

Expand your Professional Horizons: Rethink your Limits

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INTRODUCTION

Staff working in higher education have the opportunity to improve their skills and broaden their horizons by taking part in Erasmus+. Having made two trips abroad, we share our experience and viewpoint on the benefits of Erasmus+ activities for staff, their school/services and students.

Bimpe's Experience

As the Erasmus+ Coordinator for the School of Health and Human Sciences (HHS) at a UK university, my first responsibility for the school is to seek Erasmus+ partnerships with other Higher Education institutions abroad, that offer similar programmes to the School of HHS. Then to initiate conversations for partnership working that will foster staff and student mobility between both institutions.

Dawn and I had the opportunity to meet with head of schools/departments, lecturers, research leads in various health subjects, Erasmus+ coordinators, and support services at two institutions visited in Denmark and Finland. What struck me was how similar our curricula were. The health subject areas discussed were similar to what I would discuss in class with my students at my own institution. Health research activities also align with pertinent research areas in the UK. I saw instantly the opportunities to develop innovative processes of teaching, learning and research activities across borders for students and academic staff.

My foremost experience was getting to know first-hand the workings of other European educational systems, learn new ideas and explore best practices that I would bring back to the School of HHS. I was inspired by learning and sharing. This refreshed my thinking and sparked new motivation and ideas of moving forward Erasmus+ activities and global learning for staff and students within the School of HHS. I took part in workshop sessions and lectures at the Health and Wellbeing International Week in Finland. I had the opportunity to teach two class sessions – an interactive session with dental technology students, providing them with an overview of the same programme at my own institution, and a 90-minute interactive lecture to social services students.

Given this exposure and the wealth of opportunities that are just waiting to be tapped into, via Erasmus+, I came back with a clear focus of developing and fostering a partnership of

teaching and learning with both institutions visited. My main viewpoint is that what we do in our various schools within our institution matters, but what we make out of professional opportunities open to us, such as Erasmus+ activities, matters more!

My highlights from both experiences abroad were that it has enhanced my professional development, helped me to generate new ideas for best practice, whereas it was a motivation booster. Interestingly, there was meaningful exchange of expertise and experiences, and opportunities to develop international networks. Finally, both experiences abroad have opened doors for other colleagues within the School of HHS, and provided opportunities for academic student exchange.

Dawn's Experience

As Subject Librarian for the School of HHS, I have had plenty of experience and knowledge of regional and national library matters. After recently completing a Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, I wondered how I could develop my skills further via CPD.

In March 2017, I undertook my second visit abroad to learn more about international library practices. This came at a time when the School of HHS, which I support, was developing new and innovative programme areas and I was looking to deliver both resource and information/digital literacy support for these courses at the highest level. One emergent theme particularly relevant to the curriculum areas I manage, was how university libraries support students both studying on-campus and on placement in the nursing and healthcare fields. As part of the process, I identified a partner institution and I visited Finland along with Bimpe.

There were various activities in the week. I participated in their International Week for Health and Wellbeing to enhance my pedagogical skills alongside teachers. I visited the Library and discussed resource provision, information literacy and the supporting of students when on placement. Interestingly, I had the opportunity to job shadow a subject librarian and gave a presentation sharing how we deliver user education and resource provision at my institution. I met with staff who taught library students and we discussed potential placements at my institution. Finally, I attended

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an 8am lecture (students start at 8am in Scandinavian countries!), took tours of two university campuses, and also visited the public library in Turku. As part of the International Week programme, there were great networking and liaison opportunities and some fun to be had! On the last night we went to a traditional Finnish sauna and then swam in a frozen lake - which could only be described as exhilarating!

There are several reasons to internationalise your CPD. It gives you an opportunity to benchmark your services from an international perspective. It provides you with a greater understanding of living and studying abroad, whereas it revitalises your CPD and gives a fresh perspective on working life. Finally, it offers an enhanced understanding of curriculum/workforce needs, and facilitates networking and liaison opportunities.

As an outcome from our visit to Denmark and Finland, we have been able to implement new ideas into our Global Learning Week for the School of HHS. We have increased staff exchange in the School of HHS, had ongoing discussion of innovative collaboration, hosted a visit from Finland, and shared our experiences.

CONCLUSION

As educators, having a constant exposure and understanding of diverse practices can augment our professional practices and skills. Rethinking our limits by making the most of Erasmus+ opportunities enhances the quality, variety and effectiveness of our teaching and learning activities for students. Our goal is to continue to share the wide-reaching benefits of our Erasmus+ activities within the School of HHS, to further enhance our reputation and international sharing.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors confirm being the sole contributors of this work and approved it for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.