- *summarise the personal and personal and professional value of the experience.'*

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6. Developing the core curriculum

- Mode of study: depends on the type of student, staff and other resources, who delivers the programme and whether the students receive a joint or double degree
- Programme structure: decide key elements at an early stage (e.g. timing of the mobility "window")
- Syllabus: should reflect future needs of the labour market; learners should not go abroad to learn more or less the same material as they would had they stayed at home; best when staff collaborate or students use e-learning to work in trans-institutional groups
- Student workload: regular monitoring to check if the anticipated workload corresponds with the actual one

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7. Defining modules

Potential benefits include:

- increased student awareness and choice
- opportunities to widen access and promote LLL
- the possibility of sharing teaching across disciplines
- Improved transparency and comparability

The method of choice for institutions wishing to promote mobility, although differing interpretations of the concept and size can make comparison difficult in practice

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Module design: five essential components

- Clear purpose and aims
- Learning outcomes that reflect these aims and can be tested
- Assessment tasks that ensure students have met the learning outcomes
- Criteria for assessment
- A teaching and learning strategy that enables different groups of learners to achieve the outcomes

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Six points to encourage a focus on the learner and on learning outcomes

- Ensure that every learner is as active as possible
- Design frequent formative assessment
- Emphasise collaborative learning and building a learning community
- Consider how learning tasks can be personalised
- Make use of technology
- Enhance, extend and empower for learner autonomy

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Six key principles of good assessment practice

Assessment should:

- be an integral component of course design
- be explicit, valid, reliable and appropriate
- play a positive role in the students' learning experiences
- be based on an understanding of how students learn
- be diverse
- allow students feedback on learning and performance

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8. Implementing programmes with integrated mobility

- Importance of administrative flexibility: programme with integrated mobility is more liable to be damaged or distorted by rigid institutional structures
- Need for clear selection policy: e.g. to assess student's ability to cope with difficulties of living and studying abroad

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Student motivation

Motivating factors include:

- value of different approaches to the subject studied
- extra competences obtained during mobility experience
- greater level of personal maturity and ability to cope with problems
- increased opportunity for future employment
- clear information about how to overcome the financial burdens

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Marketing the programme

Depends on:

- providing a clear description of the curriculum
- spelling out the added value of mobility in the job market: make use of the opinions of alumni and the attitude of employers to the competences acquired

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Monitoring

Success depends on monitoring:

- programme quality and updating it as required
- student experience abroad: where groups have persistent problems that are not solved, then the partner should be changed
- employability of graduates: e.g. through alumni database

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9. Motivating students

- Importance of providing detailed information about how study period will be carried out: purpose, expectations, how integrated, timing, partners, finance, staff contacts and recognition agreements
- ECTS tools are the academic's "greatest ally" in alleviating student anxiety: advice on use of Learning Agreement, Transcript, Ranking Scale and Diploma Supplement

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Shared academic responsibilities

Home institution	Host institution
Description of the mobility period and how it is integrated in the programme	Clear description of the academic offer available for incoming students
Clear and publicly available principles of recognition	
Well developed and clear policy on grade conversion. Correct use of ECTS ranking system	Clear description of the grading used at the institution. Correct use of ECTS ranking system
Compulsory issue of Learning Agreements with status of a legal agreement	Full co-operation in fulfilling Learning Agreements
Flexible system of student support in cases where Transcript of Records is not issued in time by host institution	Timely (speedy) issue of Transcripts of Records
Well developed Diploma Supplement which clearly identifies study periods abroad	

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Dealing with psychological anxieties

Home institution	Host institution
Academic/administrative adviser	Academic/administrative adviser
Information sessions on host country	
Information on different academic features in the host country	
Student support services	Mentor system
	Information on telephone help lines or via e-mail

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Conclusion

- Programmes with integrated mobility require more resources, effort and commitment from academic staff than other programmes
- Wisdom in choosing the right partners and special care for the mobile students create an extra burden on staff, who need to develop their own international visions and competences
- Successful implementation of programmes with integrated mobility is an art that has to be mastered!

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