



## STUDY VISITS

### Outline of the Sessions

The Framework for Erasmus+ Staff Competencies (FESC) aims at developing a quality framework for staff at Higher Education Institutions working in the field of international mobility programmes.

As the demands posed in the administration of mobility programmes are increasingly complex, the need for clearly structured, comprehensive guidelines as well as on-hand toolkits for training and peer-group learning for staff members is adamant. Thus, the project will identify relevant skills, know-how and processes to acquire the necessary competencies for higher education staff working with student mobility, create a framework which defines quality criteria for staff members, as well as provide those necessary materials for staff to understand and improve said competencies.

As part of the project, **the intellectual Output 4 - Study visit report** will consist in the organisation and implementation of 6 study visits to gather qualitative data through in-site interviews and help to refine the “Erasmus+ staff competencies & auditing framework” (IO3).

### Timeline of the Study Visits

#### November 2019 - March 2020

5 study visits will take place in the different locations of the university project partners (Ghent, Marburg, Riga, Warsaw, Groningen) + 1 study visit to the associate university partner St. Petersburg University.

(Visit the [link](#) to see the planning of the study visits)

## The main objectives of the study visits are to:

- **Test the Erasmus+ staff competencies & auditing framework (IO3)** by implementing, among different university staff members target groups (Erasmus+ student mobility experts, human resources professionals, professional development staff, administrative staff, etc), the audit process and the study visit guidelines that will be delivered in the “Erasmus+ staff competencies & auditing framework (IO3).
- **To provide training to administrative staff members**, according to the training toolkit (IO6), in order to collect feedback and identify key elements and aspects to competence development.

Each study visit will be organised in close cooperation between the host university, the EUF (IO leader), and the visiting university (selected among the project partners).

The study visits will gather a qualitative data through interviews with three main target groups – human resources and professional development staff; Erasmus + student mobility leadership and Erasmus + student mobility staff. In addition, a selected group of individuals working with Erasmus + administration will take part in the training session.

After the study visit, the visiting university will be responsible to elaborate an individual report collecting all the feedback and findings during the conducted interviews and the training session. The EUF will cooperate with the visiting university to provide all the necessary information and make sure the individual report includes all collected data.

As a final step and once all the study visits will be done, the EUF will analyse all individual reports delivered by the visiting universities (project partners) to prepare a final study visit report.

This study visit final report will analyse all feedback collected from the trainings, data, and individual study visits reports, with the aim to provide recommendations for each HEI, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the audit process and competencies framework proposed by each one of the visiting universities (in charge to create the individual study visits reports).

The overall report will conclude in concrete suggestions on how to improve the “Erasmus+ staff competencies & auditing framework”, which will be incorporated in the final framework version.

## Target groups

Total participants to be reached by each university: 8 to 15

Participants profile:

- Administrative staff dealing with mobility programmes - working at IROs, departmental level or student services.  
(*Semi-structured interviews and workshop*)
- Human resources and professional development staff - career advisors  
(*Semi-structured interviews*)



- Vice-Rectors for International Affairs, Deans, and other related staff with leadership positions (if possible)  
(Semi-structured interviews)

## Development

### Structure of the study visits

1. Interviews to different target groups to gather and analyse the results about the view on competences and competence development opportunities defined in the Erasmus + staff competences & auditing framework, IO3
2. A workshop session to receive feedback and evaluate the Erasmus + staff competences & auditing framework, IO3

#### 1. Semi-structured Interviews - Guidelines

As mentioned above, the aim of the semi-structured interviews will be to test the initially elaborated Erasmus+ staff competencies & auditing framework (IO3) and collect useful feedback to review and make further improvements.

Results will be interpreted on different indication levels and according to the different target groups:

- Erasmus + student mobility staff (IRO, Faculty IRO, Academic coordinators, etc)
- Human resources professionals, Professional development staff & Heads of divisions

The length of the interviews will take approximately 20-40 minutes per target group.

Interviews can be conducted in any language, which is convenient for the interviewer and the participant. Regarding the analysis of the interviews, we would recommend delivering the session in English as all voice recorded sessions in other EU language will need additional work translation. Indeed, the partner in charge of the session will need to provide written notes and a summary in English regarding the main discussed points to allow the visiting University to create the study visit individual report.

The format of the interview is a semi-structured interview. The following questions are suggestions for a structure and process but as the interview proceeds, the interviewer can deviate from the suggested questions regarding the context. Either follow-up an interesting aspect more deeply or leave out unnecessary items.

Before the sessions start, we will give definitions that apply in the context of the project. They are based on EQF1 (European Quality Framework) and Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

**Knowledge:** composition of facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject



**Skills:** the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results

- **Cognitive skills:** use of logical and intuitive and creative thinking
- **Practical skills:** manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments

**Attitude:** the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations

**Competence:**

- Ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development);
- Ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in profession
- A combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes and personal development

**Responsibility:** refers to tasks and working areas in different functions and roles. Both tasks and responsibility can be used interchangeably in the context of FESC.

Since the term ‘competency’ wasn’t explicitly named in these (European) frameworks there had been an attempt to look at both related terms ‘competency’ and ‘competence’ beyond the frameworks.

*Cambridge Dictionary:*

**Competency:** an important skill that is needed to do a job

**Competence:** the ability to do something well

*Oxford dictionary:*

**Competence** (also competency): the ability to do something successfully or efficiently

These key terminologies in the FESC project, ‘**competence**’/‘**competency**’, should reflect the various components and its comprehensive meaning as widely used in European education and training policies. Therefore, the above stated extensive description will be used for the term ‘competence’ and ‘competency’ where both terms are interchangeable in the context of the FESC project. Both ‘competence’ and ‘competency’ refer to a person’s capability to do something successfully or/and efficiently and this ability is composed of knowledge and skills. Cross-cutting competencies (scheme) can be added as competencies needed across all mobility phases which are embedded throughout the different tasks.

## Questions for Erasmus + staff members

Experience
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Could you describe your job – what tasks, since how long you have been working here, etc.</li><li>2. What are your tasks related to the Erasmus+ programme, internationalisation and student mobility in particular?</li></ol>
Impact/quality assessment (personal + new employees)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In your opinion what would be the key success factors for performing this job well?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Competences (name several) - Do you think you have those competences, or you need to develop them further?</li><li>b. Time – Do you consider having enough time to perform this job well? If not, is it a problem of personal time management or big amount of work?</li></ol></li><li>2. What do you like most about your work?</li><li>3. How long does it usually take new staff to feel confident in their position?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How much time until a new team member reaches full potential</li><li>b. Can you compare with your personal experience at the beginning of your career?</li></ol></li></ol>
Student support
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Describe how you interact with the students before their mobility period?</li><li>2. Describe how you interact with the students during their mobility period?</li><li>3. What strategies do you use to support their integration within the institution and social life (e.g. buddy programme)? –</li><li>4. Are you in touch with students when they come back?</li><li>5. Is your department providing with any support if not yourself?- e.g. handle with reverse culture shock</li></ol>
Coordinating support
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What is the most challenging when it comes to providing advice to students?</li><li>2. Have you been in a situation where you experienced difficulty demonstrating assistance and responsiveness towards travel (insurances, visa, accommodation, funding,), medical or social crisis situations related to incoming and outgoing students?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. If yes - Could you describe your actions towards finding a solution?</li><li>b. Could you identify relevant information that may influence the provision of facilities to students in such situations?</li></ol></li></ol>
Communication skills



1. Do you feel comfortable while communicating with foreign students in English? – listening, writing, speaking.
  - a. Do you have to write applications, guides, webpage content etc.?
  - b. Do you feel comfortable doing so?
2. How do you assess your current level of English?
3. Do you feel fully comfortable to provide information to students on the Erasmus+ programme? And regarding ECTS? What is your role in regards to grade conversion?
4. In your opinion, how well do you maintain the social media in terms of communication related to incoming and outgoing students?
  - a. Have you ever gathered feedback from students to assess their satisfaction and needs?
5. How often do you give presentations in public?
  - a. Specifically, for the students' audience?
  - b. Do you consider it important to be trained in public speaking and non-verbal communication as well?
6. Are you focusing on communication with other stakeholders?
7. Are you responsible for the communication with the university partners? – do you experience any challenges with them?

#### Intercultural communication skills

1. Can you describe a (difficult) situation where you could or could not anticipate possible differences in perspectives and expectations of students
2. What are the basic intercultural communication competences that someone in your position should have?  
(Knowledge of the cultures and general history, Understanding of how culture can affect communication, language and behaviours, Awareness of people's beliefs and values, Sensitivity towards cultural stereotypes that may affect and interfere with intercultural communication)
3. Have you experienced (cultural) differences between systems managing mobility administration?
4. Have you been in a situation to offer support to buddies and others involved in supporting the integration of incoming students into the institutions and social life?
  - a. Do you think such a support/ collaboration would be useful?
5. Do you feel familiar with the grading structure at the university partners and the grade conversion system? Have you experienced any difficulties in the past?

#### Digital skills



1. Do you consider having a sufficient digital literacy to use the tools and systems at your job?
2. Do you consider having sufficient skills in the work with data?
3. Have you ever participated in a training to use specialised digital tools and systems for your job?
  - a. How would you assess it?
  - b. Did it meet your needs?
4. Do you think you have enough competences in your team for using digital mobility management from 2021 onwards?
5. How do you think that from a recruiting viewpoint we could make this kind of skills more transparent?

#### Appreciation of the university efforts towards professional development

1. What possibilities does your university provide in regards to professional development? (e.g. Erasmus+ STT, in-house training, external training funded by the University etc.)
2. How is the Erasmus + staff mobility scheme utilised in relation to competence development?
3. Have you been taking any training activities for staff to develop professional competences?
  - a. Describe which types and what topic they were based upon.
  - b. Tell us what were the most impactful.
  - c. What would be the easiest way to improve them?
4. Have you been given the opportunity to express an opinion in the professional development programme planning process?
5. Do you think that HR is more involved in supporting internationalisation activities and skills than 5 years ago?

#### Turnover

1. What is your observation of the turnover in your division for the past 5 years?

#### Erasmus + programme development within the university

1. How do you keep yourself up to date about the Erasmus+ programme and its opportunities? Can you name the latest changes? (EWP, OLA)
2. Are you willing to implement more innovative systems for managing administration? (for staff with advanced digital literacy)

### Questions for IRO leadership

### **Analysing current situation:**

1. Could you explain us a little bit about your job – what tasks, since how long you have been working here, etc.
2. What are your tasks related to the Erasmus+ programme and student mobility?
3. Tell me about the current situation at the department – in terms of dynamic. Has the staff increased/ decreased/ remains stable from the past 5-6 years?
4. Are you currently experiencing or projected to experience losses due to turnover?
5. Are you responsible for the handover process?
  - a. Yes - How do you handle with the handover process when someone is replaced or stepping in a new position?
6. Average years of service?
7. Average age and sex?
8. What challenges do you meet with the staff in general? – Describe in an example
9. Does the current staff have the adequate skills and competencies to efficiently accomplish objectives? What are they? (distribute the list of competence and ask them to pick several and/or add their own)
10. In what way do you collaborate with HR?
11. How does HR support Department leaders in finding competent staff?
12. How does HR support leaders in evaluating staff?
13. When you are recruiting who is responsible for defining the required competences?
14. What type of attitudes you are looking for when you are recruiting?
15. Do you consider that your organisational structure is appropriately aligned for achieving the goals and objectives?
16. Is their time between tasks related to before, during and after mobility properly distributed?

### **Determining gaps and developing employment programmes**

17. Is the future Erasmus + student mobility demand expecting to rise at your university/ department?
18. Is your department ready?
19. Is it interested in attracting more students and how they plan to do so?
20. What are the related new skills or core competencies that the Erasmus + student mobility staff will need in the near future?
21. How do you plan to build capacity of your staff to meet these future needs? (impact on size and competences)
22. How do you involve the students' feedback to improve your services?
23. How do you want to incorporate specific training in regards to digitalisation?
24. Do you think you have enough capacity in your team for going digital post 2021-2023?

### **Designing training programmes**

25. What are the minimum requirements staff members have on written and oral communication skills?
26. How do you evaluate the comm skills of your staff?
27. How do you ensure that the staff has the basic intercultural communication and stays up to date on the basics on the internationalisation, in order to be able to communicate and collaborate with foreign counterparts?



28. Have the staff been given the opportunity to provide input in the professional development programme planning process?
29. Many students indicated that the email communication as an issue due to insufficient or unclear information, and the delays of the responses. Are you aware of such a problem at your university and how do you plan to handle it?



## Questions for Human Resources Staff

### **Analysing current situation:**

1. Could you explain us a little bit about your job – what tasks, since how long you have been working here, etc.
2. Tell me about the current situation at the university, in terms of dynamic. Has the staff increased/ decreased/ remains stable from the past 5-6 years?
3. Average years of service?
4. Average age and sex?
5. What challenges do you meet with the Erasmus+ staff in general? – Describe in an example
6. In what way do you collaborate with Heads of International Refashions Office? How do you support leaders in evaluating staff?
7. When you are recruiting who is responsible for defining the required competences?
8. What type of attitudes you are looking for when you are recruiting?

### **Determining gaps and developing employment programmes**

9. The staff members selected the following 3 competences that would like to develop and apply in their daily work:
  - a. Digital skills
  - b. Stress management
  - c. Conflict management

Can you provide examples of initiatives implemented by your university to support the professional development of staff members of these 3 competences?

10. How do you want to incorporate specific training in regards to digitalisation?
11. Have you made a digital needs analysis to identify the gaps?
  - a. What are the short-term goals to consider?
  - b. Mid-term goals?
  - c. Long-term goals?

### **Designing training programmes**

12. What are the minimum requirements staff members have on written and oral communication skills? How do you evaluate the comm skills of your staff?
13. How do you ensure that the staff has the basic intercultural communication and stays up to date on the basics on the internationalisation, in order to be able to communicate and collaborate with foreign counterparts?
14. Have the staff been given the opportunity to provide input in the professional development programme planning process?
15. Many students indicated that the email communication as an issue due to insufficient or unclear information, and the delays of the responses. Are you aware of such a problem at your university and how do you plan to handle it?

## 2. Workshop session

Time	Activity
10 minutes	<p><b>Introduction to the FESC project</b></p> <p>The workshop session will begin by introducing the participants to the FESC project - what is the rationale, who are the project partners, the project goals and the beneficiaries of the project outcomes. The presentation will continue with a brief introduction to the framework.</p> <p>The aim within these first 10 minutes is to make the participants understand the function, the relevance and the structure of the framework, in order to be able to use it during the workshop.</p> <p>The supporting document for this part of the session is a <a href="#">powerpoint presentation on the FESC project and Framework introduction</a>.</p>
2-5 minutes	<p><b>Dividing the group into subgroups</b></p> <p>For the first activity the participants need to be split into smaller groups of 2-4 participants, depending on the total number of participants. Another constraint, beside the number should be their position within the institution. In order to maximise the outcome of the exercise, the subgroups should include participants occupying different positions - e.g International Officers together with Student Assistants, Erasmus + Departmental Coordinators and Heads of Units. Create mixed groups if possible.</p> <p>Next step - explain the activity.</p> <p>Within the next 30-40 min the participants will be asked to work on the framework. Each subgroup will focus on one job position/staff role dealing with student -mobility and international programmes - e.g. International Officers, Erasmus + Departmental Coordinator, Student Support, Leadership.</p> <p>They should read individually, the content of the framework (from left to right) in the first 15-20 minutes and identify 6 from each components defining one competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes), which they think are the most important to be successful at the particular job position/ staff role.</p> <p>In the next 15 -20 minutes the participants will discuss within their subgroups the competences picked by each one of them and will prepare a short presentation, after</p>



	<p>they agree on the 6 knowledge items, 6 skills and 6 attitudes that one must have.</p> <p>This is a preparatory phase before the first activity.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p><b>Individual work on the framework</b></p> <p>The participants start reading the framework. They first need to familiarise themselves with the identified tasks and then move to the internal content of the matrix - the description of the competences. They can be advised to put initial next to each competence - I for important, L for less important and N for not important.</p> <p>The goal for this exercise is to allow the participants to evaluate the framework and allow the facilitator to understand what are the important competences from first side - the practitioners viewpoint.</p> <p>The supporting material for this exercise is the <a href="#">distributed printouts of the framework</a>.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p><b>Collective work on the framework</b></p> <p>After the individual exercise is over, the participants will be asked to discuss their choices with the other participants from the same subgroup. They will have around 15 minutes to discuss between themselves and decide which are the most important competences for the particular job position/ staff role.</p> <p>It is interesting for the facilitator to discover if differences in the opinions come from the different position occupants and how each one perceives the competences needed to be successful at the particular job position/ staff role.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p><b>Presentations</b></p> <p>Each subgroup will briefly present to the rest of the participants their selected top relevant competences.</p> <p>The facilitator could intervene and guide with the following questions:</p> <p>WHY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why do you think that those competences are important?</li> </ul> <p>WHENs and HOWs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can you share some examples of situations when a person in this position needs to apply such skills/knowledge/attitude?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What actions in your opinion are needed at institution/ departmental level to equip with those competences?</li> <li>● Are such trainings existing at your institution to help people to be equipped with such type of competences?</li> </ul> <p>The goal is to collect data and opinions from the participants which should be analysed afterwards in order to understand the needs and concretise them into strategies for improvement.</p> <p>The supporting materials are a <b>flipchart and markers</b> to put down the competences.</p>
10-15 minutes	<p><b>Debriefing / Reflection on the framework and closing the session</b></p> <p>After having taken a deeper look at the structure and the content of the framework and having heard the presentations of all subgroups, the facilitator can debrief the activity with the pax:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did this activity make you feel?</li> <li>● What is your main takeaway from this activity?</li> <li>● What would you change?</li> <li>● What is different in terms of your point of view?</li> </ul> <p>The facilitator finishes the session with several framework - related questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What do you think about this framework?</li> <li>● Do you have any feedback or suggestions for improvement? How would you make it more useful and understandable?</li> </ul>

