GUIDE TO THE INTRODUCTION OF
MOBILITY WINDOWS
FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

TEMPUS PUBLIC FOUNDATION

MINISTRY OF HUMAN CAPACITIES

Erasmus+

FOREWORD

We live in a time when internationalisation is a high priority for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). There are many aspects to internationalisation: how it is reflected in institutional strategies, in the development of teaching and research, in financial planning, in the organisational support provided to persons involved in internationalisation, in improving institutional marketing, and in various other fields. In addition to internal strategies and measures, evolving new laws and regulations also require a growing number of progressively higher national and international standards concerning internationalisation.

The qualitative and quantitative transformation of organised student mobility is one of the priorities of internationalisation. Mobility windows play a role in this process.

Originally, this guide was aimed at clarifying the concept of mobility windows for Hungarian HEIs, i.e the tasks related to their introduction, the benefits of mobility windows and the rationale beyond the new legislation on the introduction of mobility windows. In this edition, we omitted those parts that relates to the Hungarian context only, and retained those chapters that might be interest of other HEIs in Europe and beyond considering cooperation via mobility windows with other HEIs.

Mobility windows

History, concept, features and types of mobility windows[1]

Initially, the term mobility window was used to denote a solution for overcoming the obstacles to mobility. It was, however, too general term to enable a definition of what a mobility window is and what it is not. The *Academic Cooperation Association*[2] (ACA) embarked in 2012 on a project to clarify the concept. Building on this research, the publication *Mobility Windows – From Concept to Practice* was born[3].

> ACA defines **a mobility window as a period of time reserved for international student mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a study programme**[4]

Mobility windows are therefore characterised by the following:

- they are embedded in the curriculum – the phase of the student journey when the student will have the option to participate in international mobility is set and known in advance;
- mobility windows also clearly determine the length of time while a student may participate in international mobility through the window;
- mobility via mobility windows is always international (cross-border) and physical (not virtual);
- the relevant requirements exceed the minimum requirements for Erasmus+ type mobility;
- recognition of the study period spent abroad must be embedded in the curriculum in advance: it is therefore an important feature of mobility windows that they are risk-free to the student with respect to the recognition of credits; credits will be recognised virtually automatically and additionally, such recognition is either required to obtain the degree or supplements it.

The typology of mobility windows, as presented in the afore-mentioned ACA publication, is based on two characteristics: the status of a mobility window within the study programme (mandatory or optional) and the degree of curricular standardisation of the

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1 Based on the presentation Mobility windows by Marija Mitic and Bernd Wächter (ACA), 29 October 2015, Prague
2 www.aca-secretariat.be
3 www.aca-secretariat.be/fileadmin/aca_docs/images/members/ACA_2013_Mobility_windows.pdf
4 "A mobility window is a period of time reserved for international student mobility that is embedded into the curriculum of a study programme."
   See page 12 of the above document

mobility experience and content (highly-prescribed or loosely-prescribed). Based on these characteristics, a mobility window can be classified into one of the four types below:

- *optional windows with loosely-prescribed content* (type 'Op-Lop' in the ACA paper) – the most flexible type of windows;
- *mandatory windows with loosely-prescribed content* (type 'Ma-Lop' in the ACA paper) – more rigid in terms of the manner and timing of the mobility experience and more flexible in terms of content;
- *optional windows with highly-prescribed content* (type 'Op-Hip' in the ACA paper) – more flexible in terms of the manner and timing of the mobility experience and more rigid in terms of content
- *mandatory windows with highly-prescribed content* (type 'Ma-Hip' in the ACA paper) – the most rigid type of windows;

Mobility windows in context: mobility and internationalisation – international and national policies

As apparent from the section above, mobility windows are a very important – though of course not the only – tool for promoting student mobility and therefore internationalisation. The goal of boosting outbound student mobility does not exist in isolation. It is clearly part of a wider context: that of the European (regional) and national higher education policy aimed at the internationalisation of higher education.

From the 1980s, the European economy started accumulating competitive disadvantage vis-a-vis its rivals. Experts considered the reason behind this to lie in the inflexibility, lack of clarity and the absence of market focus in European systems of learning, as well as the complexities surrounding study outcomes and the diplomas issued, all of which hindered student and employee mobility as well as the emergence of a truly common European labour market.[5]

It is our hope that promoting internationalisation and mobility will greatly benefit all actors in both higher education and the economy. One of the consequences of the international financial crisis of 2008 has been a renewed focus on higher education in the hopes of promoting innovation. This, among others, led to the renewal in 2011 of the modernisation agenda for higher education institutions[6], the predecessor of which was adopted in 2006. The 2011 modernisation programme listed internationalisation as a separate item among the Community actions to be taken for the implementation of the reforms. Strengthening the international character and openness of European higher education was a strategic goal in this policy document towards ensuring that participation in international mobility and programmes was attractive students, staff and researchers, making the Community into an attractive destination for learning and research on an international level. The successor policy paper – the European Commission's communication A renewed EU agenda for higher education (2017[7]) – no longer so explicitly lists internationalisation, in line with the conceptual re-thinking of intrenationalisation as a tool towards achieving the four priority areas of the communication rather than as an objective in itself.

More broadly, and well before these policy documents, important European decisions have recently been adopted with a view to promoting the international mobility of students (and staff): the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the incorporation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) at a systemic level, increasing the scope of scholarship schemes, the mobility of loan programmes, and increasing consistency in international quality assurance and accreditation options. Ministers of the European Union consider higher education an investment into the future.

Another important document concerning European higher education is the 2013 Communication from the Commission on European higher education in the world[8,9], which sets out several internationalisation priorities for Member States and higher education institutions. The guiding principle is as follows:
"A comprehensive internationalisation strategy should cover key areas grouped into the following three categories: international student and staff mobility; the internationalisation and improvement of curricula and digital learning; and strategic cooperation,

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5   Csekei László: www.tka.hu/nemzetkozi/6363/a-bolognai-folyamat-elozmenyei
6   eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/T X T/?uri=UR ISERV:c11089
7   https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/he-com-2017-247_en.pdf
8   eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0499&from=EN
9   http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0499&from=HU

partnerships and capacity building. These categories should not be seen as isolated but as integrated elements of a comprehensive strategy."

Of these, the following are particularly relevant to mobility windows:

- „Focus internationalisation strategies to include a strong student mobility component, supported by a quality framework including guidance and counselling services;"
- „Set up two-way mobility schemes with non-EU countries, embracing a wide variety of subjects;"
- „Support fair and formal recognition for competences gained abroad for internationally mobile students, including a better use of transparency and comparability tools and an increased focus on learning outcomes;"
- „...aiming to develop international curricula for the benefit of both non-mobile and mobile learners;"
- „Tackle the obstacles for the development and implementation of joint and double degree programmes, both at institutional level and at the level of national legislation".

These priorities show us that the (two-way) mobility of learners is a major component of the internationalisation of higher education. Of the directions of student mobility, outbound mobility is the one most relevant to mobility windows (though agreements based on a bilateral partnership – especially double degree agreements – may assume reciprocity, i.e. implying inbound mobility as "compensation" for the students sent abroad). As for the basic types, mobility for the purpose of credit accumulation (study period, internship/apprenticeship) is more relevant than mobility for the purpose of obtaining a degree.

As set out in Leuven (*Leuven Communiqué*[10]), by 2020 the extent of mobility should be increased to at least 20% of all students completing their study programme.[11]

Student mobility supported by mobility windows is expected to provide the following benefits to the home country students:

- the ability to acquire new or broader knowledge (in an international context);
- access to enhanced, more open study programmes and higher quality education supplemented with international components and experience due to inter-institutional partnerships;
- development of transversal skills (e.g. learning one or more foreign languages, meeting new cultures) in addition to traditional profession-specific knowledge;
- and a significant increase in the value of qualifications in the labour market and in the graduate's prospects of finding employment.
- Another important benefit would be the easier recognition of knowledge gained abroad, i.e. automatic credit recognition in the home country.

Partnerships in student mobility rarely stop at the level of student exchange schemes: they typically also include mobility options for teachers (and even researchers and other employees), which facilitates knowledge sharing and offers opportunities for improving methodologies. In addition to enhancing the study programmes, which has already been mentioned –, benefits expected at the institutional level include improved quality, the strengthening of international visibility and appreciation, changes to strategic directions, acting as a catalyst for initiating and implementing necessary internal changes, as well as positive changes in the composition of the student pool.

Mobility windows from institutional perspective

Purpose, benefits and some problems of the introduction of mobility windows

The objective of introducing mobility windows is to facilitate the participation of all actors – students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff – in international mobility by providing a relevant framework, by being embedded in the study programme and by removing obstacles to mobility; and to thereby contribute to the internationalisation of higher education.

10   www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2009_Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve/06/1/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique_April_2009_595061.pdf
     www.mab.hu/web/doc/kulfold/Leuven _magyar.pdf
11   Some Member States have set more ambitious goals (e.g. Austria and Germany: 50%, Flanders: 33%).

The following section presents the benefits, expectations and incidental challenges associated with mobility windows.[12]
Increasing, facilitating, standardizing and creating a framework for mobility

Possibly the greatest advantage of a mobility window, and the root of all further benefits, is that it enhances quality in the coordination of mobility: instead of ad hoc, formal arrangements , it creates a system whereby mobility can be planned and operations can be standardised in advance. Planning makes the job of all participants easier as the tasks and requirements become clearer in advance. This creates a framework for mobility and provides security in terms of professional standards, offering long-term benefits to all parties involved:

- For students, a mobility window visibly embedded at a fixed place in the study programme is a huge help in planning their studies and mobility. The duration of one's studies becomes known and the timing of the stay abroad becomes predictable. Standardised credit recognition gives students security with respect to the recognition of their foreign credits and learning outcomes, both in terms of process consistency and the outcome of the recognition decision. All this not only makes it easier for students to participate in mobility, but is also likely to increase their willingness to do so: they will be braver when it comes to embarking on a study period or practice period abroad.

- Mobility – both its academic and financial aspects – will become more predictable to the institution as well: it will become easier to announce various grants and set up budgets, and, if applicable, to secure the financial resources provided by the institution or the associated foundations. Mobility windows also often catalyse an enhancement of the existing student (career) services in the institution. Mobility windows may provide an integrated framework for the academic development of learners, the integration of their credits and the evaluation of their academic performance.

- The predictability of teaching that follows from a mobility window will also benefit an institution's teaching staff: compared to traditional mobility, it offers more options for teaching in an international environment, for international networking, the exchange of experiences, professional development and the improvement of one's subject and curriculum through the sharing of knowledge with partner institutions.

- Ideally, mobility windows are reciprocal. This again offers another, structured opportunity to use a foreign language in a professional context regularly and improve one's language skills in programmes delivered in a foreign language, especially when teaching foreign students. If a mobility window is not reciprocal, though, the reduction in contact hours due to students leaving to pursue studies abroad may pose a problem for teachers as the outflow of students is not set off by the inbound mobility of foreign students. This raises serious issues for the institution with respect to the organisation of teaching activities. When a mobility window is based on two-way mobility, however, inbound student mobility results in additional contact hours for teachers with a low number of contact hours, enabling them to be employed more fully. Teachers must be sufficiently prepared to be able to handle inbound student mobility (in terms of cultural needs and adaptation, language skills) and inbound teacher mobility. This has serious organisational implications, a sthe teachers will have an additional workload, together with other potential and associated challenges..

- Ideally, inbound mobility may also be a way for bringing in teachers in fields where there is a scarcity of teachers within the home institution.

- They may also be a source of new professional skills and know-how brought from abroad, may affect how such new knowledge gets integrated into the home country's practice, and may offset the limitations of some study programmes in terms of interdisciplinary flexibility. We must also consider, however, that visiting teachers are not usually able to participate in linear teaching for an entire semester. Instruction may need to be arranged into blocks, which raises additional challenges regarding management as well as the need to align or coordinate teaching methods.

- Mobility windows will also improve the quality of administrative processes and relationships with partners through standardisation. Through the institutionalisation of mobility, windows will improve the effectiveness of processes and tasks related to mobility. This will also reduce the workload of staff: automatic credit recognition will make the submission of recognition requests predictable and the processes simpler. Last but not least, it will enable the international exchange of experience in the field of institutional administrative structures, processes and process management systems, which could result in increased efficiency.

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12   Based on 'Introduction of mobility windows into the curricula of Hungarian higher education institutions', presented at the PLA organised by the Tempus Public Foundation on 2-3 December 2015 in Budapest, and the reports of the participants.

Facilitating credit recognition

Recognition of credits obtained abroad is a fundamental prerequisite for mobility windows. If a mobility window is embedded, credit recognition practices will improve significantly and students will be less worried (if at all) about having their credits recognised.
The ad hoc, convoluted and subjective methods of credit recognition that are still too often present are replaced by a safe and simpler credit transfer process, making the whole system more structured and dynamic. Credit recognition is based on pre-agreed arrangements and therefore the recognition of credits obtained is to be virtually automatic and mandatory.
This way, mobility windows provide a feeling of certainty to students and also ease the task of the credit transfer committee and administration staff.
Details of the issues related to the recognition process are presented in the section on *Recognition of studies abroad*.

Improving the quality of programmes, the value of qualifications and employability

A mobility window will typically generate added value for and improve the quality and competitiveness of a programme by opening up international perspectives. The profession-specific and other learning outcomes (transversal skills) derived from studying in a foreign environment enable learners to acquire competitive knowledge. This, of course, is a general characteristic of international mobility, along with better chances in the labour market. If mobility is an organic part of the programme, however, it might make mobility attractive for a significantly higher number of students. As a result, employers can be confident that students from a specific field of study possess international experience. This means that in addition to the traditional benefits, mobility windows can be even better at improving one's prospects in the labour market.
For suitable programmes, mobility windows enable a more flexible programme structure that is better adapted to practice periods and the needs of the labour market. This might be relevant to small programmes in very special fields, for example. An industry might sometimes require training that teachers in the home country are not yet qualified to deliver, but where the specific knowledge required can be obtained from foreign partners.
Delivery in the framework of a mobility window must be accompanied by multifaceted quality assurance and the periodic evaluation of partners, the learning opportunities they offer, as well as student satisfaction.

Communicating the option of having a mobility window properly to would-be students can significantly increase both the number of applicants and the interest of foreign students in study periods.

Mobility windows are a tool for institutional branding and for improving international competitiveness, which can improve the effectiveness of implementing the institution's strategic goals in internationalisation. One of the versatile advantages of mobility windows is that they can also be used to compensate for a competitive disadvantage: if, for example, a foreign partner can offer an infrastructural environment that is much more developed than that available at home, the home institution's competitive disadvantage may be set off by the advantage offered by the partner by scheduling the foreign study period appropriately. It is, however, a difficult task to provide a win-win situation for both partners.

Types of partnerships supporting the introduction of mobility windows

As seen from the previous sections, to have a mobility window that encourages outbound student mobility, the institution must establish cross-border contacts and international cooperation with other higher education institutions (or, in the case of practice periods abroad, with operators where such placements may be implemented). Depending on the level of coordination, this may take the following forms:

Partnerships for mobility windows

The ideal agreement to serve as the background for a mobility window is one which enables students in a given programme to pursue studies/complete a practice period abroad in a specific period of their curriculum (student journey), year after year. Such studies must cover a unit of the curriculum that is agreed in advance between the partners and is regularly revised and updated. For

such cooperation, it is essential that the participating higher education institutions are significantly more involved in the revision or development and harmonisation of the curricula (so that mutual recognition of credits is feasible), and in delivery in general.

In terms of their legal status, the students are considered guest students in the partner higher education institution during their period of mobility. They do not earn a degree there, but acquire credits which can and must be recognised for the purpose of their studies in the home country. For internship (or equivalent) periods, the work performed at the partner company or higher education institution can be validated on the basis of the contractual agreement.

Programmes granting a double or multiple degree[13]

Cooperation models of this kind signify a closer relationship between the participating institutions. Students – who choose to do so and have passed any selection criteria – participate in two study programmes: they start their studies in the first and continue in the second, as prescribed by the agreement between the two institutions. As a result of the mandatory mutual credit recognition, they obtain two diplomas (or more) at the end of their studies.

While the ability to obtain two degrees is likely to be highly attractive to students, this also requires more effort on the part of both students and partner institutions. Entering into cooperation of that nature should be based not only on mobility windows but also on broader aspects and the resulting long-term implications.

It should be noted that a large number of higher education institutions entered into double (or multiple) degree agreements with their partners a lot earlier than when the concept of mobility windows started to spread in the higher education scene. It is therefore useful to connect the existing agreements, and to link any double degree agreements to be signed in the future to a mobility window from the start.

Joint (degree) programmes[14]

The joint programme model, which is typically accessible to a narrower pool of students, receives priority support from Community funds – and, due partly to this, is often considered elite or excellence education – and includes a mandatory foreign study period, could be the non plus ultra of the mobility window concept.

In terms of its final goal, (ideally), a scheme ending in a joint degree expects more from both the institution and from the students than a double degree programme does. In these programmes, the institutions involved need to develop a very precise joint curriculum, evaluation methodologies, rules of admission, and must determine the number of participating students in advance. If the programme includes a mandatory practice period (internship), it is important that the institutions involved try to come to an agreement with several companies providing practice placement options in advance. Because multiple institutions are involved in the programme, they need to address the issue of how to control the number of students enrolling in studies at the other institutions. They need to address the requirements for obtaining the degree, as there might be significant differences between the study requirements of the individual countries. It is also very important that the institutions involved agree, in advance, on how to tackle the tasks related to hosting students from the other institution: providing scholarships (by reserving a portion of the institution's Erasmus+ budget in advance, or otherwise), accommodation, residence permit, visas for students from outside the Community, and other issues.

Programmes like this are often the result of grant applications. It is also important for the parties involved to develop a plan for maintaining the programme after the grant expires (i.e. to make it sustainable).

In this case, the freedom of choice of students is limited to deciding whether they apply for the programme or not.

13 Dual/double/multiple degree
14 Joint programmes / joint degree programmes

Options for the introduction of mobility windows[15]

Basic forms of mobility windows in terms of the nature of studies pursued abroad

Mobility windows typically cover three types of mobility:

- mobility for study purposes – taking courses at a higher education institution abroad,
- practice (internship) period abroad,
- doing research or completing a thesis in a foreign country.

Mobility for study purposes

In the absence of a mobility window, the flow of students to foreign countries is less predictable even if a relatively large number of students avail themselves of the option of mobility. A mobility window gives a framework to mobility for study and makes it more predictable by concentrating it to one or more specific semesters. One must not forget, however, that for existing programmes, making the required changes to the curriculum is a significant amount of work.
The various programmes and special fields of study offer different opportunities for establishing a mobility window.

Practice periods abroad

With respect to practice period semesters, there are different options for establishing a mobility window depending on the desired learning outcome for the programme in question. One important question is whether the practice period is a compulsory part of the programme, and if it is, how many months it must take and whether students are given credits for that period.
Another important question is the extent of help the institution can give in finding places for completing the practice period abroad. Sometimes this is the responsibility of teachers, at other institutions it is the task of career offices, or there are international offices that have signed contracts with agencies, or there may even be dedicated experts to help students along. It is not easy for students to find a workplace where they can complete their practice period, even within the home country – except where the placement site is set in advance. This may be even truer for the international market.

For programmes including a mandatory practice period with a duration of only six weeks or two months, without credit value, this may not be used as the basis for a mobility window. It is advisable to set curricula up so that they include a mandatory practice period of at least three but preferably six months. Unless the length of the practice period is extended to an entire semester, this should be planned to take place in the summer, for example between 15 June and 15 September. Some solutions can be found to make up for the week snipped off the exam period and the beginning of the next academic year.
Ideally, each programme should include a continuous practice period worth 25 to 30 credits. This assumes that mobility covers an entire semester.

Looking at practice periods from the perspective of mobility and mobility windows, it is important to see that the shorter the duration of international mobility, the less willing companies are to employ the students. This should be taken into account when developing programme curricula.

Practice-intensive programmes (dual study programmes) pose specific, complex and in many respects unexplored problems. In these programmes, student workload is so much structured, alternating between time spent at the job and at the academic institution, that it is difficult to find a solution for including mobility in the form of either study or practice period.
Despite the complications, this is one of the potential solutions: if the partner company in the home country is a subsidiary or other branch office of a larger company, then the home country company participating in the practice-intensive programme (dual study programme) should be used as the gateway to contact the parent company or its sites in other countries.

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15 Based on 'Introduction of mobility windows into the curricula of Hungarian higher education institutions', presented at the PLA organised by the Tempus Public Foundation on 2-3 December 2015 in Budapest, and the reports of the participants.

Doing research or completing a thesis in a foreign country; co-tutelle

Semesters used by the student to write a thesis or to pursue research abroad should be distinguished from the above scenarios. The latter gets more likely the higher the level of studies is – the possibilities for establishing a mobility window are different depending on the various PhD (third cycle) programmes.

In the semester in which they write their thesis, students are often required to obtain fewer credits for academic subjects. Thus their task is not only to attend courses. If student mobility takes place in this period, the foreign teacher will be responsible for consultations and for providing guidance for writing the thesis. This is a special case also in that guidance might be provided jointly with the student's home institution, although such co-tutelle practices are mostly reserved to doctoral schools and joint programmes. Depending on the programme and topic, industrial entities or knowledge centres operating at the host location may play a role in the thesis or research.

Implementing mobility windows depending on the nature of the programme

The options for implementing mobility windows are strongly influenced by the nature of the programme concerned. It is generally true that it is simpler to add a mobility window to programmes that are already international in nature (international studies, international economics), where the curriculum is mostly consistent on an international level (e.g. programmes in natural sciences and engineering), or where the resulting jobs are almost certain to expose students to international scenarios (e.g. commerce, hospitality). In this respect, programmes in foreign language studies also have an easier job.

This does not mean that programmes not listed above should give up on the introduction of mobility windows. Mobility and internationalisation are not an end in themselves: the underlying purpose, e.g. the improvement and broadening of students' skills and knowledge in various directions, not limited to the profession concerned, will improve the quality of and deliver added value for any programme.

It is the institutions themselves which must determine which of their programmes and which semester within a programme is best suited to accommodate a mobility window. According to some opinions, one must not make the mistake of filling a window only with optional courses that broaden students' horizon, improve their language, intercultural and transpersonal skills, for a minimum of 15 credits. In part, students travel abroad in order to acquire skills and knowledge useful for their future career. One must also consider that not every student will travel abroad, and that there will also be an inflow of students. According to these opinions, a semester comprised only of courses based on intercultural learning serves neither students who travel abroad, nor those who stay at home, or those who come from a foreign country. Semesters in which students work towards obtaining their degree, or which are comprised of project courses would be suitable. Others, however argue, that putting in one semester all the elective (and international-oriented) courses, and make it the semester when the mobility window is integrated is an acceptable solution. According to this opinion, this approach is still better than not having a mobility window at all.

Implementing mobility windows depending on the language of instruction

With respect to the language of instruction, there are various solutions. Each country offers education in its own language. In most cases, this would not be suitable for a basis for bilateral international relations.

Institutions have adopted various solutions to facilitate internationalisation:

• They provide an entire study programme in a foreign language.
• They provide one or two semesters in a foreign language in a given field, changing only the language of instruction for the period concerned and without making any changes to the content of studies in that period.
• To promote international inbound mobility, the institution organises a special semester worth 30 credits, fundamentally for the inbound students, with a few credits allocated to intercultural and language courses but most credits earned from profession-specific courses.
• The institution offers a selection of courses in English (or another language), covering a greater variety of topics, of which inbound students can choose both profession-specific and other courses.

Any of the four cases are feasible for the purpose of planning a mobility window, but the options do not all carry the same weight with respect to the reciprocity of the mobility window.

If an institution wishes to implement a reciprocal, two-way mobility window, study programmes offered in a foreign language in the home country provide the best opportunity.

A two-way mobility window is not always feasible, however. The institution's task is therefore divided into two parts: to provide a mobility option for students travelling abroad, in this case through a mobility window, and to provide instruction in a suitable language to students arriving from abroad through any channel. For students arriving through a mobility window, the first three of these four scenarios are suitable, as they can be planned for. For other mobile students, a "random" selection of a suitably large number of mixed courses would also be appropriate – though it should be pointed out that options planned in advance are always better.
When there are fewer students travelling abroad from a programme than there are incoming (exchange) students, making suitable arrangements in terms of contact hours, laboratory and other capacities is a serious task for the organisers.

An alternative or halfway option could be to offer a profession-specific block of courses delivered in a foreign language and worth at least 15 credits as part of the home-country programme delivered in the national language. It is therefore possible to embed courses delivered in a foreign language into the curriculum of a programme that is provided mostly in the home-country language. Doing so has two advantages: first, with proper planning, the institution will not necessarily have to offer the same programme in a foreign language as well and link the first one to the (host) mobility window associated with the other. Rather, a single mobility window will be able to handle mobility in both directions. The mobility window can be planned to ensure that outbound and incoming mobility take place in the same period (semester or half semester), so that teacher workload is not entirely asymmetrical. Having the two mobility directions take place in different periods might also have its advantages. In this case, the block of courses delivered in a foreign language can be used to teach relevant language and terminology to students who will participate in outbound mobility.

Implementing a mobility window as part of a new or existing programme

With respect to the introduction of a mobility window, the fact that the window will be accommodated in a new, an existing or a long-running programme is not exclusively good or bad. Generally, it is thought that embedding a mobility window in a new programme is easier because the programme's curriculum is not yet set and the window can be taken into account when developing the curriculum. For a long-running, time-tested, routinely operated programme that is already (re)accredited or is awaiting ex post accreditation, on the other hand, modifying the curriculum built around the learning outcomes is a lot more difficult or carries much more risk.

One must also see that arguments to the effect that mobility windows are based on partnership, and that quality may only be guaranteed if the partner institution and its programme are also of high standards and accredited, are also valid. The length of time over which a higher education institution has been accumulating experience in the delivery of a certain programme can also be an important component of quality. A new programme therefore cannot inspire the same level of trust as a long-running programme does, which might already boast important accomplishments (of students, teachers, researchers or otherwise). Last, but not least, the know-how generated purely by having delivered the programme for several years has a value of its own, as it can be relied on to modify the curriculum while making sure that quality is not compromised or that it does not involve a significantly higher workload going forward. Curriculum development is always a difficult and serious task, which will become necessary for all running programmes sooner or later for other reasons as well, at which point it is worth considering the option of adding a mobility window.

Concepts for implementing mobility windows in another form

The term mobility window refers to mobility for the purpose of completing studies or a practice period abroad for a full semester (25 to 30 credits) or at least a trimester (block worth 20 credits, possibly in the form of a short study cycle, with delivery arranged in a block).
Alternative arrangements and special delivery methods might offer additional options, but most of those raised doubts as to achieving the original purpose, i.e. are not considered a mobility window. This does not mean though that these are not worthwhile activities or forms of cooperation.

- *Partially virtual mobility:* while mobility itself must involve an actual stay abroad, certain components or national requirements might be met using ICT tools. This would include, among others, cases where the presence of teachers from the both the home and host country would be needed (e.g. videoconferencing, jointly supervised examination, jointly arranged thesis discussion, co-tutelle studies and the defence of a thesis, and similar).
- *Commuting mobility:* if the partners are located closer geographically, this could eliminate the difficulties stemming from being away due to mobility (need to participate in home country studies, difficulties finding employment, high cost of living etc.). It is doubtful, however, that so much travel and the brief stays abroad will still enable achievement of the fundamental goals of mobility. Even if this model might be used in practice, it is rare and is certainly not something that fits the generic definition of MWs.
- *Modular semesters with different foreign teachers for each module:* for students who stay in the home country during the mobility window period. Mobility windows are an important component of internationalisation. While a semester with international teachers is not part of the topic of mobility windows, it is an important aspect of the increasingly important topic of "internationalisation at home".
- *Adding an extra semester to the base duration of the programme, specifically for the purpose of mobility:* while this solution certainly relieves the institution of the burden of adapting and coordinating its curriculum, handling credit transfer and making changes to teacher workload and schedule, it transfers all of the burden to the students.

For this reason, the competitiveness of this solution – i.e. how many of the students would accept the extra burden – is doubtful. We do not recommend this solution, with one of the main fears of students being suffering a delay in obtaining their degree. Also, students wishing to continue in a master programme can lose a state-funded semester, potentially leading to higher costs. The greatest problem, however, is that such an extra semester is not part of the original curriculum and therefore the resulting credits are not recognised towards the underlying programme. This makes it impossible to implement one of the main goals of mobility windows: mandatory recognition of credit.

Challenges of mobility windows, and potential solutions[16]

The following section takes a look at the difficulties that may be encountered when introducing mobility windows.

Introducing mobility windows, and finding the right timing during the programme

One of the most important questions institutions must decide is the selection of programmes where they should start working on the introduction of mobility windows. To make this decision, they must consider any prerequisites that are already met. These might include existing foreign language courses, international partnerships that already exist and can be further developed, strengths suitable for PR, quality in education, and other factors. The institution must also consider the type of mobility window best suited to the programme and the best timing of the window within the programme. Programmes must be differentiated according to their nature: some are sensitive to mobility and some attract less interest from international students.

At the level of individual programmes, the biggest task is having to revise the existing programme template and restructure the courses. In this respect, the following must be taken into account:

- Making changes to the curriculum and restructuring the courses is always a difficult task, especially for programmes with a heavily structured curriculum, in highly-regulated professions and that already have a high workload.
- Coordinating and harmonising home and host country curricula while maintaining the original standards of the programmes is no simple task. The more credits involved in the mobility, the more difficult it is to coordinate the relevant curricula. This must also be undertaken very carefully, as this will be the basis for the recognition of credits obtained abroad in the future.
- With mobility windows for study purposes, the most frequent solution is to set up a semester in which students can take up specialisation subjects and optional courses. This will invariably require changes to the programme template. The changes will also affect the students who remain at home, as they will follow the same programme template. Moreover, many students will be unable to progress according to the programme template for unrelated reasons, which could cause additional difficulties.

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16 Based on 'Introduction of mobility windows into the curricula of Hungarian higher education institutions', presented at the PLA organised by the Tempus Public Foundation on 2-3 December 2015 in Budapest, and the reports of the participants.

There might be cases where the original curriculum does not assign any credits to certain courses or practice periods (criterion requirement). If these courses/practice periods are intended to be part of the mobility window, then it is most advisable to revise the allocation of credits and assign credits to these parts of the curriculum as well. Otherwise, completing such courses/practice periods will not allow the mobility window to fulfil its goal of allowing students to obtain credits. This is a complicated task, as the total number of programme credits is fixed; i.e. when changing the number of credits assigned to a course from zero to some other number, the same number of credits must be unallocated from one or more other courses.

- When restructuring the curriculum, the institutions must also be careful not to risk the accreditation status of the programmes (both in the home and the host country). This will require special quality assurance tasks and processes to be set up.

When deciding on the timing of the mobility window within a programme, consideration must be given not only to when the window would best fit in the study programme academically, based on the considerations mentioned above (type and nature of the programme), but also the earliest time that students are able to travel abroad, i.e. when they can apply for an Erasmus+ or other grant. In this respect, for programmes in the two-cycle model, the short duration of programmes allows very limited wiggle room: in bachelor programmes (1st cycle), students may not travel abroad too soon, and the last semester is not recommended due to other potential complications – in many countries, courses end later than the semester does in the home country, potentially causing the student's final examination to be delayed. Due to the variance in semester start and end times, a student might already have completed his or her final examination by the time they receive their transcript from the host country. For bachelor (1st cycle) programmes, therefore, it is recommended to schedule the mobility window for one of the two semesters preceding the last one. In the case of Master (2nd cycle) programmes, the semester ideal for accommodating a mobility window is the second or the third semester, depending on the length of the programme. The last semester is not recommended for these programmes either.

- To the extent possible, when making changes to the curriculum, it is useful to consider the risk of delay to students: if the curriculum remains highly structured after the changes, students who do not follow the programme template will not be able to use the mobility window if it is scheduled at a fixed point in the programme. For compulsory mobility windows, this is a problem; otherwise, such students will simply not participate in mobility.
- The revised programme template should remain suitable also for the students who remain in the home institution: acquiring the credits that students abroad are envisaged to obtain in a foreign country should not involve additional workload for them. It would be useful to make available other forms of internationalisation to the students remaining in the home institution, through the curriculum (courses international guest teachers in a foreign language) and/or by other means (e.g. mixing with incoming international students).

A well-functioning credit recognition system

Another huge challenge for mobility windows is to create a transparent and properly regulated credit recognition system which provides security to the students travelling abroad. Feedback from colleagues working in the international field indicates that while there is an increasing number of well-functioning procedures in this respect, credit recognition practices are not consistent despite the European recommendations and there is much haphazardness, bureaucracy and teacher subjectivity in the system. One of the greatest challenges is therefore to overcome the sentiment of teachers who are unwilling to leave old practices behind and are not open to variation from the programme template or to the acquisition of credits in other institutions, especially in a foreign one. There are still very many credits obtained abroad that are not recognised, and the associated fear makes students unwilling to participate in mobility.

This issue does not apply only to credits obtained through a mobility window but is a general problem that is one of the most important questions of international student mobility.

By including a clear description of the recognition of international mobility in the institution's study and examination policy, including the steps of the process and the decision-making body, from pre-accreditation to actual credit recognition and the conversion of marks, the institution can create transparency for the students.

As for the teachers, it is important that they have a clear understanding of the issues associated with mobility windows, and, in a wider context, the internationalisation of the institution. While the introduction of mobility windows is, in most places, a top-down process, the resistance of teachers and departments stemming from the 'replaceability' of their subject may be reduced if they retain the decision-making rights concerning fundamental academic issues, including the evaluation and acceptance of the foreign partner. What mobility windows can offer as an advantage compared to other models is that most types of mobility windows require close

collaboration between the academics involved in the different programmes in order to achieve some curricular compatibility, if not alignment. This should reduce the amount of control that home academics have over what happens abroad, and reduce mistrust. While not the best solution, if differences of opinion over recognition continue however, restructuring the curriculum by moving such courses to another semester for not affecting the mobility window could help.

Resistance by staff; excessive workload, low level of motivation, lack of funds

In practice, the reasons for resistance and the low level of motivation are excessive workload and insufficient remuneration for increased work.

Excessive staff workload and the insufficiency of funds are the two most problematic factors affecting the implementation of any task of the institution. The introduction of a mobility window, together with the associated reworking and harmonisation of the curriculum will invariably result in additional workload on the short term (while on the long-term, after the revision of the curriculum, the resulting benefits – the predictability and standardisation of processors – will significantly reduce such workload). Also, the home institution's study documentation needs to be converted into a foreign language for the purpose of foreign-language programmes to be launched in order to support incoming student mobility. For many programmes, the curriculum also needs to be revised to fit the interests of the target group (for example by continuously updating the subspecialisation). The inflow of foreign students through a mobility window or otherwise results in additional administrative workload in all fields. Challenges for student administration staff include creating a student data management system that functions well in a foreign language, the provision of appropriate information, managing visas, handling student complaints and claims, and especially having administrative staff speaking foreign languages. Similarly, the library, the website management staff and the financial administration staff must also be prepared to handle additional workload due to international mobility.

Even though it might seem that there are few tools to motivate staff to promote internationalisation and the introduction of mobility windows, there are certain options worth considering:

- Involving all stakeholders in the planning process; convincing teachers and administrative staff by outlining how mobility windows will benefit them through the predictability of mobility and the fact that it will enable them to improve their profession-related language skills and create a more open international educational environment for them as well. Everyone must be made to see that by restructuring mobility-related processes, tasks and responsibilities that are currently being performed in a disjointed manner, and by sharing information with stakeholders and improving coordination, work processes will become more transparent and efficient, resulting in a competitive advantage within a reasonable time. Teacher and staff mobility, as well as the dissemination of good practice related to mobility windows abroad may help bring about a change of perspective. Building the mobility windows with those partner academics with whom the home academics have established ties and collaboration in another practice that can reduce the amount of opposition and even create academic ownership of the process.
- It is important that teachers whose courses in the home country are covered by the mobility window do not feel overshadowed. The inflow of foreign students may compensate for the loss of contact hours due to home students leaving, as well as the fear of the teacher's work becoming redundant – all this requires good organisation and suitable training for the teachers. A well-functioning, ideally reciprocal mobility window should result in an increase in the workload of staff teaching courses in a foreign language.
- Inbound teacher mobility could play a role in reducing the workload of teachers in the home institution. As mentioned earlier, however, the linear mode of delivery followed in many institutions seriously hampers the ability of the institution to enable guest teachers to have a higher number of contact hours or to teach a larger block of courses.
- Outbound staff mobility can introduce staff to best practices and improve their motivation, as well as get them to know the foreign academics and their teaching methods.
- For teachers involved in international teaching activities, it is important to incorporate non-financial incentives to reward their activity in this field. One of the most important factors is that the criteria for career progress should include an appreciation of teaching in a foreign language, in the home country or abroad. Additional opportunities include a reduction in contact hours, granting sabbaticals, and enabling staff to do research abroad as a guest researcher – although these place a financial burden on the institution. Several institutions reward teachers teaching in a foreign language by paying them a higher hourly fee, funded from the increase in recent years in the number of students coming for a full programme.

Staff competencies

In many cases, staff resistance may stem from deficiencies and problems related to the competencies required for mobility-related tasks. Mobility-related tasks are multi-faceted, and while a mobility window can integrate such tasks and make them transparent and predictable, it also introduces new requirements for the staff involved.

- Often, the language skills and professional competence of the staff are inadequate for the international environment: there are too few lecturers teaching in a foreign language and too few student administration staff capable of managing foreign students' affairs in a foreign language.
- In addition to delivering courses in a foreign language, teachers are required to internationalise both the professional content of their course and their teaching methodology, as well as the language of technical literature.
- Teachers are also expected to be able to establish international contacts in their field, to keep their course updated with the most recent information and research through international relations, to find new mobility partners and to participate in networking outside the institution.

While the above issues could already be seen earlier, in the framework of traditional mobility, the mandatory introduction of mobility windows in the future will hopefully speed up the processes leading to a resolution.

Student motivation

One of the greatest challenges to address is the poor motivation of students to participate in mobility. Even before citing practicalities, a significant portion of students reject foreign studies on the basis of principle. By providing appropriate information at the time of application and providing career advice after enrolment, students can be made open to foreign learning environments from the onset of their studies, ensuring that they perceive such studies not as a distant possibility but as an important or even required step in their professional development.
Mobility windows give students the assurance that their credits will be recognised and that participating in mobility will not cause them to skip a semester or to have to take special examinations in numerous subjects. Financial issues as well as insecurity as to how one will be able to manage the challenges posed by a foreign environment might still be obstacles to mobility, though. Finding suitable accommodation, especially if a mobility window can be shorter than a semester, can be another significant challenge. All-encompassing and well-organised preparatory arrangements can help overcome student fears. It is best if such preparations and arrangements are carried out along the lines and solutions developed jointly with the partner, and are documented in an agreement between the parties.

However large percentage of the students may be convinced to go, there will always be students who remain in the home country. Therefore, finding suitable activities for those students is a related challenge.

Finding a suitable partner

No mobility window can exist without a close partnership based on trust. Ideally – though not necessarily – mobility is organised on a reciprocal basis. However, finding a suitable partner is, in many cases, a challenge. One related issue is that even within the EHEA, students tend to be one-sided in choosing the target country, while popular target countries have little capacity. It is therefore important to increase the number of quality partners and to strengthen such relationships to an extent that might be suitable as a basis for establishing a two-way mobility window. An additional important factor is to communicate the partnership and the partner's offers appropriately, making them attractive to the students. With respect to practice period mobility, an emphasis must be placed on increasing the number of practice sites, industrial partners and research sites.

Restructuring tasks related to mobility windows: the need for harmonisation

In the institutions preparing for the establishment of a mobility window, the basic functionalities related to mobility are typically in place, but their operations are not sufficiently integrated and conscious. As the efficient operation of mobility windows requires

harmonised processes and consciously controlled operations, there is a need to set up a framework and coordination between organisational units that at present engage in cooperation only on an ad hoc basis. This includes reviewing the relevant tasks and developing a precise specification, the delegation of responsibility for specific levels and subprocesses, and, if possible, the operation of a business management system supporting these operations.

Other challenges

The following additional challenges should be anticipated:

- The geographical location of the institution, its degree of attractiveness, and its standing in the home country and internationally: these could have an effect on the pool of students who might be enrolled and the pool of international students who might find the institution attractive; on the willingness to travel to/from a foreign country; the type and extent of funds available; the ways of promoting mobility options, and other aspects.
- One must accept that while the introduction of mobility windows in one's country is still in the preparatory phase, no spectacular increase in the number of students involved should be expected until the scheme is introduced in a "critical" number of programmes and until the students incentivised to participate reach the semester including the mobility window.
- In programmes provided in the language of the home country, the institution will only be able to affect the number of students sent abroad. The only foreign students who might come to study in such programmes will be citizens of the home country living outside its borders. The introduction of mobility windows will also require institutions to introduce more structure into how they organise groups of courses delivered in a foreign language to international students and to students staying in the home country.
- The administration of financial affairs also requires some international adaptation in the form of the ability to handle payments from abroad, contact with foreign bank accounts and foreign financial systems, and the ability to clear international invoices - although these tasks also arise in the course of traditional international mobility.

Prerequisites to the introduction of mobility windows; recommendations[17]

Important steps have been taken to remove obstacles to mobility both at the European level and at the level of individual member states. These include the structural reform of higher education, the qualifications framework, the widespread adoption of the ECTS, the introduction of a quality assurance system based on common standards, and the mobility of scholarships and loans. The major shift in the country's education system towards learning outcome-based specification of programmes also matters a lot. This, in itself, is not yet sufficient, however: the higher education institutions themselves also need to accept certain tasks and take the necessary actions. In the following section, an attempt is made to give an overview of these tasks and actions to ensure the successful introduction of mobility windows.

Attitude of the management: commitment and strategy

The first and foremost of all prerequisites is that institutional management in higher education realise the importance of internationalisation[18] and the long-term benefits inherent in it, and develop a committed positive attitude to internationalisation, including support for student and staff mobility. The management should also be able to convince all staff involved of the importance of this cause. Managerial commitment means that the institution's internationalisation strategy is made clear and full support for it is made evident through the communication of the institution's management.

A decision adopted by the management can only be successfully implemented if such decision is well-founded and the path to implementation is well-considered. Just like for internationalisation, strategies and plans also need to be created for a subset of the issue as well, i.e. for mobility windows. This must include an overview of the institution's current situation, and an assessment

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17 Based on 'Introduction of mobility windows into the curricula of Hungarian higher education institutions', presented at the PLA organised by the Tempus Public Foundation on 2-3 December 2015 in Budapest, and the reports of the participants.

18 ACA encourages higher education institutions to develop a comprehensive internationalisation policy that includes mobility windows as a key tool. See the presentation Mobility windows by ACA on 29 October 2015 in Prague

of whether the relevant prerequisites (adequate number of teachers and staff, suitable partners and infrastructure, transparent processes, ability to handle international financial affairs and the ability to sustain the internationalisation process and the achievements, primarily from a financial perspective) are already met or can be met within a reasonable period. Operative tasks associated with the introduction of the window must be identified and scheduled, and responsibilities must be divided among the stakeholders involved. The international and global requirements – such as flexibility, openness, 'currentness' and sustainability – must be considered. It is important that implementation of the strategy is accompanied by risk management and quality assurance. The institution itself should determine the extent of its internationalisation, the rate at which it wishes to become more open and the tools used in the process. All this should be part of the institution's development strategy, supplemented by components of the career model and combined with talent management programmes.

While establishing commitment at an institutional level is primarily a task and challenge for the management of the higher education institution, teaching staff and the organisational units (persons) responsible for international affairs are primarily tasked with seeking and establishing international partnerships, developing international curricula, and comparing and possibly harmonising curricula. With a view to fundraising and the proper positioning of the higher education institution internationally, this is closely linked to the tasks of the institution in the fields of writing applications, implementing projects, financial management, international marketing, creating publicity for the role of the institution in the international community, and boosting its reputation. One of the most important tasks for institutional management in this respect is, on the one hand, to identify the institution's needs with respect to employing professionals with the right skills and experience and with respect to the internal improvements and reforms to be implemented; and, on the other hand, to ensure coordination among the professionals involved in different tasks and to secure and make available the funding required for the operations.

Re-thinking organisational structure and harmonising responsibilities

The introduction of mobility windows being a complex task, effective operation and coordinated performance by the actors involved require more than a few committed teachers and members of staff in international affairs. Rather, a dedicated professional organisational solution is needed. This inevitably requires the rethinking, strengthening and increasing of staff numbers in the organisational units handling international mobility, as well as drawing up precise specifications of mobility-related tasks and of responsibilities, as well as developing effective and coordinated operative process models (as part of the agreements signed with the partners and also as part of the institution's internal rules of organisation and operation). It is recommended to perform a thorough analysis of the existing practices, which often vary from one faculty to another and from one department to another, and to bring them together into a consistent set of processes that will be easier to follow. It is essential that mobility processes are supported by a suitable database with good record-keeping functions and online access.

Gradual implementation

The introduction of mobility windows into the programme portfolio must be gradual. It is essential that institutional management identify the principles behind the process and employ its own tools in support of the move. This part of the process therefore follows a top-down approach. Let us see some additional features:

- Attention must be paid to the characteristics of the programme relevant to a mobility window. In the case of mobility windows for the purpose of study, programmes delivered in a foreign language are the best first candidates for a mobility window. In the event of mobility windows for the purpose of practical training, implementation may best start with programmes that traditionally require a large amount of practical training, as well as practice-intensive dual training programs. Faculties and departments that are more internationally active and have existing partnerships should be identified and preferred for the implementation of a mobility window.
- All stakeholders, including teachers, students, administrative staff and staff responsible for international affairs and quality assurance should be involved in the process, which should be agreed and coordinated with them. One-way windows are feasible, but when establishing a two-way or multiple-way window, thorough consultations are needed with the staff involved of the partner institution(s).
- It is best if newly launched programs are set up to include a mobility window from the get-go. As these programs do not have an existing programme template, the curriculum can be developed to accommodate a mobility window from the start. Building

a mobility window into an existing program is best done gradually, for new entrants only, following a bottom-up approach. The change can be initiated at a faculty or departmental level.

- With respect to the number of partners, it is best not to base the mobility window on a single partner only. A mobility window like that is extremely "vulnerable" and should therefore be used only in very special cases.
- As to the number of mobility windows within a single programme, while one or more windows are both feasible, we consider it best to start by including a single mobility window with a duration of one semester.
- When planning a mobility window, the institutional body must look at the possibilities from various perspectives. The planning body must pay close attention to any requirements specific to the programme involved, as well as to the number of students affected by the introduction of a mandatory or optional window. In addition to the resulting anticipated numbers, it must also look at whether the institution has sufficient financial resources or options, possibly from support grants, that will be adequate for the future as well. Even if a mandatory mobility window is anticipated, it is worth considering the introduction of an optional window first. While a mandatory window would be more effective in many respects, it is more difficult to achieve as an initial approach, as it will, temporarily, generate a lot of additional workload, with relatively little support can be received. An optional window would better serve getting to know the concept of mobility windows, and would place less burden on the students.
- One must keep in mind that mobility windows are not the only tool for internationalisation and mobility. There might be situations when another tool might serve mobility better.

Finding a suitable foreign partner

It is not possible to have a mobility window without a suitable foreign partner. Mobility windows are not a form of ad hoc cooperation: they assume the existence of close personal professional links and trust, all of which should be sustainable and the long term. When seeking such a partner, one might keep in mind the following considerations:

- It is best to start with the existing active partnerships for mobility or international cooperation, and reassess them from the perspective of mobility windows. One must see whether such partnership is still ongoing, whether the partner would be willing to deepen such cooperation and possibly set up a reciprocal mobility window. "Dormant" agreements could be activated, and whenever possible, existing mobility partnerships could be elevated to a higher level. It is advisable to make use of the existing professional contacts of faculties and departments. These must be re-thought, however, and the demand for new mobility links should also be assessed. It is best if any new (or renewed) mobility agreement sets out more concrete, "mobility window specific" tasks.
- A relationship based on trust is essential both within the institution and between the partners. To generate such trust, it is best to involve as many teachers and administrative staff members already in the preparatory phase. Establishing a working relationship between the professionals responsible for training/mobility is useful for deepening trust and the strengthening the relationship. If cooperation is strong enough, joint examinations might be considered.
- When establishing a new partnership, it is best to thoroughly evaluate the partner itself and its operating environment first, and only then scrutinise its study programme. Before initiating negotiations, all important aspects should be analysed: legal regulations of the partner country, the partner's programme structure and strategy, study offer (subjects, potential for coordination), experience in and willingness for curriculum development, student pool (language skills, willingness to participate in mobility), and policies (e.g. requirements applicable to students). Not all evaluation criteria necessarily have the same weight. The reputation of the partner and the quality of the education it offers might, for example, be more important criteria than geographical distance. It might be worth developing a set of quality assurance criteria first for the purpose of assessing potential partners, and build network of partners using such criteria.
- Cooperation should only be sought with foreign partners whose teaching profile, and the intentions and perspectives concerning mobility are similar to those of the initiating institution. Ideally, both partners are willing to adjust their curricula in order to establish a mobility window. It should be emphasised, however, that this is not mandatory. It is important, however, that both partners retain the ability to make (ideally dynamic) changes in the future to ensure that the curriculum is adapted to professionally justified changes proposed by the partners.
- It is important that a mobility window relies on as many partnerships as possible. Relying on a single partner is risky, as it is difficult to find a new partner in time if the first partnership is unilaterally discontinued. Additionally, a single institution might not be able to accommodate the number of students planned to participate in a mobility window embedded in a specific study programme of the home institution.

- The content of the mobility window will have a profound influence on the contents of the agreement to be signed with the partner.
- It is essential that the agreement is mutually beneficial for the parties. The partnership must be sustainable, but periodic monitoring should also be implemented and it should be possible to terminate the agreement if necessary.
- Mobility windows do not have to be reciprocal. If they are, however, reciprocity requires that in the future the institution launch a higher number of quality courses taught in a foreign language. Such courses may be offered to the partner for the purpose of incoming mobility.
- In the spirit of reciprocity, the institution must agree to create an environment suitable for the foreign students sent by the partner: appropriate infrastructural and – to the extent possible – cultural environment and accommodation; teachers with the ability to deliver instruction in a foreign language and knowledgeable about methodology; administrative staff with foreign language skills and the ability to handle the affairs of foreign students; as well as a – preferably dedicated – contact person.
- The agreement signed by the institutions should cover more than the usual aspects of mobility (identification of study programmes, quality requirements, student numbers, selection and evaluation, credit recognition). It should also address the parties' commitments concerning the operation of the mobility window as a higher level of cooperation. Such additional aspects include monitoring, periodic joint evaluation, initiatives for the review and revision of the curriculum (primarily for reciprocal windows, double degrees and joint programmes), the preparation of outgoing students, support for the inclusion of incoming students, and the sharing of feedback and experience. If the foreign study period is to take place at a fixed point in time, separate rules must be elaborated for the timing of courses.

Revising and harmonising the curriculum

Mobility windows, by their very nature (i.e. studies completed abroad that count towards the home curriculum), make the revision of institutional curricula unavoidable. In many cases, curricula also need to be partially harmonised with the curricula of the partner institution. Revision of the curriculum of the study programme associated with the mobility window is the most important professional task related to mobility windows. The following considerations might be kept in mind during this process:

- The likelihood of being able to coordinate one's curriculum with that of foreign institution is minimal[19] if the existing curriculum – or at least the part of it affected by the mobility window – is overly rigid, closed and unstructured, which makes it is impossible for the knowledge covered in that segment or the associated learning outcomes to be acquired or achieved in another higher education institution. Even in programmes specifically intended to impart knowledge about the home country's social and cultural traditions, or in studies preparing for learning outcomes applicable in such programmes, a portion of the curriculum must be designed so that it is open and compatible with a foreign environment.
- As partnerships are two-way, it is not enough for the academic performance of students studying abroad to be recognised for the purpose of the home country's curriculum: the home country's curriculum must also provide foreign exchange students with content that enables the knowledge obtained in that country to be recognised by their home institution.
- Ensuring compatibility among curricula requires substantial preparatory work, which should be carried out under the direction of the persons in charge of tertiary programmes, with the relevant teachers of all partners participating. The timing of a mobility window within a programme can be selected so that it fits the needs of the programme. An important component of this process is the analysis of the programmes delivered by the partners.
- Curricular harmonisation is possible only where there are matching subjects or topics in the curricula: the parties either identify equivalent subjects in the different curricula, or they might identify components of the curricula that are independent from specific programmes and that lead to credits that will be recognised for all or at least several programmes. It is important to see that mobility students are not limited to the subjects that they could have taken up in their home institution: they might also choose courses from the other institution's study offer that provide supplementary or new knowledge in a similar field. An effort could be made to group courses that are identical or that fit the programme into the mobility window.
- This is the best route to take not only for programmes involving outgoing student mobility but also for the ones affected by inbound student mobility: courses that are meaningful for incoming foreign students should be scheduled for the mobility semester.

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19   ACA also encourages higher education institutions to establish interinstitutional cooperation aimed at window mobility and the internationalisation of curricula in general. See the presentation Mobility windows by ACA on 29 October 2015 in Prague.

- An additional important factor is student satisfaction based on the analysis of feedback: when selecting the courses to be included in the group of mobility subjects, attention should be paid to feedback on what courses students travelling to or arriving from abroad, respectively, like to take up. The grouping of subjects is needed mainly if the mobility window is reciprocal. Otherwise the important thing is to offer an adequate selection of courses to incoming students.
  If at all possible, coordinated curricula should be flexible enough to be able to handle students who deviate from the programme template by one semester.
- If there are several foreign partners and the mobility window is reciprocal, it is best to develop credit equivalence tables agreed separately with each partner institution, and to include such tables in the mobility window agreements.

Attractiveness and quality assurance

Partnerships for mobility windows include hosting students from the other party, which – especially together with the need to coordinate curricula as mentioned above – is relevant to the issue of attractiveness. One of the major factors of establishing attractiveness is quality. For institutions of the home country to be able to find institutional partners with curricula that are professionally compatible and can be recognised towards the programme accredited in the home country, they themselves need to be attractive and meet appropriate standards, which they must be able to communicate purposefully, credibly and effectively.

There is a complex set of quality assurance aspects related to international mobility:
- Mobility windows themselves are already expected to contribute to the quality of education. This, however, will not occur automatically. Effort must therefore be made to enhance quality from the earliest steps in establishing a mobility window.
- Quality assurance is not an end in itself: the goal to be kept in mind is that a programme including a mobility window should ultimately bring satisfaction and feelings of success to all stakeholders. It is not mobility windows that bring quality assurance to an institution: the institution should already have in place appropriate internal institutional quality assurance mechanisms in line with national and international standards (ESG[20]).
- Being accredited in one's home country refers to the minimum level of quality. In an international context, accreditation by a well-known foreign accreditation agency and the purposeful communication of results indicative of quality are especially important. Such results might include the ratio of finding employment after graduation, student achievements and scientific results, as well as existing cooperation with prestigious partners for teaching, research or practical training. Institutions have already collected all or part of such results during the accreditation process. They would only need to be communicated on the institutional web site, both on the home country language version and on the English version. Having obtained such an international accreditation in addition to accreditation by the national agency would facilitate the recruitment of partners and students even more.
- Another specialty of mobility windows is that quality assurance should be a criterion in the partner selection phase already. In this respect, the first thing to be clarified is the expected quality standards of the partnership, the manner of checking and assessing the quality of potential partners, and the selection criteria. Institutions should develop an assessment system that enables them to compare various partners. In addition to the assessment completed by the institution, one should also be familiar with the partner's existing quality assurance evaluations, accreditation and any related professional or student feedback. Some information and quality assurance criteria are already included in the Charter required for Erasmus+ applications.
- As the parties undertake contractual obligations, quality assurance must also cover legal compliance, including in the context of the legal requirements of the partner country, any licensing or registration requirements, the identity of the persons authorised to sign for the organisation, and the need for periodic legal review of the agreements. Legal preparations should be appropriate and consistent presentation (through contract and other documents templates) is important.
- The issue of quality is an important factor when revising curricula. Harmonisation is a challenge in two respects: first, the content of and credits allocated to parts of the studies completed in the home and host country, respectively (requirement concerning practical training) must be harmonised, and, second, the curricula of students travelling abroad and staying at home, respectively, must also be harmonised so that their temporary separation does not result in additional workload for the students

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20   ESG: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg

or the institution. In the context of restructuring curricula because of mobility windows, one must take into consideration the programme's existing accreditation in the home country, the content of the last accreditation report, the suggestions for improvement included in the last accreditation report, as well as any required changes to be verified through an ex post monitoring procedure.

- The quality assurance of a mobility window must have components that are joint or harmonised with the partner. It is best to cover these in the agreement. It is important that both partners have in place are system for collecting student feedback on both the quality of instruction and on the successful completion of studies. Reports provided by returning students, covering not only academic but also cultural and recreational aspects, help sustain the quality of the programme. If the mobility window has an added staff mobility component, guest lecturers visiting the partner can also bring back information on one another's work. Feedback must be processed in a meaningful way and any issues uncovered must be addressed by the partners with sufficient seriousness. In addition to the unilateral institutional monitoring covering the partnership, it is advisable to include in the agreement arrangements for periodic joint evaluations, as well as joined corrective actions when necessary.

- Quality assurance must be able to meet the physical and staff requirements of mobility and the long term. Both partners need to be able to provide foreign students with a suitable educational environment in a foreign language (study and reference materials, information, administration), and a suitable sociocultural environment.

- Although it is addressed in a separate section as well, quality assurance also includes the guarantee for the mandatory recognition of credits obtained by outgoing students through the mobility window. In addition to recognition, other student rights and interests must also be upheld: for outgoing students, this includes administrative support, the right to legal remedy, the acceptance of suitable credit certificates, their inclusion in the diploma supplement, making it easier to pay any fees due, opportunities for receiving other forms of support, and other services.

- Protecting the interests of incoming students is also a part of quality assurance. This includes the provision of information in a suitable language, the right to legal remedy, the issue of credit certificates in due time, organising services and cultural programs, opportunities for receiving support, and other services.

- Setting up a professional organisational structure as described earlier is essential for the purpose of quality assurance as well. Such a structure must clearly define the roles and competencies of individual organisational units and responsible persons, set standardised, transparent and deliverable administrative requirements in the field of handling mobility affairs, lay down efficient processes and ensure coordination and close cooperation among the various organisational units.

- Quality assurance also encompasses the appropriate preparation of outgoing students: it is important they possess the requisite profession-specific knowledge, language skills and sociocultural awareness.

- It is difficult to ensure the fulfilment of all of these quality assurance criteria together: it can only be the result of a longer process. Additionally, it might not be necessary to implement all of them together – rather, these criteria serve as a guideline to achieving an ideal situation. Institutions, however, must strive to meet as many of these criteria as possible.

- In the introductory phase, for example, a mobility window may be organised for a subspecialisation on the basis of the customary Erasmus+ agreements and the practice followed so far. In this case, the number of partner agreements is determined on the basis of the students participating in the subspecialisation, taking 20-30% of this number as the basis. It is possible therefore for a programme to review the existing mobility options suitable for a sub-specialisation, and establish a mobility window.

Recognition of studies abroad

A mobility window will only be successful in achieving the goals set out for it and the underlying partnership will only function well if it makes it significantly easier for students to have their performance abroad recognised than through a conventional credit recognition or validation process (a more ad hoc process not based on an underlying partnership). This assumes that adequate information about the administrative tasks is provided to the students travelling abroad through a mobility window, and returning, as well as to the teachers and administrative staff involved in the recognition process; that the entire process is coordinated centrally, where possible (all-round support for submitting recognition requests, the provision of a separate submission period if necessary); and that record-keeping processes (e.g. the form and content of credit certificates) are harmonised with the partner institution. All this is done to ensure that it is a controlled rather than an ad hoc process. Establishing mobility windows will inherently cause an increase in the number of recognition procedures at the institution. The institution therefore will make not only the students' but its own job easier by ensuring that these tasks are performed in a systematic and organised manner according to a plan, so that the process runs smoothly even when there is a spike in the number of requests. To achieve this, the following might be considered:

- The institution needs to create a transparent and properly regulated credit recognition mechanism that is based on a comparison of curricula and that will make the recognition of credits acquired abroad practically automatic. The evaluation of practice periods completed abroad should also be precisely regulated. It is useful to keep a list of the companies where the institution's students have worked before, to evaluate these companies and to strive to establish a long-term professional relationship with those that prove to be valuable practical placement sites.
- In addition to addressing credit transfer and validation after the fact, an approach based on prior action must also be built up.
- This means that decision-makers should not encounter the question of whether a specific act of student performance can be recognised only after the relevant course (practice period) has been completed; rather, students should ask for a statement in advance before taking up that course (start the practice period). Such a prior statement, or pre-accreditation, will of course not change the rule that a final decision on credit recognition may only be adopted subsequently; it does mean, however, that if the credit transfer committee adopted a positive opinion on an issue of recognition in advance, the subsequent decision should not countermand it as long as the conditions haven't changed and the student completed the course/practice period as specified in the prior statement. This is the goal of the new Learning Agreement template used for Erasmus+ mobility, but many institutions have their own mechanisms in place for endorsing courses in advance. Mobility windows enable students to take up a set of courses that is already known to the institution (or the academic unit), simplifying the issue of prior endorsement.
- Request for prior statements regarding credit recognition will be most effective on a systemic level, for a higher number of students, if the programme includes an embedded mobility window which proposes, based on curricular harmonisation, a set of mobility courses (practice period) for the period concerned. This might be supported by including in the agreement signed by the partners a list of all courses that are mandatorily recognised towards the students' home study programme. Naturally, such a so-called credit equivalence list may be included in the agreement only after the relevant curricula have been compared, an agreement was reached between the parties, and the credit transfer committees have issued their preliminary opinion. There must also be a suitable maintenance mechanism in place regarding the list.
- It is not necessary to otherwise fundamentally reorganise or centralise the credit recognition system in the institution. Operative tasks may continue to be performed on a faculty/department basis (the mobility coordinator can, of course, assist with the credit recognition process). The main thing is to ensure that there is a flexible system in place which operates automatically, securely and free from problems. The current mechanism for subsequent credit recognition would remain, but would be supplemented with the option of requesting a prior opinion from the credit transfer committee, and with the fact that credit recognition is mandatory whenever there is a partnership agreement. This procedure would be recommended, with a mandatory nature, also to the non-window students travelling abroad. There is no doubt that the more ad hoc courses not checked before a student takes up, the more difficult preliminary endorsement is, but at least an effort should be made to implement pre-accreditation.
- The establishment of a secure credit recognition system could be supported by creating a so-called mobility map. This is an informative diagram which shows which subspecialisation is and courses may be taken up at/by which partners. The map can help students take up subjects that will be recognisable for the purpose of their study trip selected later, even if that subject is not taught in the home institution.
- Establishing a so-called precedent system for the purpose of credit recognition is an interesting solution. What this entails is that a specific credit once recognised for a student should be automatically recognised for any other student later, provided that the conditions are identical (a course provided by the same partner, with the same curriculum and the same number of credits, taken up by a home student with an identical academic background). Such a proceeding system can be useful also for students travelling abroad outside mobility windows.

Organisational, communication and marketing tasks associated with mobility windows

Operating mobility windows involves various organisational and logistics tasks, which require preparation. Some of the tasks are no different from the mobility-related tasks established earlier.

Tasks of academic units

Most of these have already been listed. Here is a brief summary:

- Review of contacts and relationships, curricular revision, inclusion of a mobility window, organisational tasks related to student mobility, provision of courses in foreign languages, and international networking. Fundraising is only partially the responsibility of academic units – the most important source of funding for mobility is the Erasmus+ programme, for which institutions can only apply for as a whole. Even a department, on the other hand, can build industry contacts that support mobility, or may identify sources of supplementary funding.

Organisational tasks related to students

- Selection of students: applications may be received centrally or by the academic unit, but ranking and decision-making is always a task for the faculty or department. In each case, preliminary consultation must be held with the manager of grant funds (office for international affairs, faculty coordinator) regarding the number of students who may pursue studies abroad.
- Preparing window students (profession-specific preparatory courses, language skills, preparing students for the environment in the foreign country).
- Administrative and support tasks to be performed during and after the return of window students, helping them report to the home institution, and with the evaluation of the experience.
- Receiving incoming students, providing accommodation and facilitating their adjustment.
- Providing academic support to incoming students.
- Helping guest students find their way in the buildings and part of buildings they use – foreign language signs, map of buildings on the web site.
- Translating information and basic rules and policies for guest students.
- Organising a mentor network to support foreign students.
- Collecting, processing and discussion of student and teacher feedback – measuring and increasing student and teacher satisfaction.

Effective communication and promotion activities also entail multi-faceted tasks:

- An institution's communication activities are considered good if all stakeholders – managers, teachers, future applicants, students, study administrators, partners etc. – are provided with adequate information about mobility windows, and if it engenders interest in and motivation for such windows. This can be achieved by highlighting the benefits of mobility windows, presenting good examples and results achieved in and outside the country, disseminating the experience of staff who have been successful in this field, and by providing information about the legal regulations and the institution's processes and support offered for the purpose of the mobility window.
- Communication should not be pursued only on an ad hoc basis (one-time recruitment initiatives or information campaigns); rather, it should be ongoing, and should be continuously accessible especially to students and any person interested in applying. It is recommended to bring the issue of mobility windows up to teaching and non-teaching members of staff until the associated benefits become evident to them.
- It is important to ensure that information about bottom-up international cooperation activities and initiatives coming from the faculty/department/teacher level reaches the central management so that it can ensure coordination and offer assistance to the departments.
- In promoting a mobility window outside the institution, it is best to use all methods and channels of communication: web site (including in a foreign language) trade fairs, alumnus programmes, social media (Facebook), open days, staff training weeks, international events, and oral communication at professional conferences and expert meetings.

Handling students

Similarly to conventional mobility, mobility windows are not intended to ensure that all students, without exception, participate in mobility, unless it is a mandatory window with highly-prescribed content. It is not possible, nor is it necessary to provide each and every student an opportunity to study (or complete a practice period) approach. It is therefore necessary – and will probably also be required by the partners – to have a selection procedure in place, which should take into account the interest, the level of subject-specific knowledge and foreign language skills of students, as well as their ability to cope with a foreign environment. Travel abroad through mobility windows can be supplemented with a talent management perspectives.

When a program includes a mobility window, applicants should be informed of this option already when the application criteria are announced. This is especially relevant if the mobility window is a mandatory one.

Mobility windows resolve the greatest fear of students, the fear regarding recognition, even though applicants cannot yet see this clearly – at this point, they are attracted instead by the opportunity for studying or completing a practice period abroad. The intercultural preparation of students is an extremely important task: information days, the web site and all other channels of information should clearly articulate the advantages of mobility to students, as well as the costs associated with mobility, the requirements regarding academic performance and language skills, and the key characteristics of the various host sites and countries. Additionally, any major variances from the rules applicable in the home country should be pointed out.

At the same time, the students staying at home as well as incoming foreign students should also be provided an international environment for learning and leisure. Courses provided in the home institution should not only be held in a foreign language but should also have foreign students attending in addition to the home students. The institution should be able to provide quality, an international environment of appropriate standards, events facilitating adaptation, as well ongoing academic and technical assistance to incoming students.

Compensation

The introduction of mobility windows requires without a doubt capacity and funds. This is a question of intent and decision on the part of management.

In the context of funding through application programmes, the most significant ones are Erasmus+ on a European level and CEEPUS for Central Europe, but of course there are numerous national and regional support schemes. It is therefore important that the institution has a well-functioning application monitoring system, with links to the units requiring/organising mobility.

With respect to funding for courses delivered in a foreign language, the potentially higher costs of provision and, to some extent, the fees paid by foreign students might be mentioned.

As mentioned earlier, departments should also be involved in the planning of financial support for mobility so that not all resources are managed centrally and so that the faculty budget also include internationalisation expenditure.

Establishing a mobility window – Step-by-step process

This chapter is intended to follow a step-by-step approach to assist professionals involved in the internationalisation of higher education with a focus on mobility windows.

Mobility windows for new and existing programmes

If a properly defined and specified mobility window is introduced, it can be implemented gradually, for new entrants only, but in the building/pilot phase, it is worth considering doing a test using existing programmes. The long-term goal is to provide the option of a mobility window for all programmes.

To gain a clear understanding of the processes, it is essential to clarify the concept of mobility windows. If the institution offers a semester's worth of credits to students in a foreign language, but the students study for those credits in their home institution, it is not a mobility window. Such a scheme would be covered by the topic „Internationalisation at home", i.e. virtual mobility. One of the foremost requirements for mobility windows is physical mobility. These two forms of mobility – virtual and physical – are both relevant to higher education institutions. As explained above, only a portion of students can be expected to pursue physical mobility due to financial and other study management issues.

- Embedding a mobility window into conventional bachelor (Cycle 1) programmes comprising 6 or 7 semesters or master (Cycle 2) programmes comprising 3 or 4 semesters is a significantly more complex task.
- The controlled introduction of mobility windows on a national level assumes open and transparent communication as well as strong PR work, all this in an environment already rife with competition for students among the programs. How the study programme of a degree programme is specified depends on the institution. Making changes to existing structures is a difficult task which requires several years.
- A special solution for practice-intensive programmes could be to enable students to complete a more substantial, continuous practice period (worth as much as 30 credits) abroad. This might be implemented by cooperating with another higher education institution, or even directly through partnerships with companies. Mobility may involve the preparation of the one's thesis abroad (in a foreign language), with the recognition of additional credits, but this raises other issues. The issue of overlapping periods has already been mentioned in this paper in this respect. Here, we would only point out the issue with thesis advisors: finding foreign advisors is difficult, teachers are more willing to receive exchange students coming to study.

Institutional goals and preparations

Higher education institutions aim to meet the challenges of internationalisation at progressively higher standards. The choice of tools to be used to achieve qualitative and quantitative growth in the field of internationalisation, and, more specifically, in the context of mobility windows, is a question of institutional intent.

For the institution to be able to set out its objectives concerning mobility windows, irrespective of the approach chosen (within new, vs existing study programmes or both) an internal assessment should be carried out. The most important questions in respect are as follows:
Which are the institution's existing programmes where the programme template makes it possible to build in a mobility window?

- Which are the programmes where, while mobility is possible, a mobility window is absolutely unfeasible – this may be the case for part-time (evening/correspondence) programmes, for example.
- Which are the anticipated programmes where the inclusion of a mobility window will definitely be mandatory, and how and with what tools does the institution intend to meet this requirement?

To answer these three questions, the institution needs to examine the programme template, the existing and potential international contacts associated with the various programmes, the subjects/modules taught in a foreign language and their suitability for inclusion in a mobility window, as well as the existing credit recognition practices.

Organisational tasks related to partners

In the context of organisational tasks related to partners, a distinction must be made on the basis of the purpose of the mobility window: does it offer mobility for the purpose of studies or for practical training?
In either case, if a faculty wants to build a mobility window into its programme templates, it should give preference to long-standing, time-tested, well-functioning partnerships.

In the context of mobility windows for study purposes, the main criteria for partner selection are the content and quality of foreign language courses, and how well they fit the home institution's curriculum. The courses and modules sought need not necessarily be identical or greatly overlapping in terms of content. It could just as well be that the institution considers the group of subjects important but lacks qualified teachers in the relevant field, and a foreign institution might be able to provide the desired instruction.

When building a relationship, personal contact is an important factor. In the context of mobility for study purposes, personal contact can result in teacher exchanges, research programmes and joint applications, which can help the joint curricular development and training required for establishing the window. Personal contact is always a good starting point for developing a progressively closer relationship and for cooperation based on mutual trust.

Geographic location is less of a factor, and it does not determine the quality of a higher education institution anyhow. Experience to date indicates that there is great variance in the interest of students. When it comes to geography, some wish to travel north, some to the south, and some to a nearby location. With respect to the geographic location of the partners, however, it is important to keep in mind that while large cities and capital cities are always attractive destinations, they are also much more expensive than other locations.

When establishing a reciprocal or even a one-way mobility window, one must also look at the language of instruction. It is safe to assume that in the academic community, mobility windows using the English language will be the most popular ones, but will by no means be the only ones. The most important criterion is that the language of instruction used in the partner institution should fit the needs of the home institution. If the home institution's students are received by several foreign institutions, language skills in more than one foreign language could be among the requirements for applicants.

Division of labour between the parties involved in a mobility window

Many actors are involved in creating a mobility window. Mobility windows and conventional mobility comprise many identical or similar tasks. It is important to see that to perform all tasks effectively, close cooperation is needed between the actors responsible for the various fields.

- The sending institution is the one providing the possibility of mobility and, if applicable, the requisite funding through scholarships.
- The host institution is responsible for providing student services both in the field of academic matters and in other respects (accommodation, events).

The management of the programmes involved will have a significantly more active role in developing the mobility window, including with respect to the coordination of courses, (reciprocal) credit recognition, and the conversion of marks from one system to another.

The following section describes a potential way of dividing labour associated with mobility windows by a medium-sized institution having faculties. The allocation of tasks and responsibilities can, of course, vary depending on the size of the institution, its traditions and its organisational characteristics.

- Institutional top management level *(rector, chancellor)*:
  – establishes managerial commitment, builds strategy, make decisions concerning the introduction of mobility windows, ensuring that the implementation process fits the institution's other objectives and its entire internationalisation process
  – secures funding for the mobility window and lays down the rules of funding
  – wins staff over to the cause of mobility windows, engenders a positive attitude in the institution's staff

- Institutional deputy top management level *(vice rector for educational or international affairs)*:
  – coordinates mobility-related processes at the top management level
  – supervises the Central Office for International Affairs
  – raises awareness of the concept and benefits of mobility windows and disseminates best practice within the institution in line with the other institutional tasks and internationalisation process coordination activities at the same level

- *Central Office for International Affairs:*
  – coordinates the mobility processes in the institution, assists with the operation of mobility windows, performs mobility-related administrative tasks in close cooperation with other organisational units, formalises and standardises processes
  – assists in fundraising and in applications, provides financial information
  – supports faculties/institutions in finding and selecting partners, signing agreements, and in elaborating and implementing mobility
  – reviews existing international relationships to identify the ones that might be suitable as the basis for a mobility window, proposes the signing or termination of agreements, performs administrative tasks in preparation for signing the agreements
  – establishes contact with new partners independently, consults with partners on general mobility issues, monitors for and signals problems concerning recognition, quality or otherwise in relation to the agreement to the partners

- performs promotional activities and event organisation, regularly consults with institutional coordinators, ensuring the participation of faculty/department leaders
- performs the logistics, organisational coordination and monitoring tasks

- *Legal department:* assesses the legal environment and monitors the lawfulness of proposed agreements

- *Faculty leaders (dean, vice dean):*
  - clarify the scope of programs concerned, ensuring that the persons in charge of tertiary programmes, those in charge of courses, Erasmus coordinators and students are involved in the process; for the programmes concerned, set the timing of the mobility window within the study programme and consider the issue of credit recognition
  - receive and discuss institutional initiatives
  - keep mobility records and perform study management tasks at faculty level
  - consult the Central Office for International Affairs and the institutional leadership with a view to funding, support and operational coordination
  - liaise with the partner at faculty leader level, prepare annual mobility programmes
  - carry out promotional activities at faculty level

- *Institution/department, persons in charge of tertiary programmes and persons in charge of courses:*
  - create plans to carry out preparatory work for the introduction of mobility windows and building them into the curriculum, and fill mobility windows with professional content
  - evaluate partner institutions, practice sites and curricula prior to negotiations and signing an agreement; carry out preparatory work for partnership agreements
  - maintain professional relations with the partner at the level of teachers and persons in charge of tertiary programmes
  - discuss changes to the curriculum and initiate the implementation of changes
  - select the students travelling abroad, create a student mobility programme for them, provide preparation in terms of professional issues, foreign languages and intercultural skills, keep in contact with students abroad and the coordinators of partners
  - advise incoming students and assist them during their studies

- *Faculty-level coordinators:*
  - organise mobility in cooperation with the Central Office for International Affairs: plan student travels, prepare outgoing students, prepare travels abroad, process applications or participate in the central process for assessing applications
  - receive and coordinate incoming students, assist with accommodation, travels, meals, adaptation etc.

- *Body/person making credit recognition decisions:*
  - issues a prior opinion on the recognition of courses available abroad as part of the block scheduled for the mobility window semester, or on the recognition of the practice period to be completed abroad
  - pursues quick, standardised and automated decision-making concerning the recognition of courses/practical training with a prior positive assessment

- *International and study departments of faculties:*
  - liaise with departments
  - carry out promotional activities at faculty level among home students
  - approve the list of students travelling abroad, as well as the mobility programme
  - provide support for the adaptation of incoming students, assist with handling and keeping records of their study-related issues

- *Faculty quality assurance committee:*
  - handles complaints
  - evaluates feedback from students/teachers/partners
  - assures the quality of the mobility windows and performs quality monitoring in line with the institution's internal quality policy, taking into consideration the home country's accreditation requirements and possibly any international accreditation requirements (e.g. for joint programmes)

- *Faculty financial office:*
  - handles scholarship agreements – while the coordinator for international affairs is responsible for signing the agreements, the financial department is responsible for making money transfers
  - carries out financial tasks and coordinates the use of funds

- *Student organisation and ESN (not present in all institutions):*
  - promotes mobility windows among the students
  - uses its mentor network to help create an international environment

Allocation of human and financial resources

The most important task is to ensure that the topic of internationalisation as well as the fact that the institution wishes to allocate resources to the process are reflected strongly in the decisions adopted by the institution. There are two important issues on which the organisational unit introducing a mobility window must work with the unit organising international mobility:

- the submission of each annual application, and
- the allocation of funding once the results are known.

The academic unit organising the mobility window should provide precise information on the number of window students. To ensure this, the submission of the applications of students for the subsequent academic year should precede the relevant application by the institution. This way, the request for funding can be based on actual figures.

Once the application results are known, it is advisable to set up a separate scholarship budget for window students. To calculate the size of this project, precise information must be available on the destination country/countries, the duration and type of mobility (studies or practice period), and also on whether students submitted a relevant request (e.g. for a scholarship based on financial need). This allows the calculation of each student's scholarship amount and the planned scholarship budget for window students can be summed up.

It is advisable to set up an institutional budget for internationalisation, with a fixed percentage of this budget allocated to student support.

Many higher education institutions have foundations, which might also be able to supplement student scholarship amounts. The leadership of the faculties and of the institution plays a key role here.

Finally, departments and faculties can also use their industry and professional contacts for fundraising.

The institution has various options when it comes to providing financial support from its internal funds: it can grant a full support amount to students not receiving a scholarship or might grant supplemental payment to scholarship holders.

For the purpose of decision-making it is important to specify what the support granted by the institution is based on: it is best to base it on excellence, but support based on financial need, as well as dedicated assistance, e.g. support for travel or insurance are also feasible.

All of these procedures must be public and be implemented through a suitable internal application scheme so that students are aware of their options and can submit their applications in a timely manner.

Designing a mobility window is typically a task for the faculty, as it is usually a single faculty that is responsible for a study program, including its accreditation.

Introducing mobility windows might be compulsory for the institution but might only be compulsory for students if the programme specification includes a compulsory window and provides funding for it.

We recommend that the institutional management set as a minimum requirement that at least one programme of the institution has a mobility window, discuss the related tasks with the institution's stakeholders, and provide both financial and other support to the faculty which introduces the window.

One-way and two-way mobility windows

The introduction of a mobility window as an educational service does not, in theory, assume reciprocity or the balancing of outgoing and incoming student numbers between two institutions. There are many factors influencing inbound and outbound mobility numbers (e.g. the language of the relevant countries, the prestige and "brand" of the institutions, the number of contact hours offered in a foreign language, the costs incurred etc.). Funding considerations – and, let's not forget, the need to establish a professional partnership – may, however, assume reciprocity and the harmonisation of student flows in the different mobility directions.
The agreement between the institutions must address these issues as well, especially if the mobility is not funded from Community (or other external) sources.

It should therefore be repeatedly emphasized that reciprocity is a useful but not mandatory feature of mobility windows.

Minimum and maximum duration of mobility

In theory, the time spent abroad in the framework of mobility (or the number of courses completed in a different institution and then recognised) can greatly vary. For practical organisational considerations, the length of one semester (4 to 5 months) appears to be a generally feasible solution. Two (or more) semesters require significantly deeper curricular coordination and would be more suitable for joint degree programmes.
The financial/funding schemes also act towards promoting shorter, single semester mobility windows.
The question of one or two windows is also affected by the practical training included in the program curriculum (its conditions and length). Theoretically, a program can include two (or even three) mobility windows, for the purpose of study, practical training and thesis writing, respectively.
The minimum duration should be three months and/or 15 credits. This is in consideration of the trimester model in use in some countries, the definition that international mobility is meant to encompass at least three months, as well as the mandatory requirement regarding minimum duration as per the Erasmus+ programme, the largest source of funding.
The application scheme providing the greatest opportunities, Erasmus+, allows scholarships for 12 months per study cycle.

Building mobility windows into the study programme

The timing of a mobility window within the study programme is greatly influenced by the nature and structure of the programme, the education and outcome requirements and the degree of curricular rigidness. There are, however, certain general considerations that make it easier to determine timing.

Selecting the timing of a mobility window within a bachelor (Cycle 1) programme: It is generally agreed that it is inadvisable to time the mobility window for the first year of the programme, as students have yet to adapt at this point. Especially for bachelor programmes, the lack of profession-specific skills and technical terminology in a foreign language is also a reason why it is best to schedule mobility for a later semester. For bachelor (Cycle 1) programmes it is therefore recommended to time mobility windows for the second half (last one-third) of the programme, after students have selected their specialisation/subspecialisation, and by no means before the first two semesters have been completed. This is the arrangement favoured by international practice, in part based on the "maturity" of students and in part due to the characteristics of the home institution regarding study administration. Thus, it is best to send students abroad when they already possess some profession-specific skills as well as basic routine regarding higher education processes, are aware of how the system functions, and when it is possible to base selection on performance in several preceding semesters (academic performance, other work or experience), whenever the latter is a requirement or criterion for the foreign travel.

Selecting the timing of a mobility window within a master (Cycle 2) programme: For master (Cycle 2) programs, it is recommended to time the window for the second or third semester, provided that the duration of the programme is minimum two years. By this time, students have accumulated sufficient skills and knowledge, and the smooth completion of the mobility period is not threatened by the timing of the final examination, i.e. the issue of timing overlaps due to the variance in semester start and end times between the two institutions. Additionally, this arrangement supports equal opportunities because application for a mobility window scheduled for the first semester would be limited to students coming from bachelor programmes within the same institution.

Selecting the timing of a mobility window within a doctoral (Cycle 3) programme: In doctoral (Cycle 3) programmes, the semester best suited for doctoral students is the semester dedicated to research, but this is likely to vary widely by country and subject areas.

Additional considerations regarding scheduling:

- It is not recommended to schedule the window for a semester in which academic requirements prevent or pose obstacles to international mobility (such as mandatory courses not available or difficult to arrange approach, practice period or research to be completed in the home country, requirement to actively attend specialty courses in the home country, or other problems).
- It is significantly easier to find a time for the mobility window if the institution wishes to time it for the mandatory practice period, the duration of which is typically one semester (or shorter).

- The window can also be timed for the period for writing one's thesis. The advantage of these arrangements is that the timing of the relevant activities already fixed within the curriculum. These periods are typically part of the time dedicated to specialisation, which means that the mobility window is scheduled for the very end of the programme. The drawback is that for both bachelor (Cycle 1) and master (Cycle 2) programs, the last semester must and with the final examination, but due to the variance in semester starts and ends times, students might have difficulty submitting their thesis written abroad by the relevant deadline of the home institution.
- There are some programmes where it is important that the foreign experience take place before the final part of the programme (before specialisation, if any). This is especially relevant to programmes where studying abroad and experiencing a foreign environment is an integral part of the training. In this case, the mobility window should be scheduled for the middle of the programme.

The general conclusion is that it is best to schedule mobility windows no earlier than the third semester for bachelor (Cycle 1) programmes and the second semester for two-year master (Cycle 2) programmes. In bachelor (Cycle 1) programmes, the mobility window can be part of either the period of specialisation (semesters 5 to 7) or, in some cases, the middle portion of the programme (semesters 3 to 4).

Considerations regarding the content of the mobility window

Theoretically, a mobility window can include study units, subjects and courses of any type and level. The important thing is that the home institution guarantee recognition of the subjects taught by the host institution. Such guarantee, in theory, may be given for any selection of courses. It might be based on identifying equivalent courses (e.g. course x' abroad is equivalent to course x of the home institution). It is also possible to accept the content of the mobility window and document it in the agreement (e.g. subjects j, k, l, m and n are recognised by the home institution for the purpose of the programme in question, without necessarily having equivalent courses in the original curriculum). There are examples of both arrangements in the country's higher education practice. Experience so far indicates that many institutions tend to recognise foreign courses that are mostly specialisations, optional courses etc. Such a group of courses may include terminology studies, courses addressing intercultural issues as well as special profession-specific subjects.

Care must be taken to maintain a balanced composition and ensure that the mobility window is not without specialised or profession-specific subjects. The letter might be supplemented with optional courses, but proportions must be watched. In the context of credits from activities abroad, the majority should be credits for profession-specific studies.

Tasks of teachers

Teacher commitment is essential when establishing a mobility window. One of the key requirements for the effective operation of mobility windows is that teachers should support the institution's internationalisation policy, participate in the coordination of curricula, in the development of joint academic modules and in writing applications for this purpose, as well as in teaching the subjects/modules required for the functioning of the mobility window.

Bringing curricula up-to-date – which is what the introduction of mobility windows is – always entails hard fights in a higher education setting. In this context, teachers are active participants, submitters of proposals and possibly also the developers of subjects. There is a great need for their professional experience, skills and international contacts, but they do not make the final decision on their own.
The bodies responsible for adopting curricula play a key role in the processes described herein, and support from top management is also essential.

Recognising studies/practice periods completed in the framework of a mobility window

As mentioned above, mutual recognition of the content of the mobility window can be based on several basic models:

*   The subjects taught as part of the mobility window and/or the practice period completed under the supervision of the partner is recognised by the other party, and this is documented in the form of an agreement,,
*   academic modules (e.g. subspecialisations) are developed jointly and implemented by all parties – although this is much rarer than the previous resolution and requires more significant effort; combination of the two previous methods;
*   recognition of a practice period.

Any of these arrangements may be equally suitable for supporting a successful mobility window. The specific solution might be selected on the basis of the nature of the partnership and the features of the institutions.

Partner institutions and mobility windows

The range of partner institutions may be wide, depending on the nature of the mobility window one wishes to create and operate. The definitive component is that performance delivered at the partner is recognised by the home institution.
 Accordingly, the accreditation (acceptability) of the institution is a key factor in the context of mobility for study purposes. To ensure a balanced corporation, it is best to choose an institutions with "similar" prestige and capacity. Depending on the nature of the partnership, mobility windows can be one-way or multi-way, limited to a single partner institution (bilateral) or implemented among several partners (multilateral). The nature of the partnership may change during the period of cooperation, too.

Before introducing a mobility window, an analysis of the existing contacts should be performed to identify the partners with whom a one-way or two-way window can be established, and how. When selecting new partners, many additional criteria should be considered:
The first and foremost question is that of the curriculum, i.e. how well suited the institution is to cooperation based on its curricula. One must look at not only the extent to which the subjects at the two institutions match, but also whether the foreign partner offers courses that are not taught at the home institution and that could support mobility in the framework of a specialisation.
For practical training, the level of equipment of the partner's laboratory needs to be assessed. Additional important factors include the quality of education as well as the quick and efficient administrative processes of the partners.
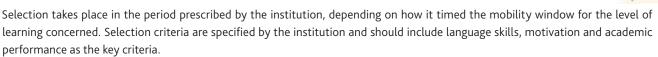
Geography might be a factor – some locations are more attractive for students than others.

The language of instruction should be looked at in terms of the number of courses offered by the potential partners in English or in another language suited to the programme, as well as the nature and probable demand for such courses.
It is useful to identify, possibly on the basis of statistics from previous years, the other major languages next to English that students are interested to be studying in, and to take this information into account when building partnerships.

It is strongly advised not to base a mobility window on a single partnership with another institution. Having several institutions involved improves stability and also enables mobility for a larger number of students. We should not forget that one of the objectives of mobility windows is to contribute to growth in student mobility numbers.

In the context of mobility for the purpose of practical training, the possibility or need for the accreditation of the practice site might be relevant. It is important for the institution to work on establishing long-term relationships with partner companies that fit its programme profile. Teachers with industry contacts can be of great assistance in this matter.

Selecting students to participate in mobility windows

Selection takes place in the period prescribed by the institution, depending on how it timed the mobility window for the level of learning concerned. Selection criteria are specified by the institution and should include language skills, motivation and academic performance as the key criteria.
Additional criteria may include an assessment of the student's project work or thesis, and strong weight may also be attached to other scientific or community activities.
The selection criteria should be transparent and be published on the web site of the institution or faculty.

Closing words

This guide was written to offer some thoughts to help higher education institutions with a task that is not easy.

The introduction of mobility windows in higher education will result in much debate and many challenging situations.

In the course of such debate, the benefits of mobility for students and the institution should be kept in mind. Mobility windows are not a goal, but rather a useful means to an end. Their introduction takes institutions on a long journey, for which we wish much success.

Acronyms and technical terms

Charter: Erasmus Charter for Higher Education: framework document for European cooperation between higher education institutions in the Erasmus+ programme.

ECTS: European Credit Transfer System

EHEA: European Higher Education Area

ESG: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area

ESN: Erasmus Student Network – not-for-profit international student network

Ex ante accreditation in higher education: programme accreditation prior to programme launch

Internationalisation at home: virtual mobility within a home institution

PLA: Peer Learning Activity – learning from and teaching one's peers

Staff training: in-service training for university staff

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Transcript: A document certifying one's academic history