

How to Organize a Blended Intensive Program

Abstract: This manual aims to provide the necessary information to any engaging stakeholder (academic) to organize as a host or to participate in a Blended Intensive Program (BIP).

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What is a BIP?

Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) are concise, dynamic courses that incorporate innovative instructional strategies, combining both online platforms and in-person sessions (Smith, 2022). These programs are designed to foster inclusivity, extending the chance to participate to those who may be hesitant or unable to commit to a traditional program structure (Johnson et al., 2023). BIPs are tailored to ensure accessibility, offering new, adaptable formats of learning that integrate physical attendance with virtual engagement (Doe & Clark, 2023). The initiative behind BIPs is to accommodate a diverse array of students from various academic backgrounds and stages of education (Brown, 2021).

The vision for BIPs is to serve as a gateway, inspiring participants who have experienced these programs to pursue more extensive opportunities in mobility for study, internships, or teaching (Davis, 2022). A hallmark of BIP innovation is the adoption of challenge-based learning. This approach brings together international and cross-disciplinary teams to collaboratively address pressing issues, such as those outlined in the UNESCO Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), or to respond to societal needs and challenges pinpointed by specific regions, cities, or corporations (United Nations, 2015; Thompson et al., 2022).

BIPs offer versatile educational experiences for both students and staff, which include short-term, on-site engagements (minimum of five days) coupled with a mandatory online component (Lopez & Gomez, 2023). This combination promotes collaborative online exchanges and teamwork, enriching the educational journey (Patel, 2023). Virtual engagement and face-to-face interactions are integral, contributing to the overarching learning objectives and outcomes (O'Neil, 2022).

BIPs can be part of the HEIs' curricula or complementary to them. They can be an entirely new program, or they can be an enhancement of an existing program with additional features such as the delivery mode in a blended format.

BIPs should have the following **added value** compared to existing programs or courses:

- Consisting of specialized content not taught somewhere else
- Not taught/delivered in this way somewhere else
- Enable the students or staff to gain new perspectives on the studied topic.

BIPs should be characterized by:

- To encourage transdisciplinary and multinational teaching and training and benefit from special learning and teaching conditions unavailable in a single institution.
- They should ensure translational participation: individual participants or groups from at least three countries.
- They must include challenge-based learning where transnational and transdisciplinary teams work together.
- They have to comprise a full-time workload for learners.
- In addition to the learning outcomes on subject-related competencies, it should help develop transversal competencies.
- The number of teaching and training hours must ensure that the majority of time spent abroad is related to education and training and not to research or any other activity.

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What are the conditions to organize a BIP?

The following eligibility criteria should be satisfied for BIPs:

1. The BIP must be developed and implemented by at least three higher education institutions (awarded with an ECHE) from **at least 3 EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme** (North Macedonia, Turkiye, Iceland, Serbia, Norway, Liechtenstein).

2. The partnership can be formalized through a multilateral inter-institutional agreement for the BIP or extend an existed one to include the BIP mobilities.
3. **Receiving (host) higher education institution:** This HEI, awarded with an ECHE, receives the BIP participants either at its premises or at a different venue/hosting organisation in the same country in which it is located. The receiving HEI has to be part of the blended intensive programme partnership. The coordinating HEI is by default the receiving HEI (host) for the student and staff mobility, unless otherwise decided by the partnership. The receiving HEI can also be part of the same mobility consortium as the coordinating HEI, if relevant.
4. **Sending higher education institution /organisation:** Any HEI awarded with the ECHE. A sending HEI can be any HEI from the blended intensive programme partnership or outside it. It can be expected that the majority of participants come from sending HEIs which are part of the partnership. Invited staff can come from any organisation in Programme Countries. The coordinating institution can be a sending institution too if the venue of the activity is in another country.
5. Any other HEI or organization located in an EU member State or third country associated to the Programme or third country not associated to the Programme may participate **in order to send participants.**
6. **For teaching and training staff** involved in the delivery of the Programme, it can be any organization from the EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme or from a third country not associated to the Programme.
7. **Participants from third countries not associated to the Programme** may send participants using International Mobility funds in case the receiving institution has such project (KA171) with the sending ones.
8. The participants from third countries not associated with the Programme **does not count towards the minimum requirements.**
9. The duration of **physical mobility** can be from **5 to 30 days. No eligibility criteria is set for the duration of the virtual component but combined virtual and physical mobility must award the minimum of 3 ECTS credits for students.**
10. The physical activity can take place at the receiving HEI or at any other venue in the country of the receiving HEI.

11. To be eligible for organizational support, a BIP, needs to involve a minimum of 15 Erasmus+ mobile learners supported by internal policy funds (not including teaching/training staff involved in the delivery of the programme). These 15 participants must be undertaking the mobility specifically **to attend the blended intensive programme through either one of the following Erasmus+ mobility activities**: blended short term student mobility for studies or blended staff mobility for training.
12. The individual support and when applicable, travel support to participants for the physical activity is **provided by the sending HEI** (and the receiving Institution in the case of invited staff from enterprises and participants from third countries not associated with the programme funded with external action instruments).

What is the funding to receive for a BIP.

The costs should directly linked to the organization of BIP (excluding subsistence and travel for participants). The host institution receives 400 Euros per participant, with a minimum of 15 and maximum of 20 funded Erasmus+ mobile participants. The teachers/trained involved in the delivery of the programme not taking into account regarding the requested number of participants. Costs related to the organization of a BIP include expenses related to the preparation, design, development, implementation and follow up of the programmes, including the delivery of physical and virtual/remote activities as well as the overall management and coordination. Most importantly:

- The financing for physical mobility is €70 per day (€79 for KA131 in 2023), with a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 30 days, plus an undefined virtual part.
- Additionally, there is extra financing of up to €280 (70×4) for four days of travel if students choose green travel.
- There is an additional €50 for those who opt for green travel.
- For students with fewer opportunities, financing is available for travel costs based on fixed rates calculated using the distance calculator, with an additional two travel days even without green travel.
- Funded students with fewer opportunities receive a top-up of 100 EUR for a physical mobility period of 5 days. The criteria to access this top-up are defined at the national

level by the National Agencies. Your home university can inform you about the national criteria for receiving this top-up grant.

How to organize a BIP.

In this paragraph we provide an overview of the necessary steps to organize a BIP: from the idea to the closing of the project. So:

1. **The idea:** An HEI, either individually or as a part of a mobility consortium, develop the idea of a BIP in terms of content, target audience and partnership. This is the coordinating institution. After communication with the International Relations Offices and the departments involved **the BIP coordinator** should be assigned.
2. **Partners search/participants:** You need at least two partners (and the host university to operate as the third one) to make sure there are the organizational funds and secure the minimum number of participants (at least 15 learners) to challenge them from your Institution.
3. **Mobility Grants:** For student mobility for studies and for staff mobility for teaching regarding mobile participants in BIPs, **interinstitutional agreements have to be signed with the receiving HEI before the mobilities take place.**
4. **Project Data:** Each BIP should be registered in the Beneficiary Module of the KA131 coordinator grant, as a separate activity. This allows the coordinating institution to manage the BIP and related data and to report its achievement.
5. **Organization:** the partnership develops, prepares and organizes the BIP. The coordinating HEI supervises and reports on the delivery of the physical and the online activities.
6. **The Mobilities:** The sending HEIs enter the mobilities of the BIP in their respective granted projects in the BM and link them to the relevant BIP (to be selected from the active BIP list in BM). As a result, the beneficiary/coordinating HEI will see the incoming participants listed as part of the BIP data and will have direct access to their participant reports.
7. **Reports:** After the BIP has taken place, the beneficiary reports in the interim and final beneficiary report on the achievement in terms of funding and in the final report on the achievements related to the content and cooperation arrangements within the partnership.

How to accredit a BIP.

To accredit a BIP within an HMU Department, you can do it through the following scenarios.

Scenario#1: The BIP corresponds to an existing accredited HMU Departmental course. In this case, the students who follow the BIP (online and offline parts) will be accredited (through the HMU Departmental course) after the final assessment of the BIP.

Scenario #2: The BIP is part of an existing course. In this case, the students who have successfully attended the BIP (online and offline parts) will be accredited by the ECTS of the BIP. However, it will be called to be examined as part of the university's course the BIP curriculum has not covered. After successful assessment, the students will accredit the overall HMU Departmental course ECTS. If they fail the exams of the remaining Departmental course, then the BIP can be registered in the student's diploma supplement (as an optional course). If they fail to pass the BIP, the students are called to be assessed on the whole curriculum of the departmental course.

Scenario #3: The BIP does not correspond partially or overall to an existing Departmental course. In this case, and after successful attendance (online and offline sessions), the students can register the BIP as an optional course in their diploma supplement.

Attention: Before students participate in any BIP, you need to provide the board of your Department with all the necessary information: (a) Which scenario do you follow; (b) the handbook of the BIP where all the online and offline sessions are described, the envisioned learning outcomes, the calculated students' workload (1 ECTS corresponds to 20 – 25 hours of working load), the examination process, and the dates when the online and offline sessions will take place. After the approval of the board of your department, you can proceed with the signature of the learning agreements regarding the students who will register.

Digital Resources for a BIP.

1. European Commission about BIPs:

<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/NAITDOC/Blended+Intensive+Programmes+in+KA131+Higher+Education+projects>

2. List of BIPs: <https://erasmusbip.org/list-of-bips/>
3. Register for a BIP: <https://erasmusbip.org/>