Deliverable 2.1

HIBLend -

Approaches to Blended Student Mobility

Project Acronym	HIBLend
Project title	Fostering high-quality blended student mobility in higher education
Starting date	01/01/2023
Duration	36 months
Call identifier	ERASMUS-EDU-2022-PCOOP-ENGO
Grant Agreement	101090715

Deliverable details	
Work Package	WP2
Deliverable Number	D2.1
Deliverable Name	HIBLend - Approaches to Blended Student Mobility
Lead Beneficiary	Academic Cooperation Association
Author(s)	Angeliki Psychogyiou, Veronika Kupriyanova
Due Date	31.01.2024
Actual Submission	25.07.2024
Type of Deliverable	Document, Report
Dissemination Level	Public

Revision History			
Version	Date	Modified by	Comments
0.1	03/03/2024	Angeliki Psychogyiou	First draft
1.0	18/04/2024	Veronika Kupriyanova	Review
2.0	22/04/2024	Angeliki Psychogyiou	Second draft
3.0	15/05/2024	Veronika Kupriyanova	Final draft for partners feedback
4.0	25/07/2024	Angeliki Psychogyiou	Finalisation after feedback

Disclaimer

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Abbreviations

Abbreviation / Acronym	Description
EUAs	European Universities Alliances
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IRO	International Relations Officers
NA	National Agencies for Erasmus+
WP	Work Package
ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
EUF	European University Foundation
MU	Masaryk University
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
SBM	Student Blended Mobility
HEI	Higher Education Institution
BIPs	Blended Intensive Programmes
IIA	Interinstitutional Agreement
SMS	Student Mobility for Studies
HLITL	How Long is Too Long Project

1. Introduction

This document presents the **main outcomes and findings of WP2** based on a series of activities (Tasks 2.1-2.4) conducted in 2023-2024. It includes a comprehensive exploration and categorisation of theoretical and practical approaches to student blended mobility (SBM) formats, organising them into a coherent typology to serve as a guide for further development and project work (WP3 and WP4).

Following a short description of the method used (cf. **Methodology**), **Chapter 2** provides an **overview of existing conceptual and practical considerations**, resulting from desk research. **Chapter 3** presents a **mapping of institutional actors involved in SBM** at various levels. **Chapter 4** identifies the **institutional and personal drivers** motivating Higher Education Institutions and their staff to design and deliver SBM. **Chapter 5** explores the most **common types of SBM activities** and investigates their structure in terms of **sequence, length, purpose, and accreditation.**

Chapter 6 delves into the various **funding sources** available for SBM, highlighting the disparity in funding between the physical and online components. **Chapter 7** discusses the **evaluation methods** applied to **assess the quality and effectiveness** of SBM activities. **Chapter 8** addresses the **perceived concerns of students regarding SBM**, from both mobile and non-mobile perspectives.

Chapter 9 examines the **recognition practices** for SBM learning outcomes, detailing the methods used by institutions to acknowledge the efforts of participating students. **Chapter 10** focuses on **student selection and support mechanisms**, outlining the processes and measures in place to prepare and assist students in SBM activities. **Chapter 11** identifies the **challenges** faced in implementing SBM and the **key success factors** that contribute to effective blended mobility programs.

Chapter 12 moves towards developing a **typology of SBM**, categorising various formats and identifying emerging models. Finally, **Chapter 13** outlines the **next steps** for the HIBlend project, setting the stage for the delivery of the **Work Package 3: Exploring quality considerations of blended student mobility**.

Methodology

Using a mixed-method approach, the project integrated quantitative and qualitative research techniques to gather insights from three main sources of data: (a) an institutional survey; (b) three focus groups with participants from 9 countries, and 2 hackathon sessions (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Main data sources for the study

Data collection activity	Period	Response
HIBLend survey	May - July 2023	194 responses based in 23 countries
Three focus groups	November - December 2023	19 participants from 9 countries (9 academic and 9 administrative staff members, 1 student representative)
Hackathons	January - February 2024	A mixed group of participants of the first edition of the Student Mobility Summit, organised by EUF and the University of Barcelona on 30 January to 1 February 2024.

Survey

The survey was designed to gather data on the current practices and quality considerations of SBM activities across HEIs. It aimed to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions from both academic and administrative staff involved in the design, implementation, and management of such activities.

The **questionnaire** covered diverse aspects of SBM, including motivation of different actors, typical structure of SBM activities, tools and frameworks, and support mechanisms applied, as well as quality assurance and recognition practices. The questionnaire was disseminated using snowball sampling through partner networks and targeted communications. A deliberate effort was made to ensure the survey reached a wide audience, aiming for responses from at least 50 HEIs across Europe to secure a representative sample.

The **survey** gathered **194 responses from HEIs based in 23 countries** (**Figure 1**). The graph indicates a varied level of involvement across European countries in the study, with a notable representation of respondents from Germany (21%), Spain (21%), and Hungary (11%).

Respondents by country of origin (n=196)

Country	Percentage
Germany	21%
Spain	21%
Hungary	11%
Sweden	7%
Belgium	6%
Austria	6%
Slovenia	3%
Netherlands	3%
Finland	3%
Czech Republic	3%
Estonia	3%
Croatia	3%
Slovakia	2%
Norway	2%
Greece	2%
France	2%
Portugal	1%
Italy	1%
Türkiye	1%
Serbia	1%
Poland	1%
Lithuania	1%
Iceland	1%
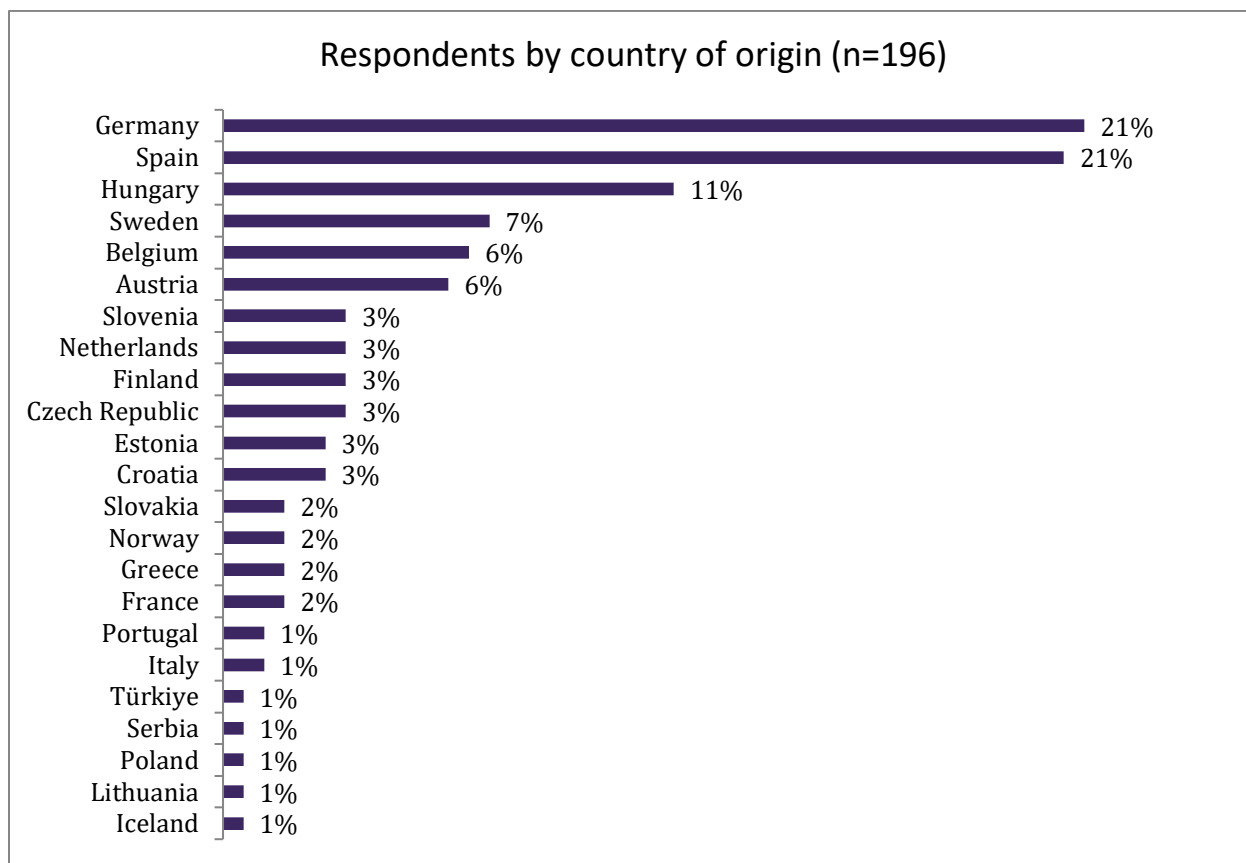
Figure 1. Respondents by country of origin

More than half of respondents are employed by smaller institutions, with 51% having up to 9,999 students enrolled and most of them were administrative staff.

Respondents by size of HEI (n=195)

Size	Percentage
100 - 4.999 students	39%
10.000 - 19.999 students	24%
30.000 students and more	15%
5.000 - 9.999 students	12%
20.000 - 29.999 students	10%
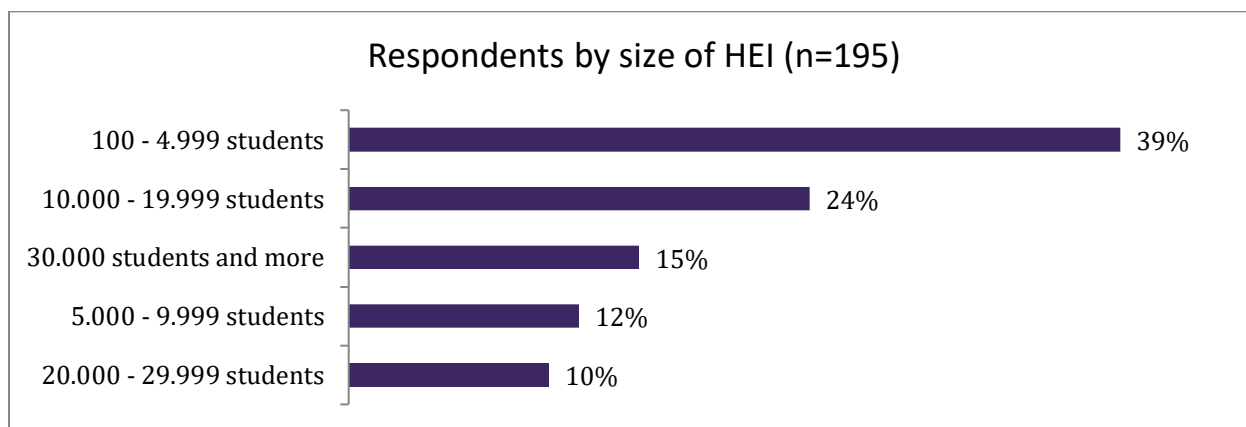
Figure 2. Respondents by size of HEI

The survey quantitative data was analysed statistically to identify prevalent trends, correlations, and patterns across the responses. This analysis facilitated the identification of common practices and perceptions regarding the quality of blended mobility. Qualitative responses were subjected

to thematic analysis, where emerging themes related to motivations, challenges, and institutional strategies for quality assurance were categorized and examined for deeper insights.

Focus groups

Three focus groups (5-6 participants each) were conducted to build on the survey findings by facilitating in-depth discussions around key themes and issues identified in the preliminary data. These sessions were designed to provide nuanced understandings of the qualitative aspects of blended mobility, including the experiences, challenges, and best practices from the perspective of those directly involved in its delivery and management. The participants represented various roles across HEIs, drawn from a total of **nine different countries (**Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal):

- **Academic staff**: Individuals primarily involved in teaching and research activities (e.g., senior lecturers, professors, and other academic positions)
- **Administrative staff**: Participants employed in the administrative sector, including policy advisors, international coordinators, and online learning project managers.
- **Students**, representing the student voice on the SBM topic.

Participants were recruited through a mix of targeted invitations to individuals who had shown deep engagement with blended mobility in the survey, and open calls within the partner networks, as well as through relevant professional forums. The sessions were conducted via Zoom, utilising tools like Google Slides and Slido to facilitate interaction and engagement.

The following topics were discussed in the focus groups:

- **Motivations** (e.g., *Why was the student blended mobility activity to which you contributed implemented in a blended mobility format?*)

- **Accreditation** (e.g., *Are blended mobilities you are involved in part of the compulsory curriculum of an accredited programme?*)

- **Delivery** (e.g., *What is the purpose for the online and physical component, and what kind of activities take place during each stage?*)

- **Perceptions** (e.g., *What are the key success factors to keep in mind for the design and implementation of high-quality SBM activities, based on your experience?*)

The focus group discussions were recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then analysed using a thematic analysis approach, with the aim of extracting detailed insights into the practices, perceptions, and quality considerations of blended mobility.

Hackathons

The **hackathons** sought to collaboratively address challenges and innovate solutions for effective SBM practices. These hackathons took place during the [EWP Back to the Future – Student Mobility Summit](#), held on 30 January to 1 February 2024 at the University of Barcelona, where the HIBLend project was represented by ACA and EUF.

The hackathons included two distinct sessions, each following the same planned design, focused on exploring and enhancing blended mobility within higher education. Participants engaged in a dynamic and collaborative effort to map the current status quo, identify challenges, and co-develop a good practice list for delivering high quality blended mobility opportunities. Through structured activities, including group discussions and collaborative brainstorming, the participants delved into the intricate implementation of SBM from the perspective of International Relations Offices and study programmes, in line with strategic approaches pursued by HEIs.

This structured approach ensured a comprehensive assessment of current SBM practices from various perspectives within the higher education sector, providing overarching insights into the quality of SBM programmes, to be further analysed in WP3.

2. Conceptual and practical considerations

This chapter provides a concise overview of the existing theoretical and practical approaches to SBM based on the literature review.

Below three different definitions of SBM, relying on academic research, Erasmus+ regulations and current practice are given.

Definitions of Student blended mobility (SBM)

SBM refers to:

- *"Strategic combinations of phases of online learning with periods of short physical mobility" (O'Dowd and Werner, 2024).*
- *"Combination of physical mobility and virtual elements, where students engage in both face-to-face and online learning experiences in an international context as part of their study programmes" (Erasmus Programme Guide, 2022).*
- *"Blended mobility is an educational concept that combines physical academic mobility, virtual mobility and blended learning." (Blended Mobility Project, URL: https://blendedmobility.com)*

These definitions highlight the goal of SBM to integrate the physical component with virtual or online learning experiences, in order to maximise the benefits of both modalities and create a more comprehensive and effective learning experience for students. While the blended format is a relatively new activity and very little empirical data currently exists (O'Dowd and Werner, 2024), much more is known about each individual component of SBM and the type of learning experience it involves.

The **physical component** of SBM involves **face-to-face learning experiences** and activities that take place in a physical setting, such as a classroom, laboratory, fieldwork site, or other educational venue. It typically involves travel to another country, where students can participate in on-site learning experiences and interact with local communities, institutions, and experts (e.g., attending lectures, workshops, seminars, or conferences, conducting research or fieldwork, engaging in internships or service-learning projects, or participating in cultural activities).

The **virtual component** of SBM involves the use of **digital technologies** enabling remote or online learning experiences that complement or supplement face-to-face mobility activities (e.g., online classes, webinars, online discussions, digital learning resources, and interactive multimedia content). These digital tools and platforms can facilitate communication, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among students, instructors, and other stakeholders, regardless of their physical location or time zone.

In the context of international higher education, the blended approach entails "combining phases of online learning with teachers and students from other educational institutions, with a period of travel to work together in person. Essentially, blended mobility can be seen to integrate activities such as online lectures (Virtual Mobility), online intercultural collaboration (Virtual Exchange) with periods of short-term physical mobility'' (O'Dowd and Werner, 2024).

Several theoretical approaches used in research literature for the analysis of various blended mobility activities with students emphasise:

a) The **importance of active, collaborative, and contextualised learning experiences**,
b) The **use of technology** and integration of physical and virtual environments.

The following overarching principles lay theoretic foundation for the design of SBM activities:

- **Constructivism** emphasises the active construction of knowledge through learner-centred activities and interactions. SBM can facilitate this approach by providing opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning experiences and collaborate with others in both physical and virtual environments (e.g., Ahmad and Schreurs, 2012; Batardiere et al, 2019).

- **Connectivism** emphasises the role of technology in facilitating learning and knowledge acquisition. SBM can enable this approach by providing students with access to a range of online resources and tools, as well as opportunities to connect with experts and peers from different locations (e.g., Herlo, 2017).

- **Activity Theory** views learning as a social activity that is shaped by the context in which it occurs. SBM can be realised in this context by creating opportunities for students to engage in a range of learning activities in both physical and virtual environments, and by enabling them to reflect on and analyse their experiences in different contexts (e.g., Karasavvidis, 2009).

The analysis of more **practical approaches** discussed in the literature highlighted the **key features of SBM,** such as the use of technology, flexible scheduling, personalised learning, collaboration, and project-based learning, taking account of their **pros and cons (Table 2).**

Table 2. Key features of SBM and their pros and cons

Key feature	Opportunities	Potential issues
Flexible scheduling	Flexible scheduling allows students to combine face-to-face with online learning experiences, depending on their needs and preferences, especially in the intercultural or international context.	From the institutional viewpoint, flexibility can generate additional administrative or organisational workload. Students also reported limitations such as lack of cross-cultural environment, and technical and organisational issues resulting from flexibility (Li and Ai, 2022; Mueller et al, 2023).
Cloud computing tools	HEIs use a wide range of tools for SBM activities, e.g., learning management systems, video conferencing, and collaboration tools to support learning in virtual environments. Cloud computing tools are particularly used for blended learning (e.g., Gross et al, 2016).	There is no "gold standard" for such tools. It is always the responsibility of the designer to identify most suitable tools addressing specific needs, topics, and student and staff, and study programmes.
Personalised learning environment	By applying various IT tools for the virtual component, SBM offers the opportunity to personalise students' learning environment, based on additional flexibility and customisation.	Challenges such as confusion, the sense of overwhelming or the pace of learning experience have been reported in the context of SBM (Gross et al., 2016).
Collaboration and networking	SBM provides the opportunity to collaborate with peers from different locations and cultural backgrounds. It offers unique networking opportunities for students and staff (Rovai and Jordan, 2004; Ustun et al, 2021; Vanslambrouck, 2018).	Special attention should be paid to open and responsive online environments where students can properly communicate to facilitators and academics (Rovai and Jordan, 2004; Ustun et al, 2021; Vanslambrouck, 2018).

Two different learning organisation models discussed in the scientific literature in the context of SBM are summarised in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Organisational models

Key feature	Opportunities and potential issues
Project-based learning The face-to-face component can include workshops, coaching, peer review sessions, or presentations, that allow students to receive feedback, learn from their peers, and refine their project. The online component can include a variety of digital resources and activities (online discussions, video lectures, tutorials, quizzes, or simulations) that provide students with the necessary background knowledge and skills to develop and execute their project (Medeiros et al, 2017).	• Dealing with real-world problems or projects • Developing critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills • Stronger employability

Key feature	Opportunities and potential issues
Self-guided // A la carte blended learning Students can flexibly choose the mix of online and face-to-face learning experiences that best suits their individual needs and preferences. Students have autonomy to self-select and self-pace their online learning experiences, while also having access to traditional face-to-face learning experiences offered by the school or institution (e.g., classes, workshops, or extracurricular activities on campus), while also completing online coursework and assessments at their own pace (Nass et al, 2021).	• More personalised and adaptive learning experience • Flexibility, accessibility, and self-directed learning • Optimising of institutional resources and expanded outreach due to a variety of online courses and programmes that can be accessed by students from different locations and backgrounds • Need for a strong infrastructure for online learning • Need for effective support and guidance to ensure students can successfully navigate the online learning environment and achieve their learning outcomes.

Practical approaches to SBM in Europe seem to have been largely inspired by the **Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027)**. The latter has not only widely supported and promoted blended mobility (particularly BIPs), building on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, but also conceptualised this field through a series of framework documents and related definitions.

Table 4 provides an overview of the key terms applied with regard to SBM in the related documentation such as the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022 (PG2022), Blended Mobility Implementation Guide (BMIG) and Higher Education Mobility Handbook 2021 (HEMH)[1]. It showcases how the European Commission's official guidance is adopted by HEIs based on the example of West Pomeranian University of Technology (WPUT).

Table 4. Erasmus+ provisions for SBM exemplified by West Pomeranian University of Technology (WPUT) approach to implementation

Overall approach under Erasmus+	• The objective of blended learning activities is to facilitate collaborative online learning exchange and teamwork (HEMH p. 4). • **Two possibilities** are foreseen under Key Action 131: (a) sending an individual student on a bilateral blended mobility or (b) organising a BIP (HEMH p. 5). • "*Erasmus+ programme rules regarding participant selection, the provision of information and support, exchanging mobility documents, quality assurance, recognition and meeting the ECHE requirements, apply to blended mobility as for any other type of Erasmus+ mobility*" (BMIG p. 8) • "Blended programmes should (…) support online cooperation through cooperative exercises and discussions through suitable online platforms" (BMIG p.9).

---

[1] Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022, Blended Mobility Implementation Guide and Higher Education Mobility Handbook 2021.

Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) (based on structured institutional cooperation)	Erasmus+ programme provisions	WPUT approach to implementation[2]
	• BIPs are short, intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation. (…) The virtual component must bring the learners together online to work **collectively and simultaneously** on specific assignments that are integrated in the BIP and count towards the overall learning outcome (PG 2022 p. 47) • A BIP has to be **developed and implemented** by at least 3 HEIs coming from 3 different EU member states or third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme (PG 2022, p. 58). • Groups of HEIs jointly develop programmes of learning, teaching and training (HEMH p. 7).	• Programme developed jointly by the consortium • 100% recognition of the designed learning outcomes • An IIA signed with the receiving HEI • Students meet the basic criteria of SMS selection • IRO notified well in advance (budget planning) • Physical mobility budget set aside well before the students are selected • Organised selection process for students (local BIP coordinator)
Bilateral blended mobility	Erasmus+ programme provisions	WPUT approach to implementation
	• *"Institutions can organise and fund different types of blended courses and programmes themselves and send participants on a blended mobility to those courses and programmes that are not Erasmus+ supported BIPs"* (BMIG p. 7) • *"Students can be integrated into existing courses in case they are offered in a blended fashion to both International students and local students"* (BMIG p. 8)	• The organiser provides an adequate description of the whole programme (online + on-site). • An IIA is signed with the hosting HEI. • The home faculty agrees to student's participation before the blended programme starts. • The home faculty declares 100% recognition of the designed learning outcomes (the condition to apply for Erasmus+ funding). • Student applies individually for short-mobility funding if 1) s/he meets the SMS selection criteria and 2) there is still some running KA131 budget available (not possible to plan well in advance like BIP).

[2] Good practice example from the West Pomeranian University of Technology.

Prior research conduced by EUF based on the Erasmus+ programme guide, various practical consultations with their members and the results of the project How Long is Too Long (**HLITL**) differentiated several types of SBM based on their length (short-term vs long-term) and type of accreditation (credit vs degree mobility) summarised in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Types of SBM - examples

Credit SBM	**Short-Term SBM** combines physical mobility with virtual learning for up to 30 days. *Example*: summer schools or study tours, involving a brief period of travel to a host institution, combined with virtual learning before, during and after the trip.	**Long-Term SBM** combines physical mobility with virtual learning for more than 30 days. *Example*: a module/semester at the host institution in a physical format combined with virtual learning elements before, during or after the physical period, where the virtual element is considered in the evaluation of the module/semester.
Degree SBM	**Blended Joint Degree Programmes** (min. 1 academic year) require students completing part of their studies at the home institution and another part at a partner institution in another country or online (Blended component). The programme is designed to provide students with a (virtual) international education experience and an opportunity to earn a degree from both institutions.	

Based on these prior theoretical and practical advancements of SBM, the following chapters explore the key outcomes of the HIBlend project with regard to the most common actors involved in SBM and their typical design features.

3. Institutional actors of SBM

In an effort to identify different actors involved in SBM at various levels, one research question in the HIBlend research framework was dedicated to **mapping the diverse institutional owners of and contributors** to this rapidly evolving field at various institutional levels (i.e., central, faculty and department) and in different roles. For this purpose, the survey targeted a broad range of staff members who could in theory play a role in SBM including different categories of academic and administrative staff. The obtained responses were coded and categorised according to the respondents' role, tasks, and work levels.

The following groups of staff were found to play a **specific role in SBM (Figure 3)**:

1. **International Relations Coordinators/Officers**: Participants' work titles included "Head of International Affairs", "International Coordinator", "International Relations Officer", "Project Coordinator", "Erasmus+ Coordinator", "Mobility Officer", and other roles related to IRO and coordination (63% of survey respondents);

2. **Teachers/Professors**: Typical work titles included "Assistant Professor", "Lecturer", "Associate Professor", and other academic roles (24% of survey respondents);

3. **Study Programme Coordinators**, responsible for study programme coordination (8%);

4. **IT Officers**, fulfilling technology related roles or offering technical support for SBM (2%);

5. **Instructional Designers / E-learning Consultants** involved in curriculum design, advising on teaching methods, e-learning, online education, and digital learning (1%);

6. **Quality Assurance Officers** involved in ensuring the quality of blended mobility programmes (1%).
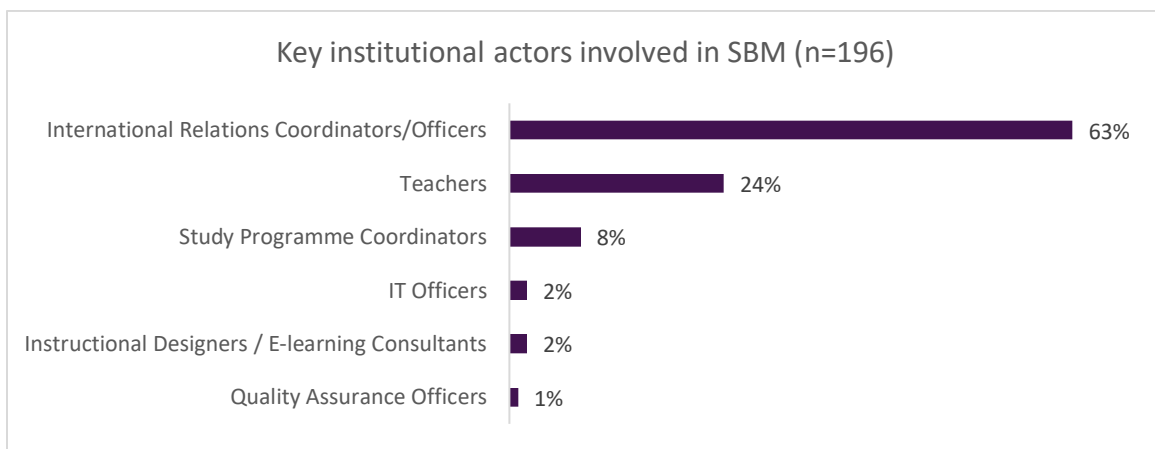
Figure 3. Key institutional actors involved in SBM

The diversity of the profiles identified points that SBM is a highly collaborative field requiring partnerships between various institutional players who are engaged in different types of tasks.

- **International Relations Coordinators/Officers** play a critical role in **coordination and implementation** driving forward administrative and operational aspects of SBM initiatives, as reported by almost 80% of respondents. Nearly one third of IRO Coordinators were found to be engaged in communication and promotion tasks.
- **Teachers/Professors** display a diversified engagement, with a significant involvement in **coordination and implementation** (ca. 60% of respondents) followed by **educational content and academic matters** (ca. 20% of respondents). While teachers' central focus tends to be on curriculum development and instruction, the share of academic staff who reported to be involved in administrative and programme management tasks is very high.
- More than 60% of Study Programme Coordinators are engaged in **coordination and implementation**, ensuring that study programmes are effectively integrated into the SBM framework and educational strategies are aligned with mobility initiatives.
- Although the statistical basis for Quality Assurance Officers is rather limited, the latter reported to offer consultation and support to SBM.
- **IT Officers** (NB: limited statistical basis) reported to mainly provide **consultation and support** in facilitating and maintaining technology infrastructure crucial for the seamless operation of SBM programmes (e.g., virtual learning environments or administrative systems supporting international activities).

While almost equal numbers of respondents worked at central and faculty/department levels (45% vs 41%), which more or less mirrored the shares of IRO Coordinators and Teachers and Study Programme Coordinators in the survey sample, 13% reported to work at both levels. The aforementioned roles are summarised in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Institutional actors and their roles in SBM

Suggested Role	Contribution to SBM	Work level
International Relations Coordinators/Officers	Central in coordination and implementation, managing mobility partnerships and agreements	Central and Faculty/Department
Teachers/Professors	Provide academic content and integrity, direct interaction with students	Faculty/Department level
Study Programme Coordinators	Align curriculum with SBM goals, bridge administrative and academic domains	Central and Faculty/Department
Instructional Designers / E-learning Consultants	Design digital content, ensure the effectiveness of the online learning aspect	Central and Faculty/Department
IT Officers	Maintain and secure technical infrastructure necessary for SBM	Central and Faculty/Department

Quality Assurance Officers	Ensure programmes meet quality standards, continuous improvement	Central and Faculty/Department

This analysis underscores the diverse and specialised roles played by various professionals within the SBM framework, highlighting how different job titles contribute uniquely to the overall operation of SBM initiatives. As one of the focus groups participants noted "*Since we were beginners it took some time for the administration and technical parts to be delivered. It is a bit challenging to agree on timing and align schedules. A lot of coordination with people from different departments is needed, so it takes time*."

The data underscores the importance of tasks related to coordination, administration, and academic content design and delivery in the successful implementation of blended mobility programmes. The diverse range of roles and interactions highlight the collaborative and multifaceted nature of blended mobility.

A **highly collaborative approach**, which integrates academic, technological, administrative, and quality assurance aspects of SBM, was found to be **highly important for quality SBM**. This has been evidenced in the following feedback: "*One of the success criteria for us is great communication between the "creator" of the SBM and the office managing the general programme that finances it.*"

4. Institutional and personal drivers for SBM

This chapter explores various factors motivating HEIs and their staff to design and deliver SBM. It also provides insights into the students' motivations and interest in SBM, as perceived by institutional respondents.

Looking at the decisions to implement an SBM activity in a blended format, **academic respondents** attached special importance to a possibility to offer their students an increased **potential for intercultural learning** (65%) and to **make mobility more attractive** or feasible to them (61%) (**Figure 4**) (e.g., "*I am based at a small campus of 1000 students with no exchange students outside Central Europe. A BIP is something that I wanted to implement as an internationalisation at home activity for our students.*")

Another top factor related to the wish to **experiment with a new format of engagement** with students and partners (52%) (e.g., "*Talking about BIPs, our European university alliance encourages these types of programmes, so we have been experimenting with this at a wider scale. We wanted to test new formats and see how the teaching comes together among our alliance*").

Overall, the financial reasons such as the use of additional funding or cost optimisation were less important for the academics.

Among other reported drivers was the aspiration "*to offer opportunities to working students*", making mobility more inclusive for a diverse student body, as noted by several respondents:

"*I think the main reason for implementing this blended mobility format was to make it accessible to a wider audience.*"

"*Our students in teacher training are adults, many with families and full-time jobs. So they don't usually have the possibility to go for a "traditional" exchange programme. That's a big motivation for them, blended is practically the only possible choice for them.*"

"*Universities of applied sciences seem to find BIPs to apply better to their context, since they usually have older students, and in that case, the more flexible the mobility can be, the better.*"

It was also highlighted by one of the respondents that SBM particularly suits the needs of PhD students who prefer to engage in short-term mobility as they need to combine it with their work at the university and research.

Reasons behind implementing the SBM activity in a blended format
(academic staff perspective: n=46; multiple choice)

To offer students an increased potential for intercultural learning	65%
To attract more students and make mobility more attractive or feasible to them	61%
To experiment and try a new format of engagement with our students and partners	52%
To offer students an increased potential for networking in their professional area	35%
To enable students to gain experience of remote (online) teamwork	30%
To use additional funding we received for that at national or EU level	28%
To optimise the cost of mobility to students	26%
To promote the green aspect of mobility	13%
Other	11%
To optimise the cost of mobility to the institution	11%

Figure 4. Reasons behind implementing the SBM activity in a blended format

The reasons that motivated the **administrative staff** surveyed look differently from the reported academics' motivations. The top three factors behind the institution's decision to incorporate SBM in its activities are linked to opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ programme (80%), particularly through BIPs, as well as aspirations to broaden opportunities for internationalisation (77%) in line with institutional internationalisation strategies (67%) (**Figure 5**).

These findings indicate that **SBM is currently mostly perceived as a new instrument for internationalisation** and, to a lesser extent, a tool supporting inclusion (39%), digitalisation (27%) and sustainability (21%) goals. This view has been captured in the following quote: "*Indeed, at institutional level willingness to keep elements from the COVID period, but also diversification of internationalisation options is a good argument.*"

"Other" responses show that SBM is used to respond to academics' bottom-up interest in this new learning format as well as to balance student interest in mobility by "*stabilising mobility numbers*" and to prepare the ground for long-term mobility (e.g., "*The way I see it, BIPs are not*

about the very strict formal academic experience and learning, but they are much more well rounded experiences, transformative ones for all involved, which is why we choose them.'')

Several respondents expressed doubts about the added value of SBM, which can be exemplified with the following statement: "*My HEI is reluctant to use SBM. There is a contradiction between students and lecturers, who are interested in these kinds of formats vs the institutional level, which is still hesitant. We are still unclear of the benefits and implementation.*"
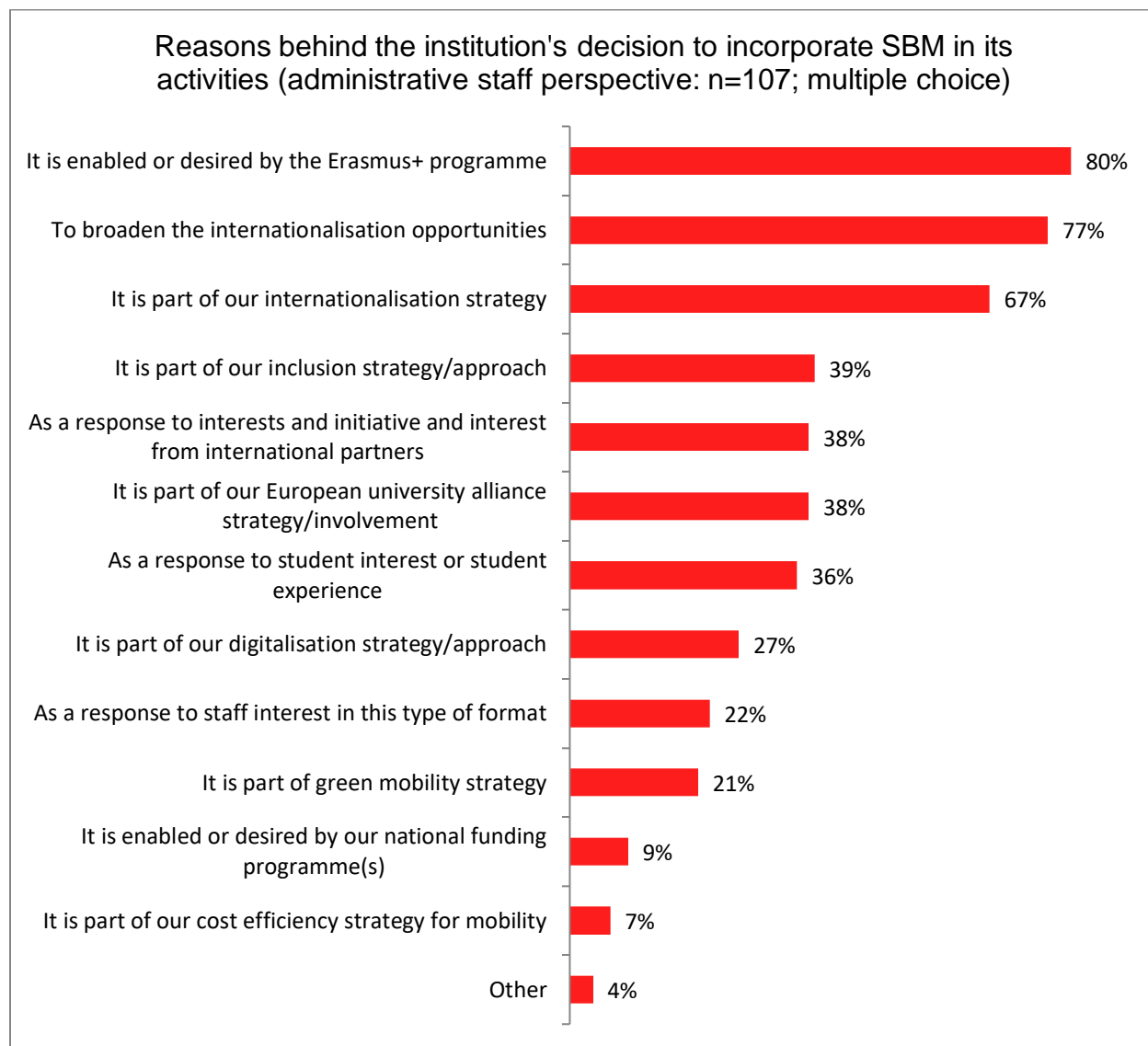
Reasons behind the institution's decision to incorporate SBM in its activities (administrative staff perspective: n=107; multiple choice)

Reason	Percentage
It is enabled or desired by the Erasmus+ programme	80%
To broaden the internationalisation opportunities	77%
It is part of our internationalisation strategy	67%
It is part of our inclusion strategy/approach	39%
As a response to interests and initiative and interest from international partners	38%
It is part of our European university alliance strategy/involvement	38%
As a response to student interest or student experience	36%
It is part of our digitalisation strategy/approach	27%
As a response to staff interest in this type of format	22%
It is part of green mobility strategy	21%
It is enabled or desired by our national funding programme(s)	9%
It is part of our cost efficiency strategy for mobility	7%
Other	4%

Figure 5. Reasons behind the institution's decision to incorporate SBM in its activities

Both academic and administrative staff respondents were asked about **students' motivations for SBM based on their knowledge**. Overall, the academic staff respondents were more cautious in their assessments, being more directly and closely involved with the students.

For both groups of respondents, students' interest in SBM particularly lies with **pedagogical innovations** reflected in the course content delivered through a blended format (64% of administrative and 43% of academic respondents). This view is captured in the following statements: *"I think the students who wanted to participate in BIPs were really interested in the topic and they could not get that kind of knowledge from our university, which is why we implemented them."* and *"Students from our university were motivated to participate in the physical part of the activity because it offered them a different opportunity and a more intensive learning experience."*

Another reason related to **flexibility** as compared to more traditional mobility formats (63% vs 39%) and an **alternative for longer physical mobility** (55% and 33%). Interestingly, more academic staff respondents are convinced in the perceived value of SBM as a way to **enhance personalised learning** environment for students.

Both administrative and academic respondents more or less agree that the use of virtual tools does not offer any value to students per se, with only 14% and 9% of administrative and academic respondents selecting this option (**Figure 6**). The latter is an important finding in a post-pandemic context, indicating that a mere switch to virtual tools is not sufficient for digitally savvy students.
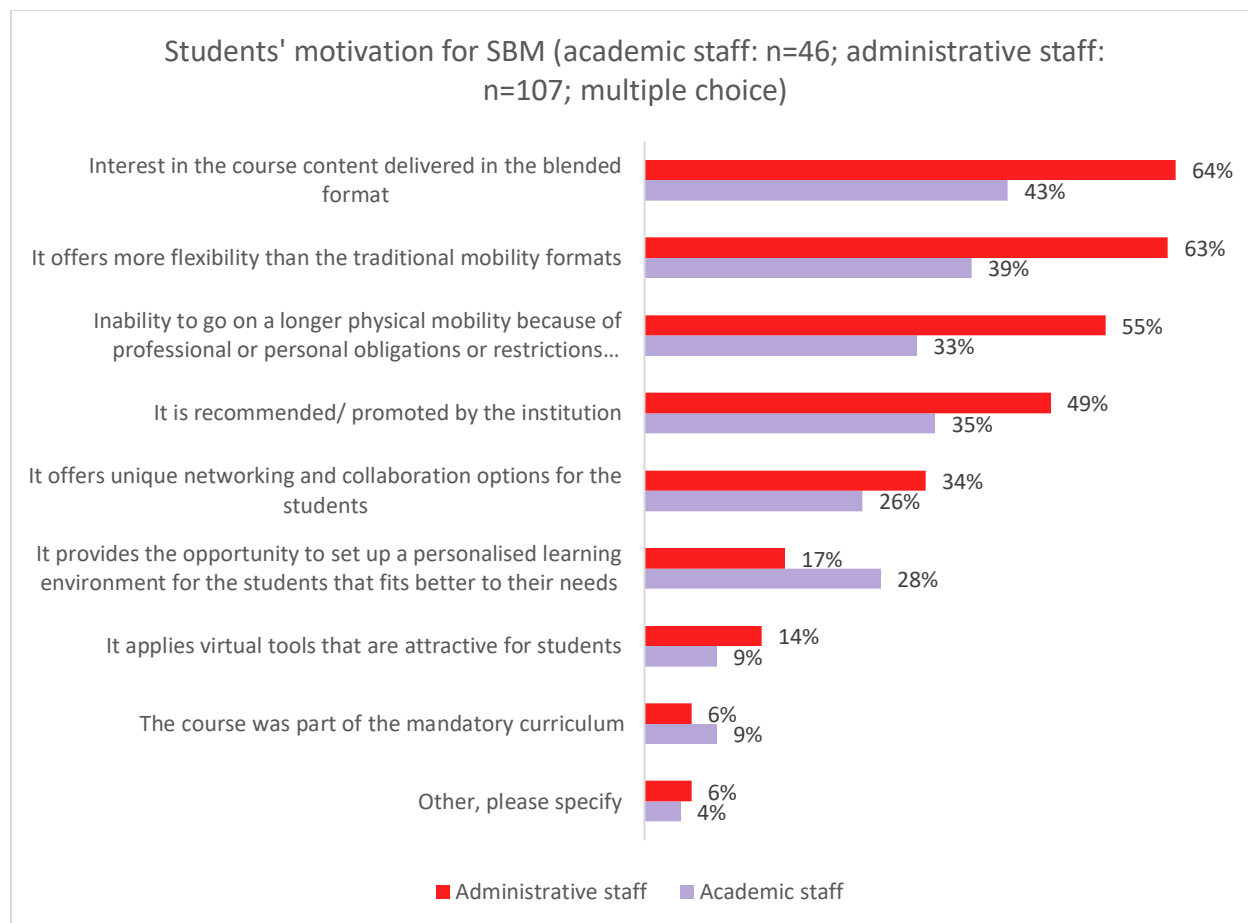

Figure 6. Students' motivation for SBM

5. Structure and design

This chapter explores the most common types of SBM that are currently implemented by HEIs across Europe and investigates the structure of existing SBM activities in terms of the sequence and length of physical and online components, the overall purpose and accreditation.

Most common SBM activities

Academic and administrative staff reported to be engaged in **different types of SBM**. While the vast majority of the administrative staff surveyed (90%) were involved in **BIPs**, only 44% of academic staff were part of this type of SBM and even a larger share of academics (49%) were involved in other types of **short-term blended mobility** (**Figure 7**). This indicates that BIPs are rather centralised mobility schemes requiring significant support of administrative staff.
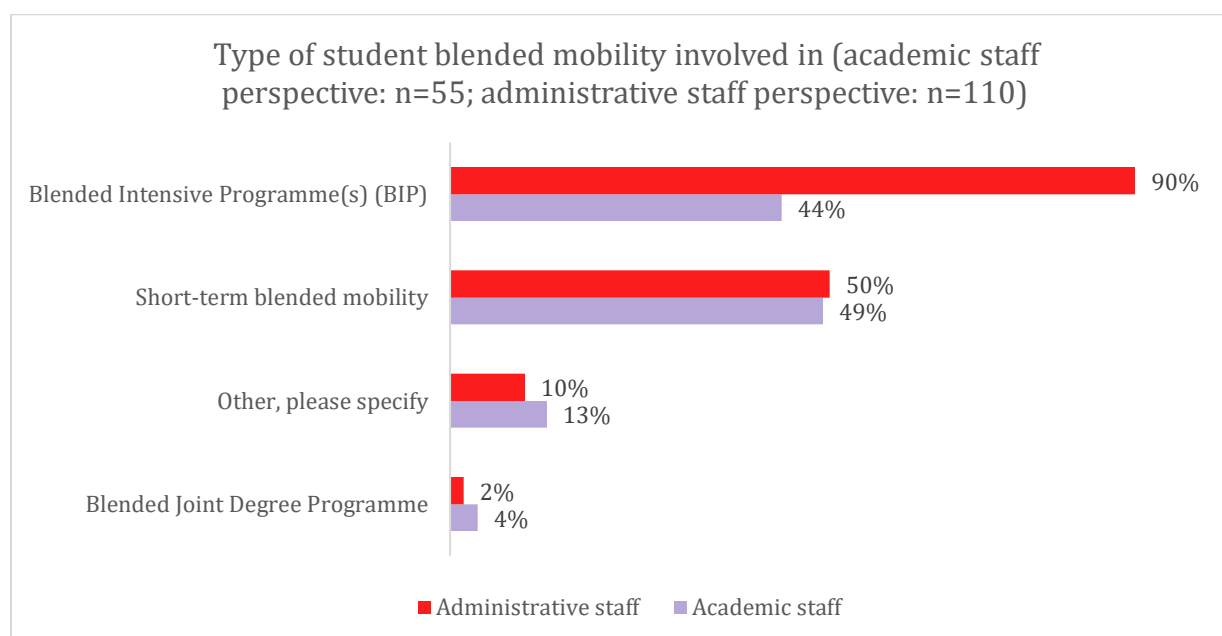
Figure 7. Common types of SBM activities

Short-term blended mobility is a common type of SBM across both groups, with academic staff at 50% and administrative staff at 49%, indicating a consensus on the use of this type of mobility.

Despite a strong inclination towards BIPs and short-term mobility, a smaller share of respondents indicated engagement with other, more niche types of SBM. These include examples of integrating blended formats into summer schools, blended courses as part of alliances, blended double degree programmes, and Master's programmes, in some instances, using blended teaching as a pragmatic solution to visa issues. **Blended traineeships** were also found to be used, reflecting the innovative approaches institutions are taking to provide diverse and inclusive mobility experiences. Interestingly, **blended joint degree programmes** have the least

involvement, with only 2% of academic staff and 4% of administrative staff indicating their use. This lower engagement might indicate that **SBM has not yet been mainstreamed across HEIs beyond the BIP scheme**.
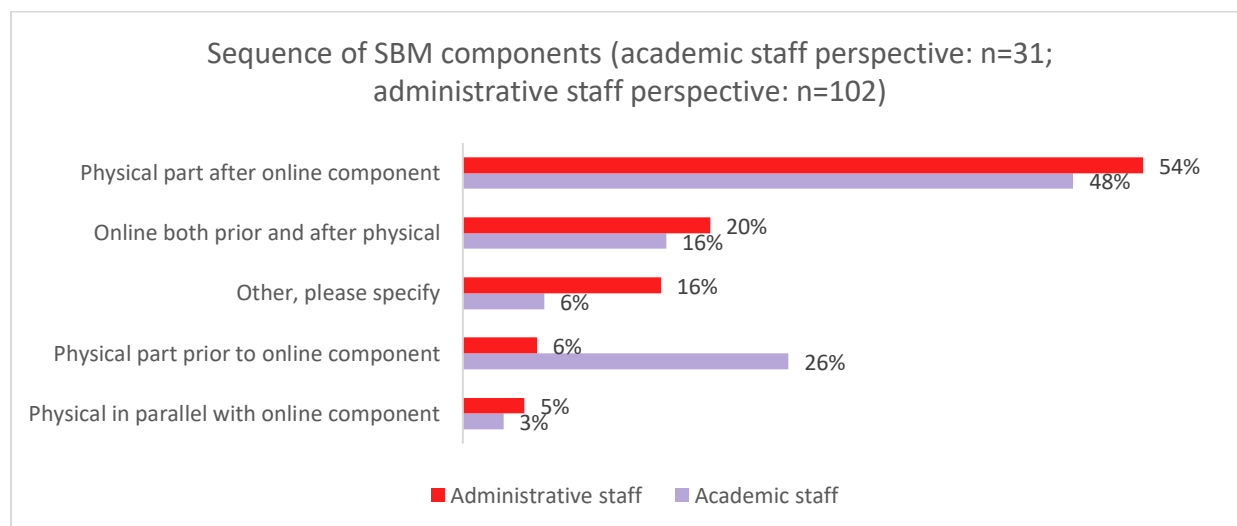
Sequence of components

In terms of the structure, the **most common sequence of SBM components** for both groups of respondents was where the **online component preceded the physical one** (54% of academic and 48% of administrative staff) (**Figure 8**). This sequence was found to be typically used to facilitate initial engagement and preparation via the online component, enhancing subsequent physical interaction.

Next, the option of having **online components both prior to and following the physical component** was reported by 20% of academic and 16% of administrative staff. This model implies a sandwich approach, where physical mobility is flanked by online engagement, potentially offering a gradual entry and exit from the intensive in-person experience.

More than one fourth of academic respondents (26%) were found to be involved in a model where the **physical part occurs prior to the online component**, which was not at all common for administrative staff. In this model, the online component is used for the follow-up activities following physical interaction.

The least common option is where both components are used in parallel (reported by only 3% of academic and 5% of administrative staff), potentially being a very resourceful model which involves two sets of activities running in parallel.

Figure 8. Sequence of SBM components

Component length

This study also explored the **length of SBM components**. The obtained feedback shows that **physical components tend to be shorter than online ones**.

- The most **common duration of the online component reported was 4 weeks**, followed by 1 week and 3 weeks. Other reported periods of duration included 8, 10, and 12 weeks, indicating a more extended online engagement in some cases.
- The **physical component predominantly lasts for 1 week**. This seems to be the standard duration for most SBM activities, with few exceptions where the physical component extended to 2, 4, 11 and even 12 weeks, but these are outliers compared to the prevailing 1-week trend.
- In several instances, the two components have **percentage values** (e.g., where 20% of the activity is online, and 80% is physical), suggesting that SBM activities might be more flexible and adapt to the needs of the participants or the nature of the content.
- Lastly, there was one instance where the duration was defined as "As long as the course lasts" for both online and physical components, providing an example of a fully integrated approach where both components run parallelly for the entire course duration.

The focused nature of SBM was highlighted by one focus group participant who indicated that *"The most powerful thing about BIPs is that when you get students to work for a short period of time and focus on one thing, you get students much more engaged. Engagement is an easy thing with blended short programmes*."

Purpose of components

Qualitative feedback collected through the survey revealed the most typical purposes for the **use of the online component at different stages of SBM**:

Table 7. Use of the online component at different stages of SBM

Purpose	Activity examples			Response rate
	Preparatory (academic & organisational)	**Formal curriculum**	**Follow-up**	
Knowledge acquisition and sharing	• Context: introduction to the institution and the topic / programme, methodology, theoretical framework (i.e. sharing basic knowledge about the topic) • Documentary research on the topic • Distribution of roles • Team work	• Lectures and seminars on various topics • Practise and exercises	• Online presentation of results	15/32

Purpose	Activity examples			Response rate
	Preparatory (academic & organisational)	Formal curriculum	Follow-up	
	• First assignments			
Team or relationship-building to foster connection and collaboration	• Connecting, getting to know each other / Team creation • Team bonding	• Project development	• Keeping in touch	10/32
Cultural and language training highlighting international nature of SBM and the importance of cross-cultural understanding		• Language training • Technical training and soft skills to promote interaction between students • Group English course		3/32

The **physical component of SBM** was found to be most commonly used to enable the following:

- **Lectures and knowledge sharing**, allowing for a more interactive and immersive experience, as participants can directly engage with experts and their peers;
- **Practical work and hands-on experiences** where the theoretical knowledge from the online sessions is put into practice;
- **Teamwork and collaboration**, emphasising team bonding, collaborative activities, and working in international environments underscores the importance of interpersonal interactions and collaborative learning.
- **Networking and relationship building** highlighting the importance of face-to-face interactions in building lasting professional and personal relationships.
- The **immersion and cultural experience** diving deeper into a different academic, institutional, or cultural environment.

Table 8 summarises the added value of each option in terms of the sequence of SBM components.

Table 8. Added value of SBM by type of component sequence

Sequence Stage	Purpose and activities	Impact on student experience
Online component before physical mobility	Preparation through orientation, language training, cultural sensitivity training. Facilitates early interaction with host country peers	Prepares and equips students for the experience, enhancing readiness and confidence
Online component during physical mobility	Access to digital resources and online collaboration tools to complement on-site experience	Enhances the on-site learning experience, enriching interactions and academic engagement
Online component after physical mobility	Reflective activities such as debriefing sessions, project work, and presentations, consolidation of experiences	Supports reflective learning, allows for consolidation and continued engagement with the host culture
Online component both before and after physical mobility	Comprehensive continuum of online learning, wrapping around the physical phase for thorough preparation and reflection	Ensures in-depth preparation and post-experience reflection, maximising the educational journey

Figure 9 summarises the **complementary nature** of online and physical components in the learning process. The online component primarily emphasizes knowledge sharing, theoretical understanding, and preparatory activities, providing a platform for initial introduction, setting the scene, and fostering first connections. The physical component offers a more hands-on, immersive experience, where theoretical knowledge is put into practice, and deeper interpersonal interactions occur as participants can fully immerse themselves in collaborative projects, cultural exchanges, and practical tasks. This complementarity was highlighted by one focus group participant: "*Normally, we organise online lectures to level students' background knowledge and to ensure that everyone understands the basic concept. Students start working together. They are divided and have meetings with their group supervisor to work on the first level. When they arrive, they have to present something that proves they have been working prior. There are also lectures offered by our external partners whom we invite to bring practical cases related to the BIP theme. And students have to really work together, go into the lab, do things and organise themselves to make a pitch at the end, present and defend the work they have been doing together.*"
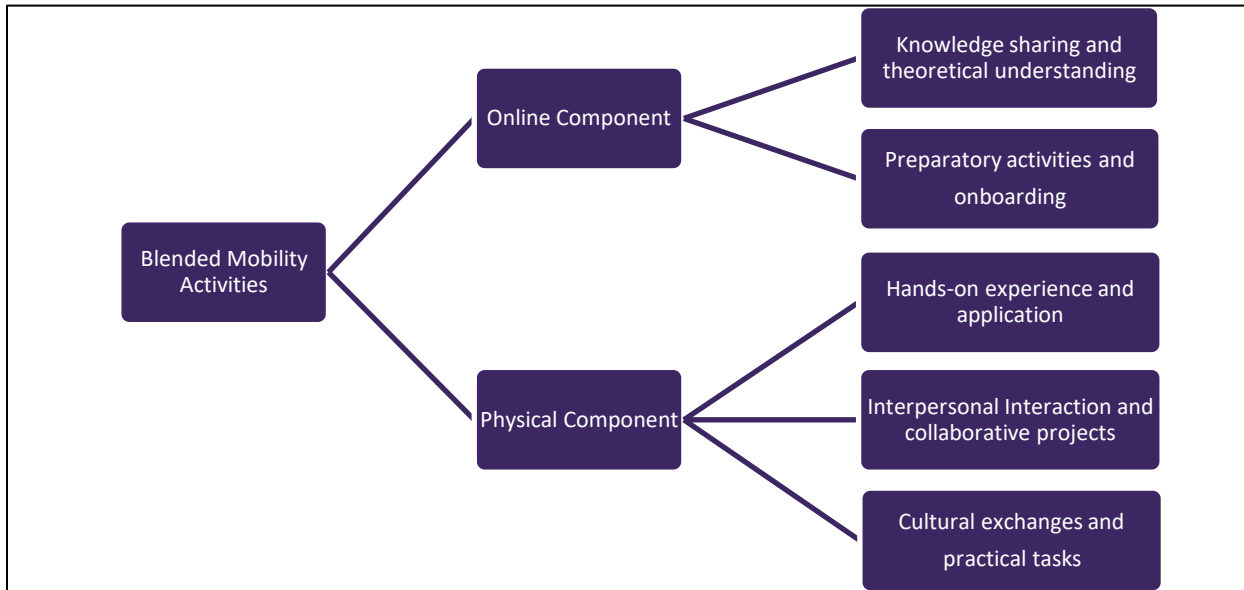
Figure 9. Roles of online and physical components

Accreditation

The study explored the **accreditation** aspects of SBM. According to 61% of respondents (all academic staff), their respective SBM activities were not part of an accredited programme. Only a small fraction (13%) indicated that SBM was part of an accredited programme (e.g., part of the curriculum and of an accredited degree similar to mobility windows or included in the self-evaluation report under the internationalisation heading), whereas more than one fourth were unaware of whether it is part of an accredited programme (**Figure 10**). This indicates that many SBM activities are currently **supplementary to the main curriculum** or that institutions have not yet formalised the inclusion of these activities within their accreditation frameworks.
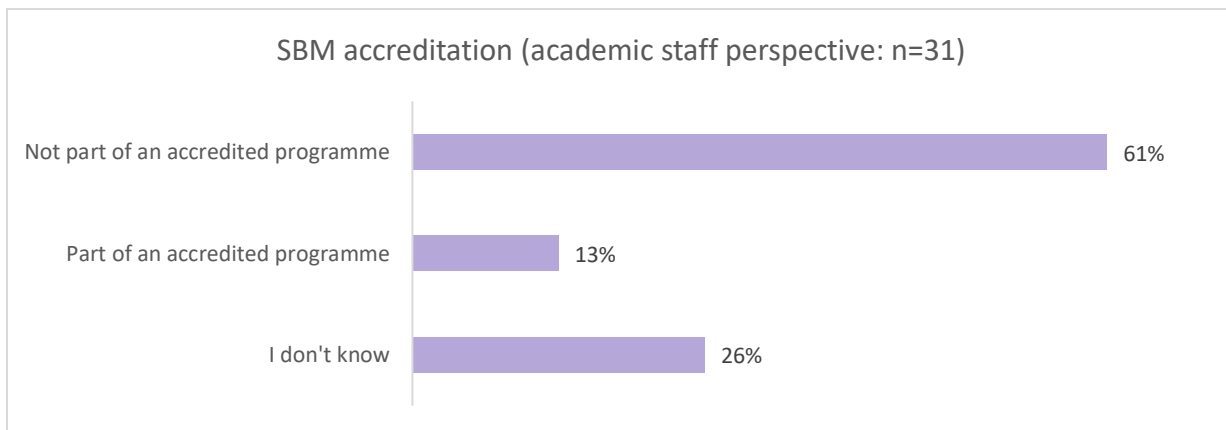
Figure 10. SBM accreditation

Focus group participants shed further light on the current situation by stressing the **optional character** of SBM and related difficulties: "*There are all kinds of issues (e.g., capacity, funding) that make it difficult to make the real compulsory programme for everyone.*"

"*BIPs until now have never [been] part of [a] compulsory programme, but an elective course. It is more of an ad hoc opportunity that is communicated and inserted in the study package, also recognised in the diploma, but not fully visible from the start, when students compose their programme. That could be because the call is annual and it is difficult for study programmes/faculties to integrate it as a compulsory element in the curricula because of high uncertainty of funding.*"

"*BIPs are an excellent alternative way for internationalisation for students with less financial resources, since it's a short stay abroad providing an alternative to a semester-long stay abroad and the need to complement one's Erasmus scholarship*".

6. Funding

This chapter explores the common funding sources used by HEIs to support SBM and its different components. Currently, the **Erasmus+ programme represents the main funding source for SBM** for the vast majority of both academic (68%) and especially administrative staff (93%) respondents (**Figure 11**). These differences in views suggest that while both groups are aware of and rely on Erasmus+ funding, administrative staff are likely more involved in the financial aspects of SBM organisation and thus may have a greater awareness of Erasmus+ contributions.

By offering financial incentives, **Erasmus+ affected the structure of short-term mobility** and triggered the rollout of SBM as summarised by one focus group participant: "*We see that some of the existing short programmes without an online component altered the way they were designed to fit in the framework of Blended Intensive Programmes*".

Furthermore, the programme offered the **opportunity to upscale the existing SBM** activities at interested HEIs: "*Since 2016 we have a tradition of these short-term exchanges (even before the current Erasmus+ programme) because students had asked for them. We had to fund them with institutional funding. And now we get this Erasmus+ funding, of course it makes it wider, so we can organise many courses a year, adapt them and implement them in this way.*"

Own institutional funding represents the second funding source for SBM, more or less equally important for academic (13%) and administrative staff (16%) and considerably smaller than Erasmus+ (**Figure 11**).

National funding sources were found to be more prominent for academic respondents (13%) where SBM can be part of broader education or research projects typically managed at the faculty or department level.

Examples of **other funding sources** specified include student fees, regional funding schemes, such as Nordplus, and European University Alliances funding, which also falls under Erasmus+. Like in case of national funding, such opportunities are better known to academics due to their more decentralised nature.
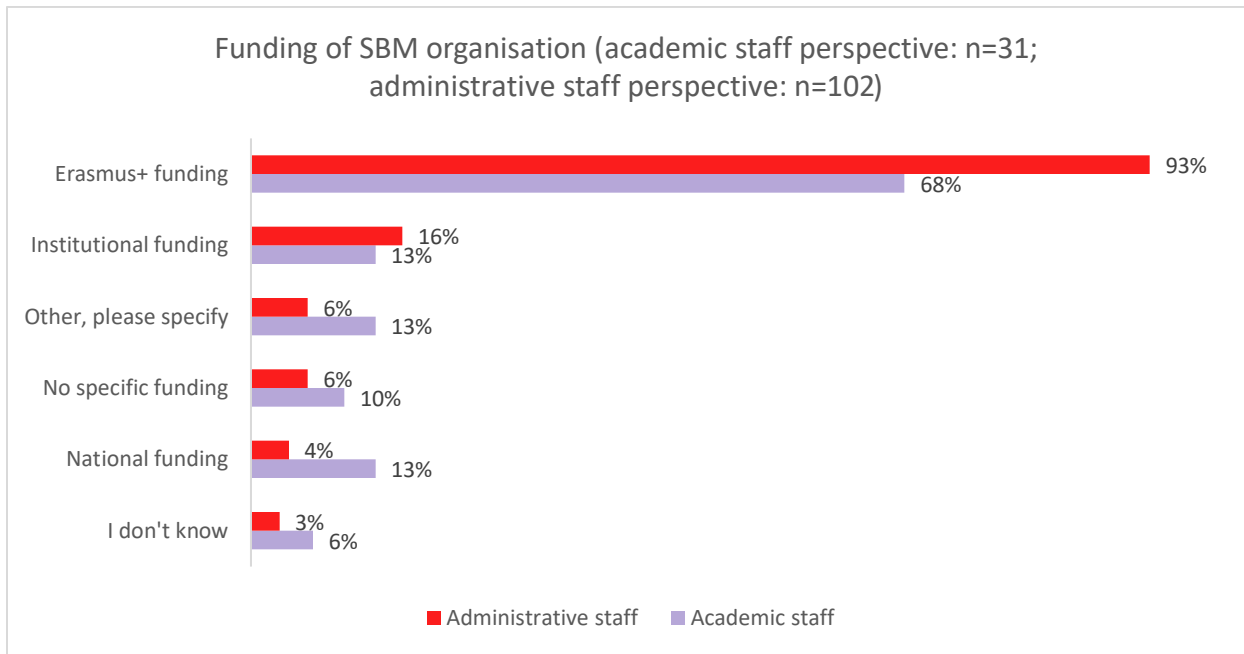
Figure 11. Funding of SBM organisation

Zooming in on the current funding sources for the two components of SBM, significant differences were established for the physical and online components.

Erasmus+ is the primary funding source for physical mobility (96% of administrative staff), followed by students' own funding (14%), alongside other sources (6%), including funding from European University alliances and regional schemes (**Figure 12**). Hackathon participants noted that students did not receive any funding for travel expenses but rather per diems, which was problematic for many students. This situation changed in 2024 with the introduction of travel costs under Erasmus+ on a pilot basis as indicated during the focus groups by participants representing national agencies for the Erasmus+ programme. National agencies are expected to test this scheme in 2024 and implement it fully as of 2025.

SBM physical component funding (administrative staff perspective: n=102)

Erasmus+ funding	96%
Students' own funding	14%
Other, please specify	6%
Institutional funding	3%
National funding	3%
I don't know	2%
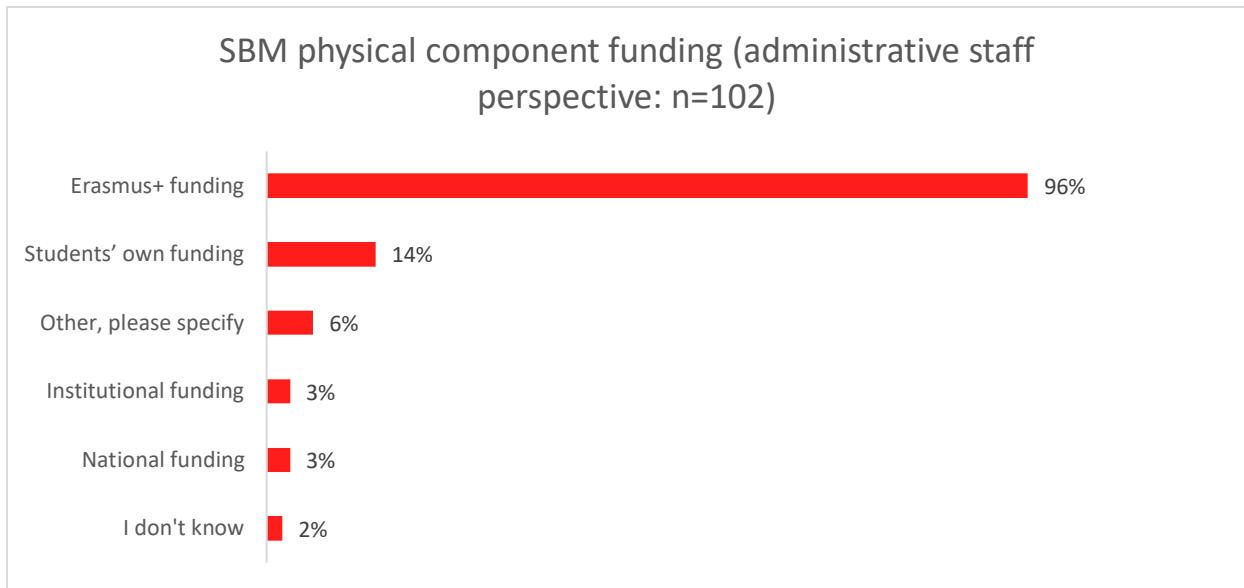
Figure 12. SBM physical component funding

A contrasting picture is observed for the **online component**, where the vast majority of respondents (88% of administrative staff) reported **no funding available for this part of SBM** (**Figure 13**). This stark difference suggests that while physical mobility has substantial financial backing, mainly through Erasmus+, the online part of SBM may largely rely on existing institutional resources or be structured to minimise additional costs. Only 4% of respondents point to students' own funding as a source for the online component, which could align with students maintaining their ordinary study loans or grants during this period. Other sources, including institutional and national funding, are minimally referenced, at 2% each.

SBM online component funding (administrative staff perspective: n=102)

No funding for the online component	88%
Students' own funding	4%
I don't know	3%
Other, please specify	2%
Institutional funding	2%
National funding	2%
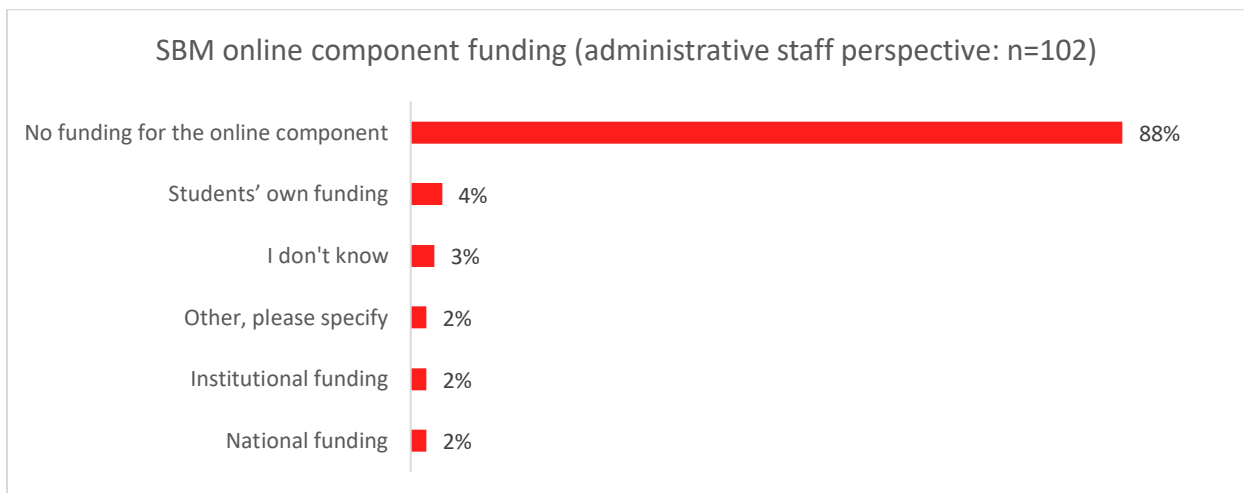
Figure 13. SBM online component funding

These findings point to a **funding gap between the physical and online components of SBM**. While the physical component benefits from strong financial support, the online component appears to be less financially resourced, possibly reflecting a perception that it incurs lower costs or can be managed within existing budgetary frameworks. This discrepancy underscores the need for a more balanced funding approach that recognises the integral role of online activities in student blended mobility and takes into account possible infrastructural and maintenance costs.

7. Evaluation

The study explored the existing evaluation approaches applied for SBM. **Figure 14** presents the current practices reported by academic and administrative staff.

In total, 40% of academic staff reported that their SBM activities were formally evaluated by the central-level Quality Assurance (QA) office. Nearly one third of respondents from both groups indicated that SBM activities were formally evaluated by the faculty-level QA office, implying that faculty-specific criteria or considerations are also taken into account in the evaluation of SBM. This suggests that **structured and formal evaluation approaches were established at a significant number of HEIs at central or faculty level** to ensure the quality of SBM.

Both staff groups reported the use of **informal assessment methods**, though to a different extent (26% of administrative vs 10% of academic staff). It is to be further investigated if such less formalised processes occur alongside or in addition to official QA procedures.

One fifth of academic staff selected **'Other' methods of assessment**, such as an assessment carried out by a European University alliance project team or blended mobility management team. This points to the growing role of specialised groups or committees in the evaluation process and a mix of central and faculty-level assessments, with the use of validated questionnaires and informal discussions. Additionally, some respondents indicated that evaluation can be part of the academic process (e.g., through research conducted by educational sciences departments or by course coordinators as part of their teaching duties).

Overall, the applied evaluation practices, which can include a mix of formal, informal, centralised, and decentralised approaches seem to be quite diverse. While there is a tedency towards centralised assessment, significant value is placed on feedback from various stakeholders within the educational ecosystem, from departmental research to student reports and informal discussions.

SBM assessment methods (academic staff perspective: n=10; administrative staff perspective: n=47)

- It was assessed by the QA office at faculty level: Administrative staff 28%, Academic staff 30%
- It was informally assessed: Administrative staff 26%, Academic staff 10%
- It was assessed by the QA office at central level: Administrative staff 17%, Academic staff 40%
- Other, please specify: Administrative staff 15%, Academic staff 20%
- I don't know: Administrative staff 15%, Academic staff 0%

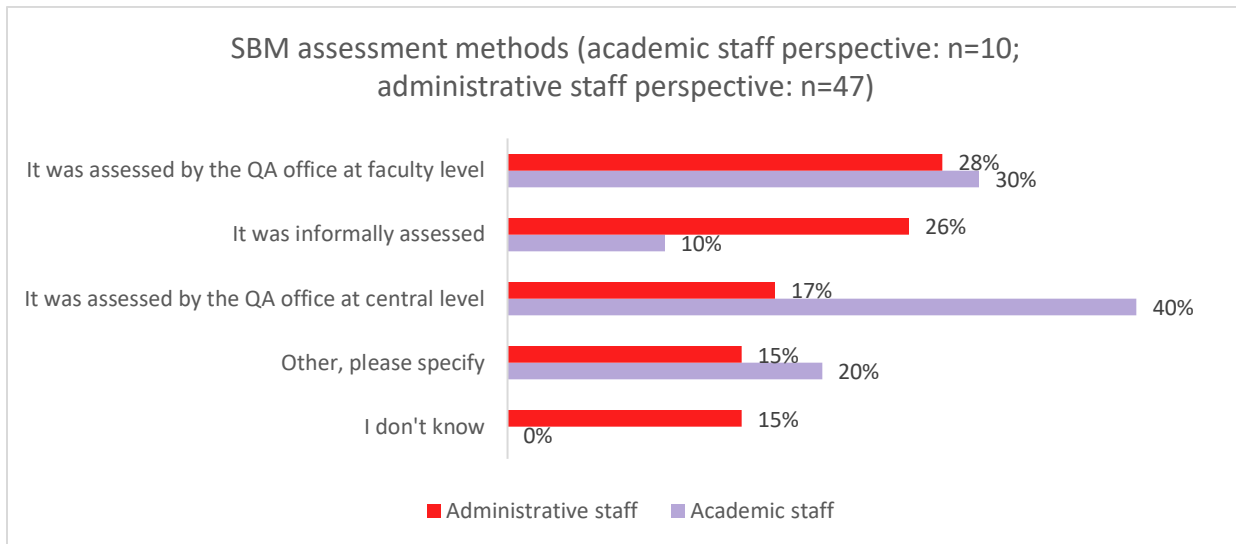■ Administrative staff ■ Academic staff

Figure 14. SBM assessment methods
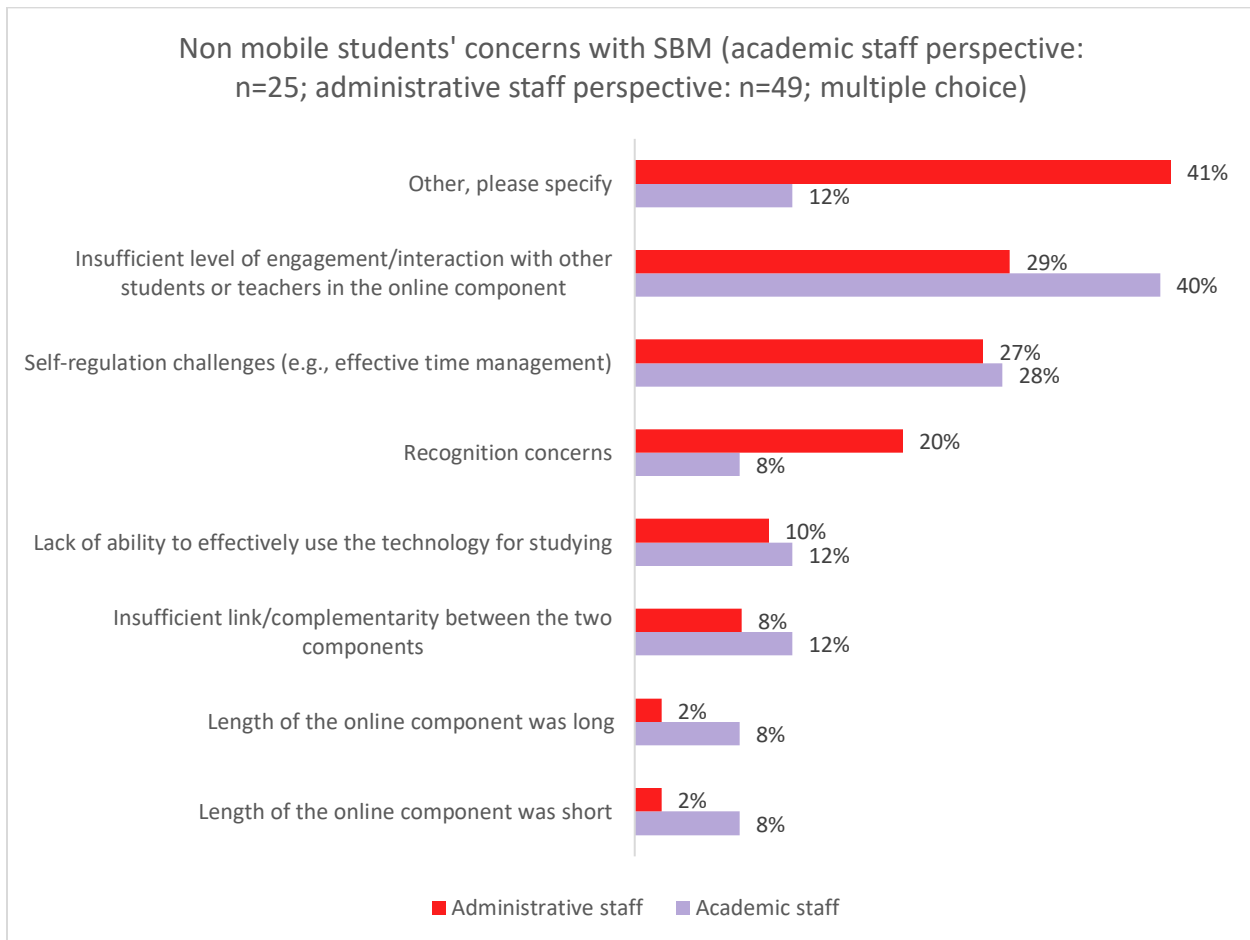
8. Perceived students' concerns

The study explored students' concerns (both mobile and non-mobile) with SBM from the perspective of administrative and academic staff (at a later stage of the HIBLend project, direct perceptions of students will also be reviewed).

Figure 15 presents the related concerns of **mobile students** who went on a physical mobility as part of SBM. Two most prominent concerns are related to **self-regulation challenges** (36%) and **insufficient level of engagement** with other students or teachers in the online component (40%), particularly highlighted by academic staff. **Recognition** was perceived as a student concern for nearly one fourth of administrative staff (27%), suggesting that students are uncertain about the recognition of the credits obtained. Both groups had different views about students' possible concerns regarding the length of the online or physical components, being more in agreement about complementarity of two components. Other responses focused primarily on time availability and scheduling issues with the involved universities affecting students.
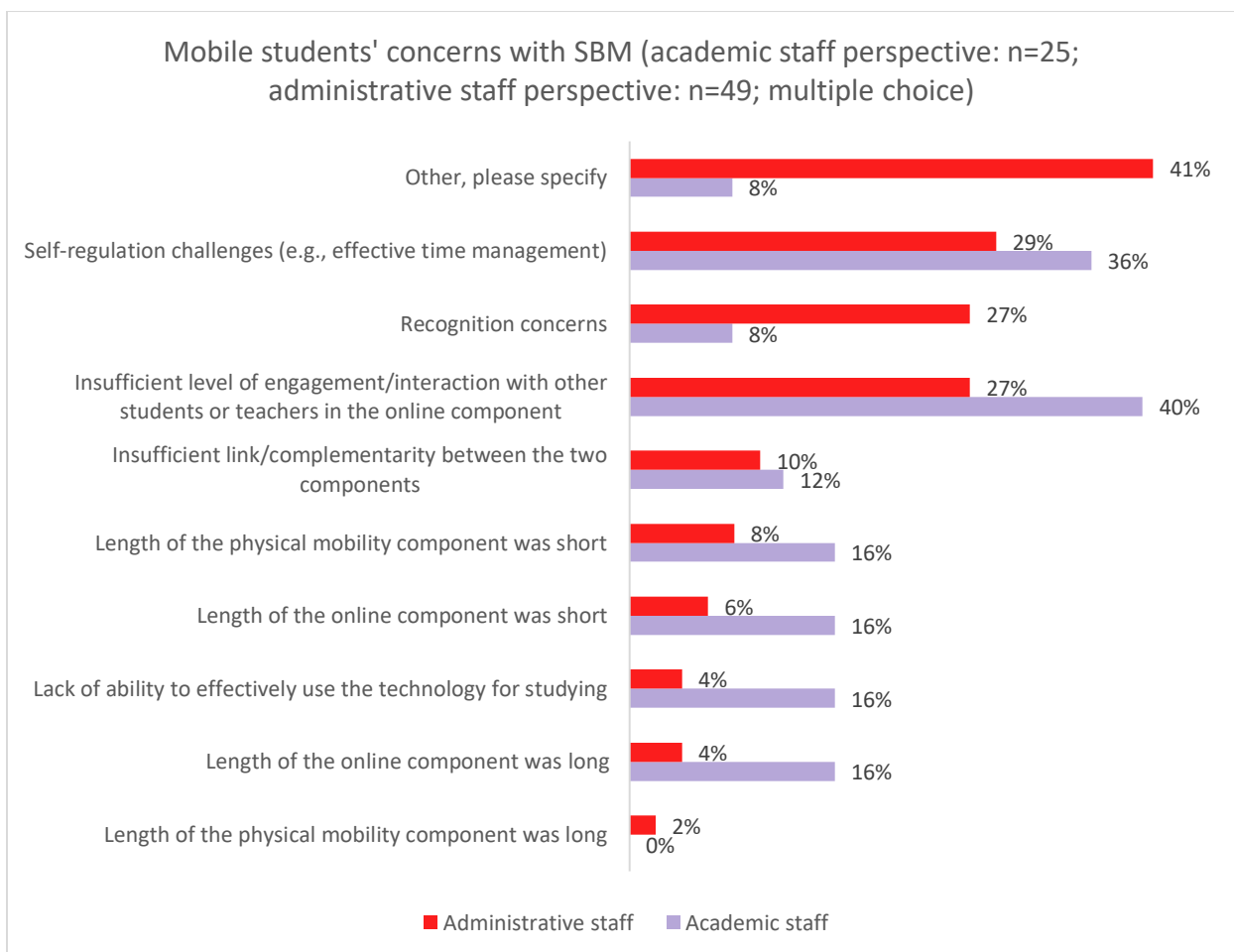
Figure 15. Mobile students' concerns with SBM

Figure 16 presents the related concerns of **non-mobile students** who did not participate in mobility within their SBM experience (e.g., students from the host institution organising a BIP). **These concerns are very similar to those of mobile students**, mostly revolting around possibly insufficient level of engagement in the online component, self-regulation challenges and recognition, according to both administrative and academic staff. The 'other' part of the responses focused on issues with attendance of this group and eventual interest levels when a mobility is not available to them.

Figure 16. Non mobile students' concerns with SBM

9. Recognition

Recognition of SBM learning outcomes emerged as one of perceived concerns both for mobile and non-mobile students. Looking at related institutional practices, the primary method of recognition for SBM is based on the **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System** (ECTS) according to administrative (94%) and academic staff respondents (85%) (**Figure 17**). This finding was reconfirmed during the focus group discussions, which can be summarised with the following statement: "*There were no differences in how recognition was done in SBM and in longer term mobility. I give the grades and then the administrative unit provides students with the transcripts of records for the process to conclude at the sending institution.*"

The use of **certificates** emerged as the second most common recognition method selected by 32% of academic and 28% of administrative staff. **Diploma supplements** are less commonly used, while microcredentials are still very rare. Only 16% of academic respondents and 2% of administrative respondents indicated that SBM learning outcomes were recognised informally. However, focus group discussions revealed some significant differences in the approaches pursued, as noted by one of participants: "*I have noticed that some BIPs give credits just by participation, while others give credit only based on the assessment of the work done*".
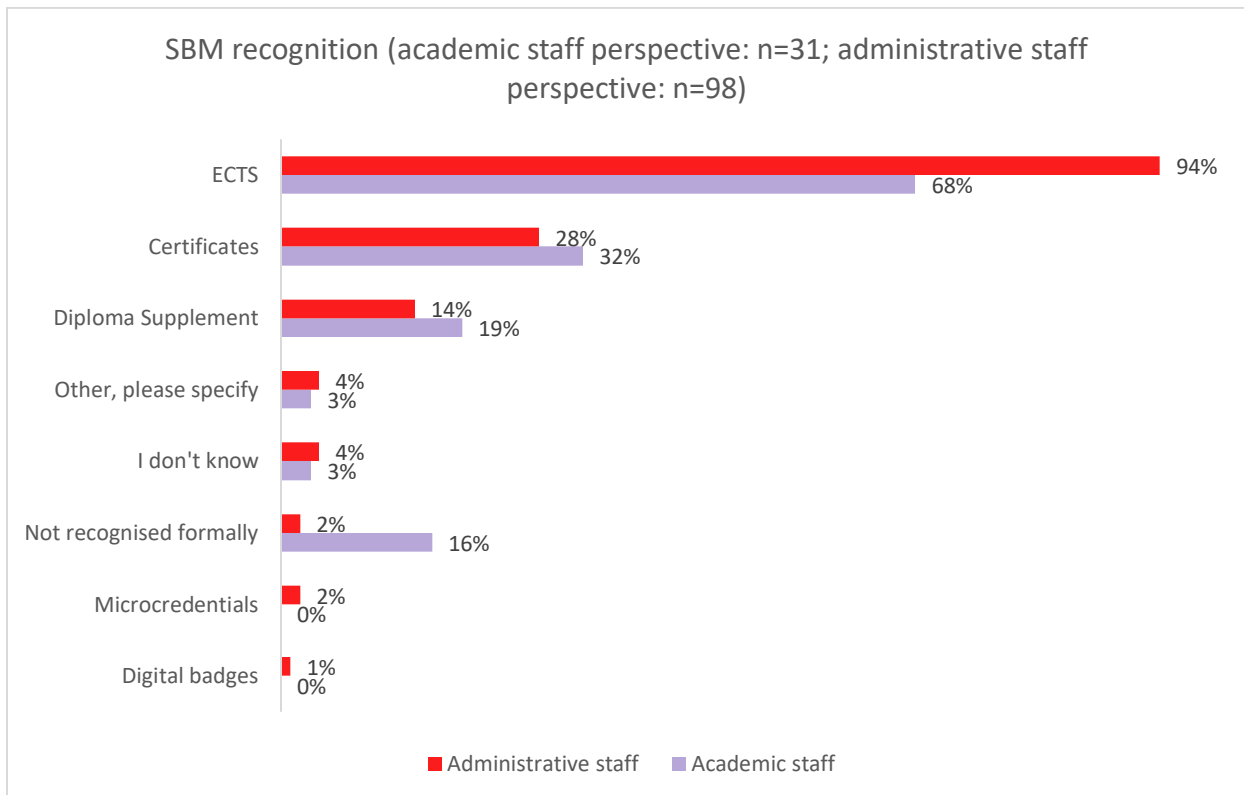

Figure 17. SBM recognition

Both SBM components are recognised as one in the vast majority of cases reported by academic (94%) and administrative staff respondents (87%) (**Figure 18**). However, the hackathon sessions revealed that the **online component of SBM is sometimes not recognised** due to the fact that it is often considered part of onboarding for physical mobility. Relatedly, it was established that **credit recognition for non-mobile students** in SBM depends on the department or exchange programme practices and has a more *ad hoc* nature. This lack of formal recognition for the online component could impact student interest in SBM, potentially disadvantaging non-mobile students. Furthermore, the number of ECTS credits awarded for SBM (typically 3 ECTS) may not be sufficient considering the overall credit requirements of some study programmes. These discrepancies indicate possible need to re-evaluate institutional recognition processes to ensure fairness and consistency for all students engaged in SBM.
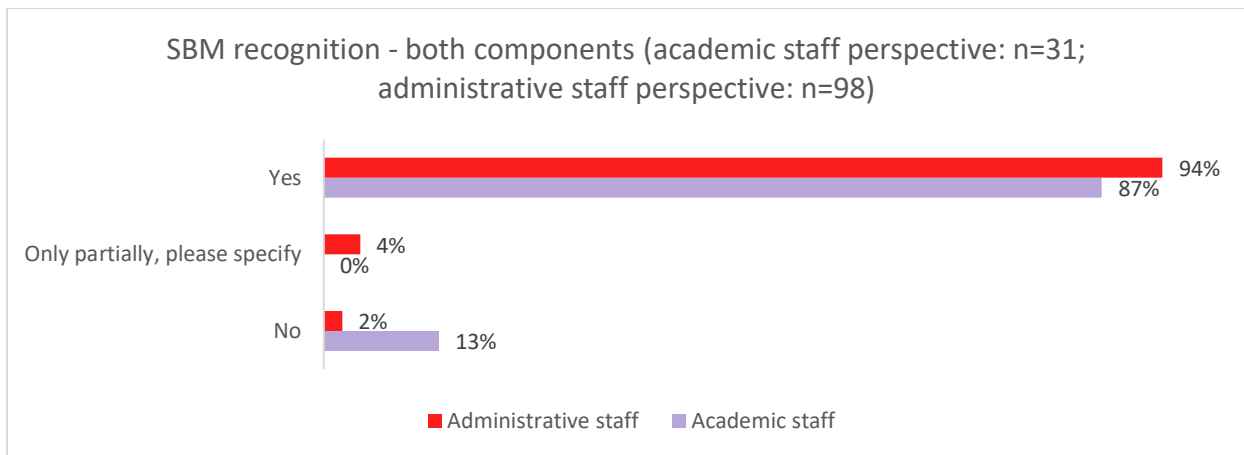

Figure 18. SBM recognition - both components

10. Student selection and support

Dissemination of information about SBM activities among students mostly occurs via the **institutional website** (66% of administrative and 45% of academic staff) alongside **email communication** (58% and 52%). More than half of both respondent groups highlighted **information sessions** organised by international offices as a significant promotion channel (53% and 55%) (**Figure 19**). Word of mouth was reported by 49% of administrative staff, underscoring the role of personal recommendations and peer feedback. Social media is more actively used by administrative (37%) than academic (16%) staff.
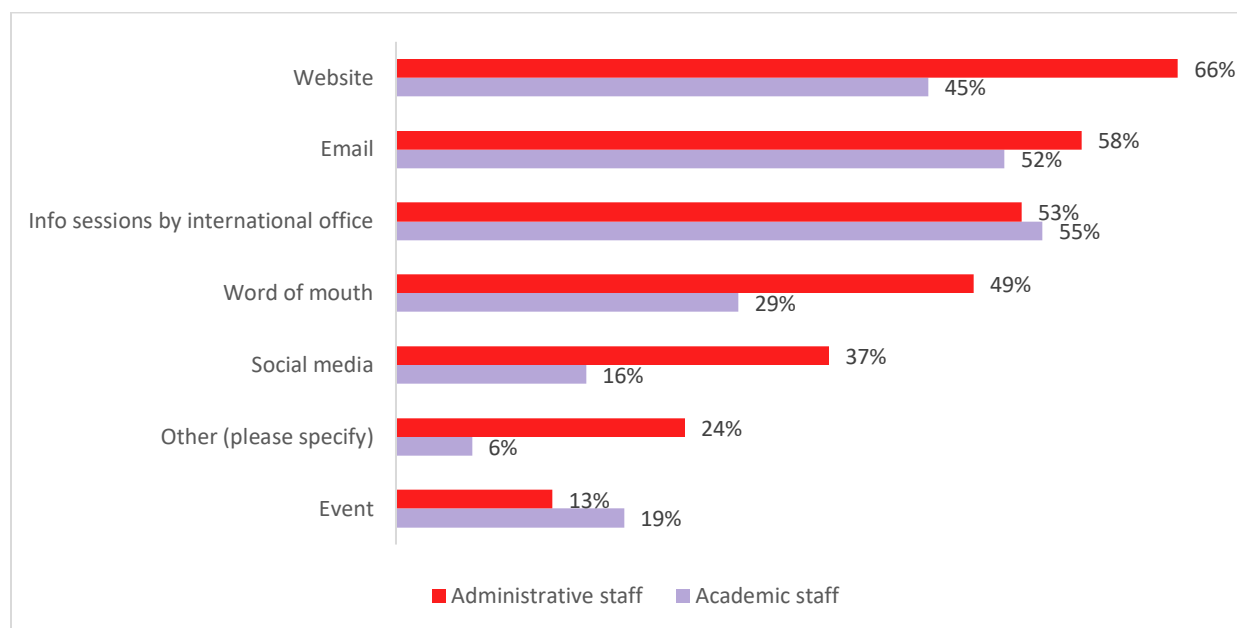
Figure 19. SBM promotion

Typically, students are selected for an SBM activity based on an **open call for proposals**, as reported by academic (52%) and administrative staff (58%) (**Figure 20**). Open calls are used both for promotion and selection, as highlighted by one respondent in a European University alliances context: "*In the CIVIS alliance we have one call for SBM for all alliance members*".

Selection based on **academic performance** is the next most common approach (43% of administrative and 32% of academic staff). **Motivation** is also a significant selection factor, reported by more than one third of academic and administrative staff respondents.

Student selection for SBM (academic staff perspective: n=31; administrative staff perspective: n=98)
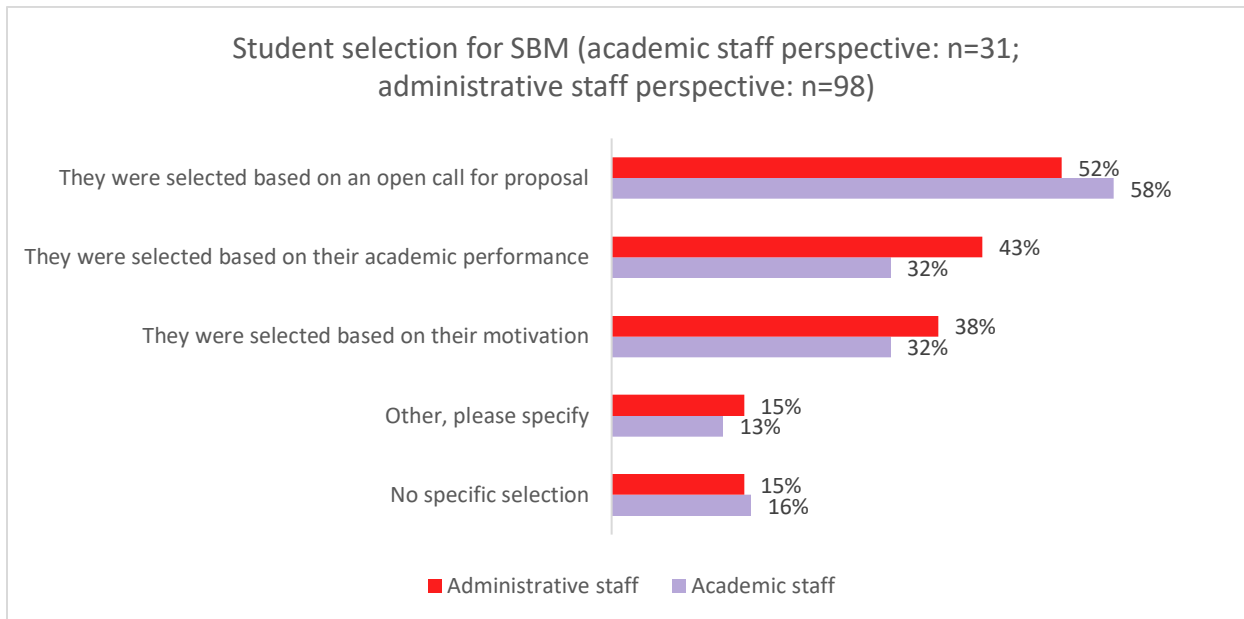
Figure 20. Student selection for SBM

The study explored various **measures taken to prepare mobile and non-mobile students** for an SBM activity.

When it comes to supporting **mobile students**, organising an information session to explain the SBM process was the most common support measure from the perspective of academic staff (68%). More than one third of both respondent groups indicated that students were supported with the organisation of **accommodation.** Offering **travel support** was reported by 35% of academic and 19% of administrative staff (**Figure 21**). Few respondents (18% administrative and 13% academic staff) reported limited preparations, highlighting a potential area for improvement in pre-departure support.

Mobile student preparation for SBM (academic staff perspective: n=31; administrative staff perspective: n=98)
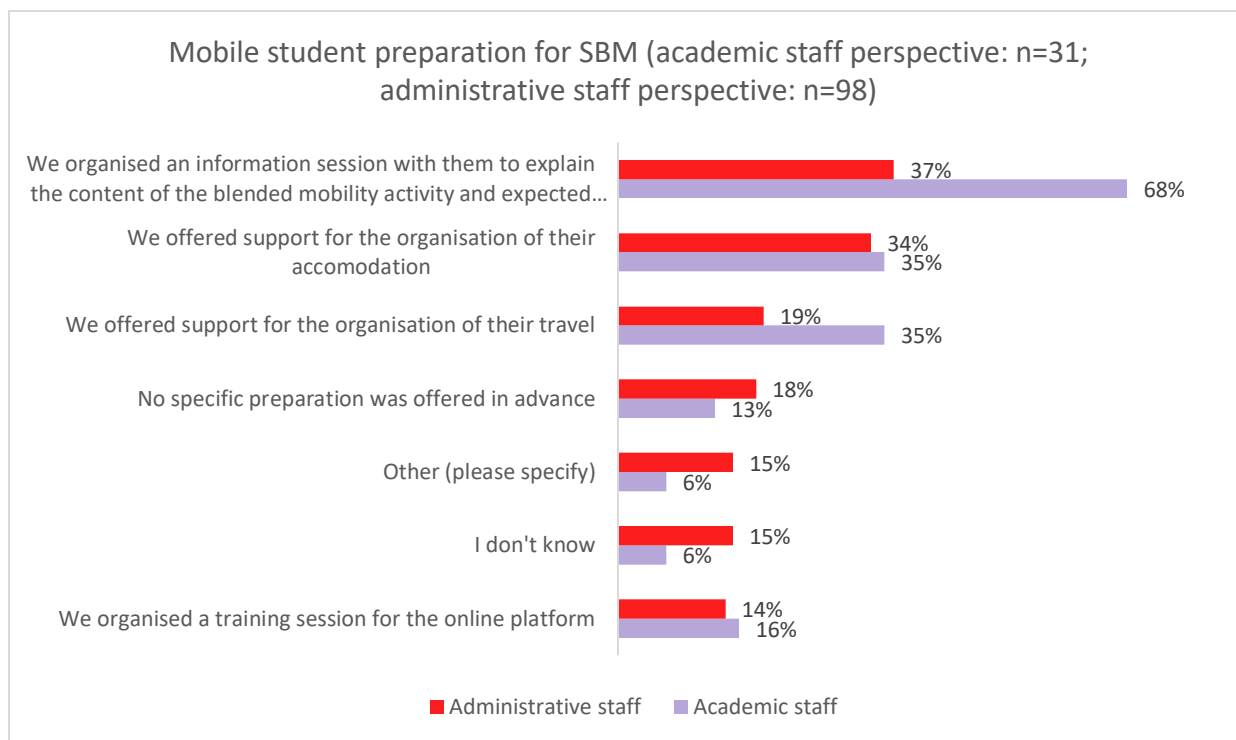
Figure 21. Mobile student preparation for SBM

Support offered to **non-mobile students** (i.e. those enrolled by the host institution) is mostly organised as information sessions, particularly reported by academic staff (55%). However, a significant share of administrative and academic staff (27% and 32%) reported that **non-mobile students did not receive any preparatory support** as compared to mobile students (**Figure 22**). Enhancing such support for both student groups can help address some of the aforementioned concerns such as limited engagement with other students or teachers in the online component.

Non mobile student preparation for SBM (academic staff perspective: n=31; administrative staff perspective: n=98)

Figure 22. Non mobile student preparation for SBM

11. Challenges and key success factors

The study explored various challenges facing academic and administrative staff in setting up and implementing blended mobility activities, which are broadly summarised in **Figure 23**.

A prominent challenge revolves around **student engagement and participation**. On the one hand, the shift from traditional to blended learning requires students to adapt, and not all students are equally prepared or inclined. On the ot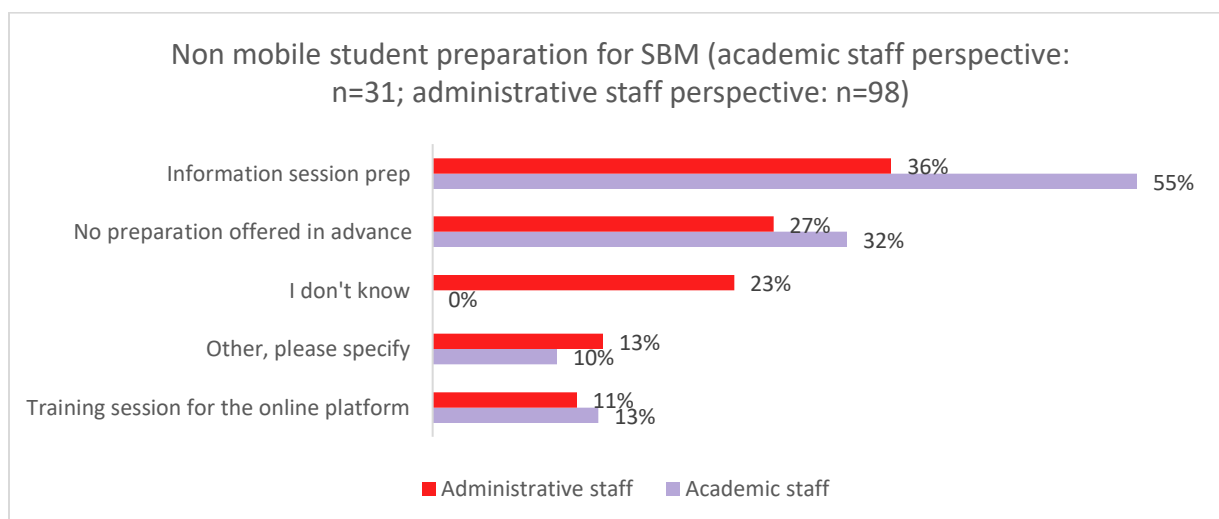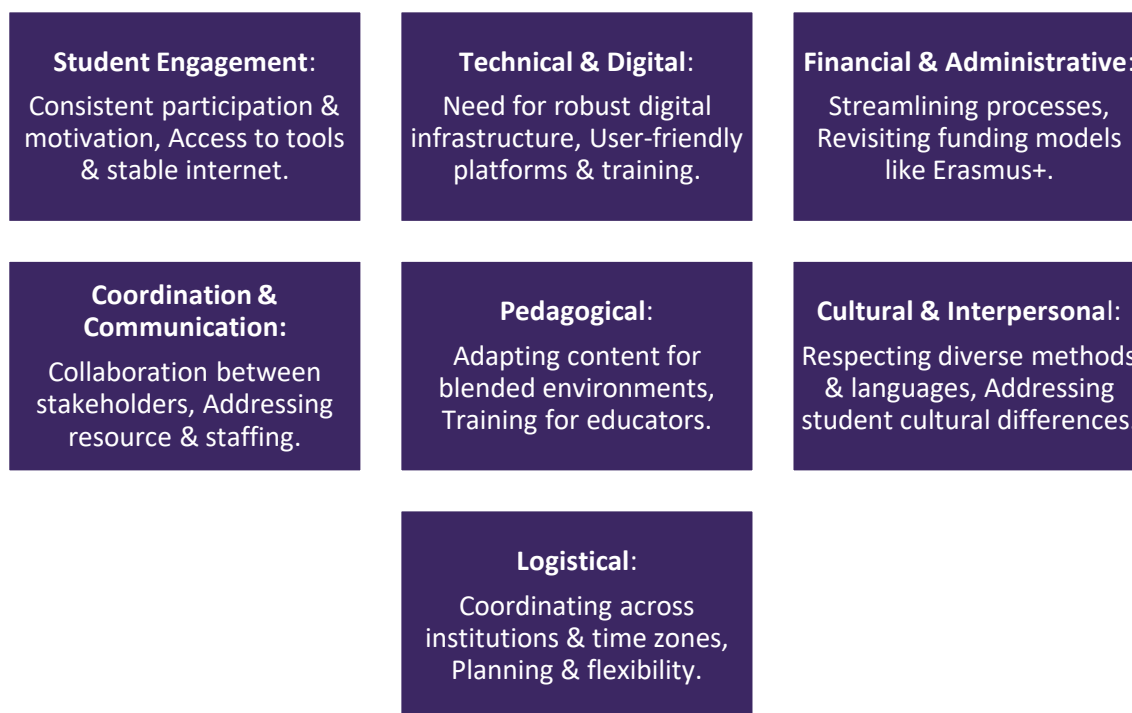her hand, the structured engagement of mobile and non-mobile students in SBM such as BIPs could differ, as noted by one participation: *"When I look at BIPs implemented at our university, there is still some room for improvement because there are no hard requirements from the Commission regarding domestic students attending the BIP. I see this as a missed opportunity for the involvement of local students that don't go on mobility."*

According to the hackathon participants, faculties often face difficulties in terms of administration and coordination due to the **perceived value of the online component**. There is a tendency to overlook the online components of blended mobility, which should be designed with pedagogical value in mind.

The reported **financial and administrative issues** emphasise the need for streamlined processes and better coordination. While the financial aspect of SBM demands clear, manageable structures to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, resource limitations, especially in terms of staffing, are a recurring theme. Many institutions feel stretched, indicating a potential need for more **training for existing staff** or even hiring additional personnel to manage increased workload associated with SBM activities, as summarised in the following quote: *"All administrative processes required by BIPs are basically the same as for long-term mobility, so many institutions find it a hassle because the time spent abroad doesn't really relate to how much time they spend on all the administrative tasks."*

A few institutions also pointed out **technical challenges**. As blended mobility inherently involves a mix of online and offline activities, stable internet connections, user-friendly platforms, and digital training are essential for the seamless execution of blended mobility.

Cultural and interpersonal differences bring to light the nuances of working with diverse groups. Understanding and respecting different teaching methods, languages, and student maturity levels are vital for a harmonious learning environment.

Student Engagement: Consistent participation & motivation, Access to tools & stable internet.

Technical & Digital: Need for robust digital infrastructure, User-friendly platforms & training.

Financial & Administrative: Streamlining processes, Revisiting funding models like Erasmus+.

Coordination & Communication: Collaboration between stakeholders, Addressing resource & staffing.

Pedagogical: Adapting content for blended environments, Training for educators.

Cultural & Interpersonal: Respecting diverse methods & languages, Addressing student cultural differences.

Logistical: Coordinating across institutions & time zones, Planning & flexibility.

Figure 23. SBM challenges (academic and administrative perspective)

Several success factors were highlighted by survey respondents, and focus group and hackathon participants (as summarised in **Figure 24**):

Preparation and planning: The emphasis is made on a well-prepared curriculum, detailed scheduling, and early engagement with partner universities. This is further complemented by the need for students to be engaged from the outset, highlighting the proactive nature of these programmes. "*The more we can involve students in planning and implementing, the better. Ownership is highly important*."

One way to support a more streamlined organisation of blended mobilities, such as BIPs would be to incorporate the Erasmus Without Paper within administration of the universities and initiate BIP calls well in advance for adequate course creation and curriculum integration. It is also recommended to develop a **comprehensive guide**, outlining dos and don'ts, emphasising the strategic value of blended mobility, and addressing the needs identified for smoother implementation.

Engagement and motivation: The teacher's commitment emerges as a vital, overarching factor, highlighting the importance of professional development and training for faculty and staff involved in blended mobility. From a student perspective, it is important to recognise blended mobility as an enhancement rather than a replacement for traditional mobilities, ensuring it serves as a supportive option for a wider array of students. Acknowledging the ongoing

challenges in credit recognition within BIPs and exploring flexible credit recognition solutions can facilitate smoother academic integration.

Effective communication and collaboration: From the initial stages of advertising to real-time interactions, open and transparent communication bridges the digital-physical divide. Administrative units, such as the IRO, play an important role in streamlining the logistical aspects. Internal collaboration can be further enhanced by creating a centralised expert centre to assist in managing blended mobilities based on early planning and cooperation between administrative and academic staff.

Support and resources: Continuous academic guidance, coupled with financial and organisational backing, ensures that students and educators alike have the tools they need.

Partnerships and networks play a crucial role in amplifying the benefits of blended mobility, as highlighted by one participant: "*I would say really invest in your partners and don't partner hop. See if you can have the core base of partners where you can really work in making a BIP better academically.*"

Preparation and Planning:
Advanced & early planning, Partner commitment.

Engagement and Motivation:
Motivated staff & students, Time for networking & cultural activities, Ice-breaker sessions for interaction.

Communication and Collaboration:
Strong partnership communication, Cooperation between staff, Share best practices & promote benefits.

Support and Resources:
Tangible support & shared practices, Sufficient funding & guidelines, Dedicated staff for guidance.

Pedagogy and Assignments:
Curriculum-embedded programmes, Clear outcomes with intercultural focus, Engaging content & interactive pedagogy.

Figure 24. SBM success factors (academic and administrative perspective)

12. Towards an SBM typology

This chapter aims to delineate a structured typology of SBM, examining its formats and variations from multiple perspectives, bringing together the key findings of the HIBLend survey, theoretical insights, and expert feedback.

Based on our findings we can outline the various types of SBM across five analytical paths, differentiating them by institutional framework, status, participation mode, duration, overall purpose, targeted activities, and sequence of mobility components. **Path 1** focuses on **Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs)** which are typically multilateral and optional, involving group participation for shorter-term durations both online and physical, aimed at mixed purposes like knowledge acquisition and cultural exposure. The sequence varies from online before physical to online both before and after physical. **Path 2** covers **Blended Summer Schools or Study Tours**, generally bilateral or multilateral, optional, and group-based, with shorter-term online and physical components, primarily for knowledge acquisition and cultural exposure. **Path 3** involves **Blended Mobility for Study**, usually bilateral and optional, with individual participation, shorter online and medium-term physical durations, for mixed purposes, and mostly following an online-before-physical sequence. **Path 4** pertains to **Blended Mobility for Training**, emerging and bilateral, optional, and individual-focused, with shorter online and medium-term physical components, for professional training, and sequences varying from online before to both before and after physical. Lastly, **Path 5** explores **Blended Joint Programmes**, often mandatory, group-based, with longer-term durations for both components, aimed at mixed purposes, and allowing sequential or parallel sequences. **Table 9** provides an overview of the identified types of SBM, mapped according to the **following key differentiators of mobility**:

1. **Institutional Framework**
   a) Bilateral agreement
   b) Multilateral agreement
2. **Status of SBM**
   a) Mandatory (core curriculum or elective courses)
   b) Optional (typically elective courses)
3. **Participation mode**
   a) Group
   b) Individual
4. **Duration of components**
   a) *Online Component (affected as well by sequence of components*) [terms included below do not correspond to terms used for the differiantion between credit and degree mobility]
      ▪ Shorter-term (less than 30 days)

- Medium-term (four weeks to course end)
- Longer-term (one semester or academic year)
  b) *Physical Component*
  - Shorter-term (less than 30 days)
  - Medium-term (four weeks to course end)
  - Longer-term (one semester or academic year)

5. **Overall purpose**
   a) Knowledge acquisition and sharing (theoretical or practical)
   b) Professional training (i.e. application of acquired knowledge in professional setting)
   c) Cultural or linguistic exposure
   d) Relationship-building / networking

6. **Activities targeted by different components**
   a) Preparatory activities (e.g., cultural orientation, language preparation, foundational academic content)
   b) Academic activities
   c) Concluding activities / consolidation of experience (e.g., debriefing sessions, project work, presentations, development of e-portfolios)

7. **Sequence of mobility components**
   a) Online component before physical component (i.e. online + physical/onsite)
   b) Physical component before online component (i.e. physical/onsite + online)
   c) Online component parallel to physical component (i.e. online/physical)
   d) Online component both before and after physical component (i.e. online + physical/onsite + online)

The types of SBM identified are grouped under **two broad categories,** providing insights into their design, purpose, and execution (**Error! Reference source not found.**):

I. SBM activities that seem to be **common** based on the analysis conducted (**Common SBM**)

II. SBM activities, which are **applied by some or few HEIs** at the current stage (**Emerging SBM**)

Each path can include several **iterations** that could be explored at the next analytical stage of the HIBLend project. Based on the HIBLend findings **the five paths** (Blended Intensive Programmes or similar, Blended summer schools or study tours and Blended mobility for study, Blended mobility for training and Blended Joint Programmes) can include **most commonly used iterations and/or emerging ones** with differences in the **differentiators of mobility**, i.e. differences in the types of programmes, institutional frameworks, type of SMB, participation modes, durations, overall purposes, targeted activities, and the sequence of mobility components.

In the **next step**, it would be necessary to make **a decision on how to proceed,** with **which of the 5 paths** should be retained for the analysis of quality considerations under WP3 (if not all), based on the **3 different stages of SBM** (design, delivery, follow up), the **4 different stakeholders** involved in the mini-Delphi studies and the **7 key differentiators of SBM** identified above.

Table 9. Existing SBM types and paths for further exploration

Analytical path	Type	Institutional framework	Status of SBM	Participation mode	Duration		Overall purpose	Activities targeted by different components		Sequence of mobility components
					Online	Physical		Online	Physical	
Path 1: Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) or similar	**Most common**	Multilateral, Erasmus+	Optional (typically elective courses)	Group	Shorter-term	Shorter-term	Mixed (Knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure; relationship-building)	Preparatory (academic and organisational) activities	Academic activities	Online before physical
	Emerging	Multilateral, Erasmus+	Optional (typically elective courses)	Group	Shorter-term	Shorter-term	Mixed (Knowledge acquisition; cultural or linguistic, relationship-building)	Follow-up (academic and organisational) activities	Academic activities	Online after physical
	Emerging	Multilateral, Erasmus+	Optional (typically elective courses)	Group	Medium term	Shorter-term	Mixed (Knowledge acquisition; cultural or linguistic exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory and follow-up activities	Academic activities	Online both before and after physical
Path 2: Blended summer schools or study tours	**Most common**	Bilateral or multilateral, Erasmus+ (possible funding line)	Optional (typically elective courses)	Group	Shorter-term	Shorter-term	Mixed (Knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities	Academic activities	Online before physical

	Emerging	Bilateral or multilateral, Erasmus+ (possible funding line)	Optional (typically elective courses)	Group	Medium term	Shorter-term	Mixed (Knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities Concluding activities	Academic activities	Online both before and after physical
Path 3: Blended mobility for study	**Most common**	Bilateral, Erasmus+	Optional (typically elective courses)	Individual	Shorter-term	Medium-term	Mixed (knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities	Academic activities	Online before physical
	Emerging	Bilateral, Erasmus+	Optional (typically elective courses)	Individual	Medium-term	Medium-term	Mixed (knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities & Concluding activities	Academic activities	Online before and after physical
Path 4: Blended mobility for training	**Emerging**	Bilateral, Erasmus+ (e.g. based on agreements with employers)	Optional (typically elective courses)	Individual	Shorter-term	Medium-term	Mixed: (Professional training; cultural or linguistic exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities	Training activities	Online before physical
	Emerging	Bilateral, Erasmus+ (e.g. based on agreements with employers)	Optional (typically elective courses)	Individual	Medium-term	Medium-term	Mixed: (Professional training; cultural or linguistic exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory activities & Concluding activities	Training activities	Online both before and after physical

Path 5: Blended Joint Programmes	Emerging	Bilateral or multilateral	Mandatory (core curriculum or elective courses)	Group	Longer-term	Longer-term	Mixed (knowledge acquisition; cultural exposure & relationship-building)	Preparatory, core and/or follow-up activities	Academic activities	Sequential or parallel

13. Next steps

The next steps in the HIBLend project involve a thorough exploration of quality considerations in student blended mobility through a mini-Delphi study, part of the Work Package 3: Exploring quality considerations of blended student mobility. By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders and focusing on key quality assurance aspects, we aim to develop a comprehensive framework that will support institutions in delivering high-quality blended mobility programs. The outcomes of this work package will be instrumental in shaping future SBM initiatives and ensuring their success and sustainability.

Mini-Delphi Study

The mini-Delphi study will be conducted in four sessions, each focusing on different aspects of internal and external quality assurance in SBM, possibly with the content, the learning outcomes, and the form/structure of the various types of student blended mobilities as a starting point. Each session will be moderated by one of the project partners, who will ensure that the discussions capture comprehensive insights from the relevant stakeholders. NVAO will develop a concept note outlining the structure and approach for the Mini Delphi sessions, which will also clarify the expected number of participants, session structure, and key questions to be addressed. This note will help guide the HIBLend partners on this endeavor. Feedback from the Mini Delphi sessions will be integrated into the above typology, helping to refine and improve it based on practical insights.

Table 10. Mini – Delphi study preliminary focus areas

Target Audience	Session Moderation	Targeted Focus Area
Administrative and upper management staff involved in SBM	EUF	Organisational perspectives: • Organisational frameworks and support mechanisms • Resource allocation • Effective organisational structures for SBM • Inter-departmental coordination • Ensuring administrative quality and efficiency • Internal Quality Assurance Focus on goals first and then implementation (pedgagogical, technological, support services etc)
Academic Staff involved in SBM	TAMK	Pedagogical/Technological perspectives: • Pedagogical approaches and technological tools • Academic staff support and development • Quality assurance in curriculum design and delivery • Innovative teaching methods for blended learning • Integration of technology in SBM • Continuous professional development for academic staff • Internal Quality Assurance

Students involved in SBM	MU	Learning Experience perspective: • Student support and administration • Learning outcomes and recognition • Evaluation methods (internal and external) • Communication and engagement strategies
Funders/External Actors	ACA and NVAO	External perspective and considerations: • Accreditation processes • Funding models and financial support • Quality assurance from an external perspective • Strategic impact and sustainability • Allignment of internal and external quality assurance processes – ESG I

Further to this, the HIBLend project team will prepare a set of **good practice examples / mini-case studies for each of the identified pathways**, including (i) sharing strategies for institutional support and organisational models that enhance SBM quality, (ii) highlighting effective pedagogical strategies and technological integrations that improve the learning experience and (iii) showcasing successful student support models and effective evaluation techniques. This work will feed into WP5 "Dissemination and exploitation" (Task 5.6 Collect testimonials and develop the digital toolbox on the HIBLend website).

References

Council of the European Union. (2021). *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*. Retrieved from: www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49659/st08658-en21.pdf

Cîrlan, E., & Loukkola, T. (2021). *Report: Internal quality assurance in times of Covid-19*. European University Association. https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/internal%20qa.pdf

European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2022). *Blended mobility implementation guide for Erasmus+ higher education mobility KA131*. Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission. (2021). *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2021–2027*. Retrieved from: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/erasmusplus-programme-guide

European Commission. (2021). *Implementation guidelines: Erasmus + and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*. European Union. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmusplus/sites/default/files/implementation-inclusion-diversity-apr21_en.pdf

European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice. (2020). *The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c90aaf32-4fce-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

Gaebel, M., Kupriyanova, V., Morais, R., & Colucci, E. (2014). *E-learning in European Higher Education Institutions: Results of a mapping survey conducted in October-December 2013*. European University Association. Retrieved from: https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/elearning%20in%20european%20higher%20education%20institutions%20results%20of%20a%20mapping%20survey.pdf

Gaebel, M., & Zhang, T. (2018). *Trends 2018: Learning and teaching in the European Higher Education Area*. European University Association. Retrieved from: www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/trends-2018-learning-and-teaching-in-the-european-highereducation-area.pdf

Gaebel, M., Zhang, T., Stoeber, H., & Morrisroe, A. (2021). *Digitally enhanced learning and teaching in European higher education institutions*. European University Association. Retrieved from: https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/digihe%20new%20version.pdf

Gross, P., Schmid, A., Gettinger, J., & Melzer, P. (2016). How do University Students Select and Use Their Learning Tools? A Mixed-Method Study on Personalised Learning (21). *UK Academy for Information Systems Conference Proceedings 2016* (20).

Marinoni, G., van't Land, H., & Jensen, T. (2020). *The impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education around the world: IAU Global Survey Report*. International Association of Universities. Retrieved from: www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf

O'Dowd, R., & Werner, S. (2024). The First Steps of Blended Mobility in European Higher Education: A Survey of Blended Intensive Programmes. *Journal of Studies in International Education*.

de Wit, H. (2017). Global: COIL—Virtual Mobility Without Commercialisation. In G. Mihut, P.G. Altbach, & H. de Wit (Eds.), *Understanding Higher Education Internationalization* (Global Perspectives on Higher Education, vol. 27, pp. 1-2). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6351-161-2_18

Annex 1. The HIBLend project

The HIBLend project was designed with an overall aim to raise interest in and enhance higher education institutions' capacity to develop high-quality blended mobility opportunities for students. This is done through the design, testing, and dissemination of a comprehensive framework offering guidance on quality considerations for existing models and approaches to blended mobility, and main processes related to the improvement of existing activities, as well as the set-up and delivery of new ones. The project has three major focus areas:

1. The design of a comprehensive framework for quality-driven blended mobility based on:
   a. Different types of emerging blended mobility models and approaches
   b. Multi-actor quality considerations for various types of blended mobility models
   c. Institutional approaches to guaranteeing the quality of various types of blended mobility models at different stages
2. Internal and external validation of the framework through two different test case scenarios
3. Framework dissemination and uptake through an interactive digital toolbox and the community of practitioners developed throughout the project

Under the first pillar, the partners will map and structure the existing and emerging theoretical and practical models of blended student mobility. They will also investigate quality expectations of various actors (students, academic and administrative staff, funders, policymakers) and institutional approaches to guaranteeing and controlling quality.

Methodologically, this will be done by means of mixed method involving a large-scale survey of higher education practitioners, focus groups and a mini-Delphi study based on a series of expert/stakeholder workshops with various higher education actors. These methods will be instrumental in harvesting rich qualitative data from experts and HEIs who are more advanced with the topic and evaluating its value and potential for transfer to other institutional settings.

This work will result in an informative, guiding typology of various approaches to blended mobility and an in-depth overview of the related quality expectations and institutional approaches to address them in practice. These two steps will lead to the design of a comprehensive framework offering guidance for institutions on the key principles and processes underpinning the quality of existing blended mobility programmes or the design and delivery of brand-new activities for students.

The second pillar will involve the internal testing of the framework by Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) and Masaryk University (MU) based on their ongoing cooperation in physical and online mobility, and the external validation by interested higher education institutions identified through an open call for participation.

The third pillar will focus on the interactive visualisation and dissemination of the framework through a project digital toolbox, consisting of a 'heatmap' of good practice examples and institutional (e.g., video) testimonials raising awareness of quality blended mobilities among institutions and students.