Co-funded by
the European Union

HIBLend

FRAMEWORK MODEL ON QUALITY BLENDED MOBILITY

AUTHORS:
Angeliki Psychogyiou, Irina Ferencz,
Veronika Kupriyanova, Lorenzo Dello Iacovo,
Mark Frederiks, Dagmar Provijn, Salome Dermati,
Eeva Heikkilä, Jiri Vilppola, Henri Annala,
Violeta Osouchová

HIBLend

Title: HIBLend framework model on quality blended mobility

Published by: Academic Cooperation Association - ACA

Project: HIBLend: Fostering high-quality blended student mobility in higher education

Authors: Angeliki Psychogyiou, Irina Ferencz, Veronika Kupriyanova, Lorenzo Dello Iacovo, Mark Frederiks, Dagmar Provijn, Salome Dermati, Eeva Heikkilä, Jiri Vilppola, Henri Annala, Violeta Osouchová

Design: Nikolina Đurić

Publication: December 2025, Brussels, Belgium

This publication is available for free download at hiblend.eu.

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

Abbreviations

ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
BIPs	Blended Intensive Programmes
EEA	European Education Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EUAs	European Universities Alliances
EC	European Commission
EUF	European University Foundation
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IRO	International Relations Officers
MU	Masaryk University
NAs	National Agencies for Erasmus+
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
QA	Quality Assurance
SBM	Student Blended Mobility
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions increasingly integrate Student Blended Mobility in their internationalisation efforts, combining physical and virtual learning to enhance accessibility and inclusivity, offer exposure to the digital environment, and provide alternative mobility formats for their students. This shift has been accelerated by the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) and the innovations fostered by the Erasmus+ Programme, as well as the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the potential of hybrid mobility models. However, despite its growing adoption, HEIs face challenges in ensuring high-quality SBM, particularly in areas such as pedagogical design, quality assurance, institutional support, and student engagement. The HIBLend project aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive framework to support institutions in effectively designing, implementing, and evaluating SBM activities.

This document builds upon previous project phases and particularly the WP2 Report on Approaches to Blended Student Mobility and the WP3 Report on Quality Perceptions and Quality Assurance approaches to Student Blended Mobility HIBLend WP2 report, which analysed types, institutional drivers, key implementation challenges and quality considerations for SBM, among others.

The document starts by exploring the current landscape of SBM, analysing key trends, participation rates, and institutional perspectives in terms of implementation and uptake. This is followed by a chapter contextualising the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance within SBM and a chapter providing the HIBLend framework, supported by a checklist of actionable items institutions can follow regarding the strategy, design, implementation and internal evaluation of SBM. Next follow strategic recommendations for the European Commission, National Agencies of Erasmus+ as well as Quality Assurance Agencies in the field of higher education.

The HIBLend framework serves as a practical guide for higher education institutions, ensuring that SBM initiatives are well-structured, effectively managed, and aligned with international quality standards. By addressing institutional, pedagogical, and strategic considerations, the HIBLend project contributes to the sustainability and scalability of SBM, fostering greater collaboration, inclusivity, and excellence in higher education mobility activities.

2. Student Blended Mobility landscape

This chapter provides an overview of the key trends in the SBM field based on official statistical data published by the European Commission and data collected by the HIBlend project.

SBM is emerging as a relevant element within EU higher education policy developments

The interim evaluation of the European Education Area[1] and the interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme[2] both underline the growing attention to flexibility, digital approaches, and inclusion in EU mobility policies. In this context, blended mobility is increasingly present in the Commission's discussions as one of the formats that can support wider participation and offer opportunities for students who may face barriers to long-term physical mobility.

Participation in SBM has been steadily growing over the last few years, propelled by the Erasmus+ programme Blended Intensive Programmes scheme and related funding opportunities.

A wider uptake of SBM, involving "strategic combinations of phases of online learning with periods of short physical mobility[3]," has been driven by a stronger focus on digitalisation and digital skills in the current Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027). This latter has not only actively supported and promoted blended mobility (particularly BIPs), building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, but has also contributed to the conceptualisation of this field through a series of framework documents and related definitions.

The introduction of the Blended Intensive Programmes under Erasmus+, along with shorter mobilities and virtual exchanges, has shown promising preliminary results, particularly in terms of inclusivity, facilitating the participation of students who typically face challenges with the traditionally longer Erasmus+ exchange durations[4]. Institutions participating in the

[1] European Commission. (2025). *Interim evaluation of the 2021–2030 European Education Area strategic framework*. https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/interim-evaluation-confirms-added-value-of-european-education-area

[2] European Commission. (2025). *Interim evaluation of the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme and the final evaluation of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme*. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/data-evaluations-statistics/evaluation

[3] 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, 28*(5), 798–817. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7348-135X

[4] Academic Cooperation Association. (2025). *The future of Erasmus+ is the future of Europe: Why further invest in (higher) education at EU level?*

HIBlend project activities noted a gradual rise as well in engagement with these formats across departments as well as among students. The potential of these initiatives should therefore be further explored during the remainder of the current programme.

The sector's interest in SBM has been mostly driven by the new opportunities for internationalisation, particularly intercultural learning, access to mobility, and pedagogical innovations.

According to the mapping[5] conducted by the HIBLend project, the main drivers of SBM within higher education institutions in Europe are mainly linked to the opportunities for enhancing internationalisation, and the added value of the Erasmus+ programme and its BIP scheme, which were particularly highlighted by the surveyed administrative staff. From an academic staff perspective, the drivers include opportunities to strengthen intercultural learning, expand student interest in mobility, and experiment with new learning formats. The mere increased use of technology does not, in itself, motivate students or staff to engage in SBM—an unsurprising finding, given that technology is generally perceived as a tool to facilitate learning opportunities rather than a driver of engagement.

HIBlend interviews also indicate that European Universities Alliances are emerging as frontrunners in experimenting with blended mobility formats. Several alliances use BIPs and related online components to deliver challenge-based, sustainability-focused or interdisciplinary modules, illustrating the potential of SBM to support innovation in mobility and curriculum reform.

BIPs represent the most common type of SBM engaging most academic and administrative staff.

Based on the same mapping, BIPs emerge as the predominant form of SBM within institutions. Their high visibility within higher education institutions is linked not only to the available funding, but also to the flexibility of the funding line, which allows for experimenting with different formats and pedagogical approaches. On the downside, this flexibility and potential for innovation often come with a sizeable workload – comparable to

[5] Psychogyiou, A., & Kupriyanova, V. (2024). *Approaches to blended student mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 21) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383253

'typical' longer-term student mobility, particularly highlighted by administrative staff, who oversee more closely the processes and the funding-related reporting[6].

Structurally, the use of the online component in SBM is most common for background preparation to the (core) physical mobility component.

Under the most common sequence of SBM delivery, accounting for nearly half of all cases encountered in the project[7], the online component precedes the physical one, typically to facilitate initial engagement and preparation (e.g., prior knowledge sharing, team building, cultural or language training).

The second most common way of structuring SBM involves a model where the physical part is followed by the online component, which is used for follow-up activities to the physical interaction.

In some cases, the online component is used both prior to and following the physical component, offering a gradual entry and exit from the intensive in-person experience.

Table 1 below provides a broad overview of the main types of SBM encountered to date in practice, acknowledging that SBM formats continuously evolve.

[6] Psychogyiou, A., & Kupriyanova, V. (2024). *Approaches to student blended student mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 25) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383253

[7] Idem. (pp. 26).

Table 1. Existing SBM types and paths for further exploration[8]

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

[8] Psychogyiou, A., & Kupriyanova, V. (2024). *Approaches to blended student mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 48) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383253

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	
	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

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 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

Although SBM should support the complementarity of the online and physical components, there seems to be a hierarchy between the two. Typically, the online component tends to be considered an auxiliary or supporting one, with academic value (and resources) mostly attached to the physical one. This situation can be partly due to the complexities of designing a high quality, engaging online experience for learners.

While Erasmus+ is the main source of funding for SBM via BIPs, there is a funding gap between the physical and online components.

While the physical component benefits from financial support, typically in the form of student grants, the online component appears to be less financially resourced, both in terms of the funding necessary for the design and delivery of SBM activities and related student engagement. This situation reflects a perception that the online component incurs no or 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 SBM and takes into account related design, infrastructural and maintenance costs.

SBM has a complementary, ad hoc nature and is rarely a core or obligatory part of internationalisation in study programmes, which is also reflected in its evaluation mechanisms being primarily internal in nature.

SBM activities are often optional and complementary rather than a fully integrated part of accredited study programmes. While optional components can be part of a structured curriculum and reflected in learning outcomes, SBM's current design and funding model frequently result in being supplementary rather than systematically embedded. The uncertainty of sustainable funding makes it difficult for study programmes to commit to long-term integration of SBM as a core or even obligatory internationalisation component of study programmes (e.g., as part of joint programmes or mobility windows). Consequently, SBM activities can be recognised in study records or diploma supplements but not necessarily structured as visible components from the outset of a student's study plan, which contributes to student uncertainty regarding recognition and how SBM fits into their study path. The evaluation of SBM reflects this positioning, as SBM activities are primarily evaluated internally, if at all, and in very different ways. These include formal assessments at the central or faculty level, based on emerging internal quality assurance approaches, as well as informal methods such as open-ended feedback from students and staff, discussions,

and anecdotal evidence gathered during project debriefings[9]. Stakeholders consulted within HIBLend also noted that this supplementary positioning may limit the broader reach of SBM. From this perspective, greater clarity around the intended role of SBM within study programmes—particularly how it fits within internationalisation at home—could support more consistent integration and visibility for students.

According to institutional staff, students are concerned with self-regulation, recognition of learning outcomes and engagement in the context of SBM, which require the further development of internal quality approaches.

According to the surveyed institutional staff, the main challenges linked to student participation in SBM are related to the specific nature and status of the online component. On the one hand, students have different levels of digital readiness, including digital skills and styles underpinning their capacity to self-regulate and maintain their attention span. On the other hand, these concerns are related to the design of the online component boosting learner engagement (which requires sufficient digital capacity of staff) and the lack of formal recognition for the learning outcomes achieved in the online setting[10].

To wrap up, these key insights, highlight the need for a more robust understanding of internal quality assurance considerations, particularly regarding the online component(s) and a more strategic approach to the design and the three-stage implementation of SBM, including robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure desired learning outcomes. The findings also showcase the importance of external support and funding for building the capacity of administrative and academic staff to design and deliver different kinds of SBM activities. Finally, they emphasise the need for improved recognition of students' efforts in acquiring knowledge and skills across different learning environments.

The following chapters explore these aspects in greater detail. Chapter 3 focuses on internal quality assurance, contextualising the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area - Part 1 for SBM, and Chapter 4 introduces the HIBLend framework offering a comprehensive overview of strategic considerations related to SBM, as well as a practical checklist of action-oriented points that can be taken at different stages of SBM prior to, during and after its implementation.

[9] Psychogyiou, A., & Kupriyanova, V. (2024). *Approaches to blended student mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 36) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383253

[10] Idem

3. Internal Quality Assurance for SBM

Quality assurance is essential for the provision of effective and sustainable SBM. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) highlight the standards that "apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery" (ESG, p.7). The ESG "equally apply to online and blended learning" (EQAR, "Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies", 2024, p.3). The first principle of the ESG is that "higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance" (ESG, p.8). Internal quality assurance is therefore crucial for all higher education provision, including SBM.

Part 1 of the ESG contains the standards and guidelines for internal QA, comprising 10 standards, with each standard underpinned by guidelines that explain why the standard is important and how it might be implemented, depending on the context. External QA (ESG Part 2) builds on the foundations of internal QA; external QA, in turn, provides the foundation for the standards and guidelines for QA agencies (ESG Part 3).

Although the different parts of the ESG are interlinked, the ESG framework depends, in the first place, on the implementation of the standards of ESG Part 1 by the higher education institutions. The wording of these standards and guidelines often reflects the context of degree programmes, which are still the main part of higher education provision in Europe. However, "the term programme refers to higher education provision in its broadest sense, including provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree" (EQAR, 2024, p. 30). The standards are also relevant for SBM (whether these are organised as part of a degree programme or not) and should "be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned, in all types of higher education provision" (ESG, p. 9).

It is, therefore, imminent to contextualise the ESG Part 1 to SBM. This contextualisation started with the quality themes developed in Deliverable 3.1[11]. These quality themes highlighted the standards that were perceived by QA agencies and other stakeholders as particularly relevant for an effective implementation of SBM. In the following pages these quality themes are expanded to comprise all standards of the ESG Part 1.

[11] Psychogyiou, A., Frederiks, M., Provijn, D., Dermati, S., Heikkilä, E., Vilppola, J., Annala, H., & Osouchová, V. (2025). *Quality perceptions and quality assurance approaches to student blended mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 31) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14811827

3.1 ESG Part 1 standards applied to SBM

3.1.1 ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

A structured quality assurance policy is fundamental to ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of SBM within higher education institutions. Such a policy should encompass both the online and physical components of SBM, ensuring coherence and alignment with institutional standards for education quality. The policy may either be integrated into an institution's broader QA framework or developed as a distinct policy addressing the specific dynamics of blended learning. The implementation, monitoring and revision of the policy is the institution's responsibility. However, the QA policy for SBM is most effective when it supports that institutional leadership, organisational units, individual staff members, students and relevant external stakeholders (involved in e.g. internships, service learning) take on their responsibilities in QA. If the institution is participating in a university alliance, then the policy may also address the value of the alliance for SBM, e.g. regarding resource sharing, frameworks for student selection, and credit recognition.

3.1.2 ESG 1.2 Design and approval of SBM

The design and approval of SBM requires careful integration of online and physical learning elements to ensure a cohesive academic experience. Effective design ensures that students can transition smoothly between digital and physical components, enhancing both their academic and intercultural learning experiences. SBM design should align with institutional guidelines, facilitating curriculum integration, academic calendar coordination, and mutual recognition of credits across partner universities. The objectives of SBM should be aligned with the internationalisation policy of the programme/institution and with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Dedicated administrative teams can be instrumental in managing the complexities of SBM, reducing administrative burdens, and enhancing coordination between departments. Equitable internal resource allocation among the design of components is also essential to support the sustainability and continuity of SBM, ensuring alignment with institutional strategic goals.

3.1.3 ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

SBM should be structured in a way that actively involves students in shaping their learning process. To maximize the impact of SBM, the design of learning activities should reflect a balance between structured academic content and opportunities for intercultural exchange. Creating a sense of continuity between the virtual and physical components contributes to a more immersive and interactive learning journey. The assessment methods used should also reflect this participatory approach. The role of feedback mechanisms is crucial in capturing student experiences at different points of SBM and fostering continuous improvements in the learning design, based on empirical evidence of student learning experiences. Assessment practices should align with the broader educational objectives of SBM, incorporating perspectives on digital, international, and intercultural competencies.

3.1.4 ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should have fit-for-purpose SBM admission, recognition and completion procedures, aligned with the broader framework of student mobility across higher education systems. These processes should be transparent for students and implemented in a consistent manner, as they are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while also promoting SBM. Additionally, continuous evaluation of student engagement and progression can enhance the overall impact of SBM within higher education.

3.1.5 ESG 1.5 Teaching staff

The role of teaching staff in SBM is fundamental to ensuring a high-quality learning experience. The effectiveness of SBM depends on the pedagogical and technical competencies of educators, particularly in managing diverse student groups within digital and intercultural learning environments. The digital nature of blended mobility requires continuous professional development, as well as institutional strategies that support faculty in adapting to new teaching modalities. Professional growth in this context should be facilitated through both formal training and participation in peer-learning communities. Institutional support mechanisms can contribute to the sustainability of SBM by fostering collaboration among educators, recognising their contributions, and ensuring that necessary resources are available. By investing in professional development and fostering the long-term establishment of SBM teams, institutions can enhance the quality and scalability of blended learning initiatives.

3.1.6 ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support

The effectiveness of SBM is closely tied to the availability of adequate learning approaches and student support mechanisms. The integration of digital and physical learning environments should be designed to facilitate seamless engagement, fostering intercultural exchange and academic collaboration. Comprehensive guidance before and during mobility enhances students' ability to navigate the blended experience effectively. Ensuring that all participants have access to the necessary academic and technological resources contributes to the inclusivity and sustainability of SBM. Addressing disparities in resource allocation between online and physical components further strengthens the overall learning experience, supporting a more integrated and holistic approach to SBM.

3.1.7 ESG 1.7 Information management

Effective information management plays a key role in ensuring the continuous improvement of SBM. A structured approach to collecting and analysing data allows institutions to monitor participation trends, assess student and staff experiences, and refine the overall quality of SBM activities. Feedback mechanisms are essential in capturing perspectives from multiple stakeholders, contributing to more informed decision-making. Ensuring clear communication and transparency about evaluation processes fosters greater alignment between institutional strategies and student experiences. By adopting these strategies, institutions can create a feedback loop that strengthens the quality and coherence of SBM programmes over time.

3.1.8 ESG 1.8 Public information

Transparent and accessible information should be a fundamental component of SBM. Clear communication about programme structures, learning objectives and environment, participation requirements, required (technical) skills/equipment and assessment procedures ensures that both current and prospective students can make informed decisions. The availability of up-to-date information also enhances the credibility of SBM initiatives.

3.1.9 ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of SBM

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their SBM structures, processes and activities to ensure that they meet their objectives and respond to the needs of students and

society. Evaluative processes contribute to identifying areas for refinement, strengthening the integration of online and physical learning components. The reviews should lead to continuous improvement and any actions taken as a result of these reviews should be communicated to all those concerned.

3.1.10 ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions undergoing regular external quality assurance should include SBM activities where relevant. Although it is currently not common to include SBM in external QA, it is in the spirit of the ESG to build external QA on the internal QA for SBM. For instance, in systems of programme accreditation, the institution can describe SBM activities in the self-evaluation reports of programmes that provide SBM. In systems of institutional reviews/accreditation the institution may describe in its self-evaluation report the QA policy for SBM (ESG 1.1). The institution may also highlight SBM information on other ESG standards, if relevant and proportionally to the extent of SBM activities (when an institution has significant SBM activities it makes sense to explicitly cover SBM in the institutional review/accreditation). In this manner, external QA can verify the effectiveness of internal QA for SBM, act as a catalyst for improvement and assure the public of the quality of SBM.

The ESG Part 1 standards applied to SBM lay the foundation for the HIBLend framework by informing its strategic, design, implementation, and internal evaluation dimensions, which are analysed in Chapter 4.

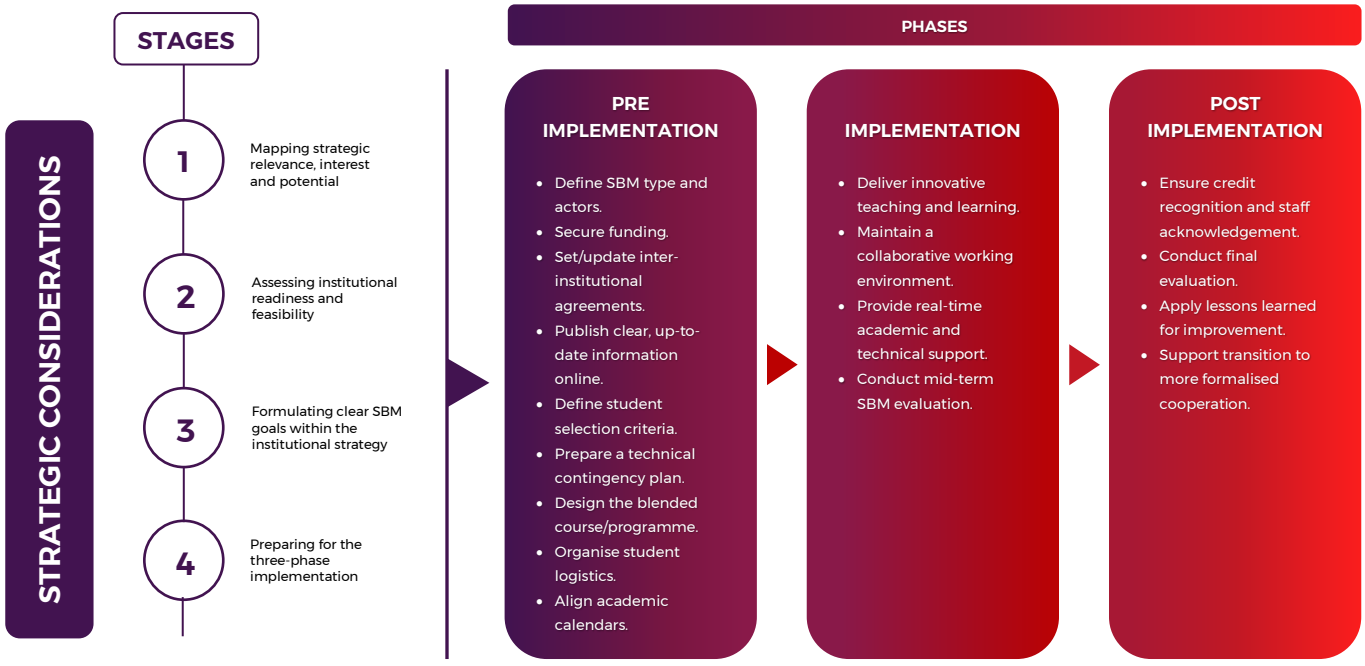
4. The HIBLend framework - Strategy, Design, Implementation and Internal Evaluation of SBM

The institutional engagement with SBM depends on (1) broader institutional strategies or strategic approaches supporting this type of mobility (typically alongside other types of internationalisation activities) and (2) more specific implementation processes covering the design, implementation and evaluation of different SBM types.

While in most institutions observed to date, different SBM types seem to have developed organically – most often in a bottom-up manner, preceding the development of any related strategic approaches at the institutional level – the diversification, further mainstreaming, and consolidation of SBM types would ideally lead to the emergence of a strategic dimension (*a posteriori*), fostering a comprehensive institutional approach.

Consequently, this chapter introduces the HIBLend Framework (see Figure 1 – available also as an **interactive tool** on the HIBLend website), composed of four stages of strategic considerations at an institutional level related to SBM as an overarching concept and a set of action-oriented points, to be considered at three key phases of SBM activities, i.e. the pre-implementation, implementation, and post-implementation phases.

Figure 1. The HIBLend Framework based on ESG 2015



Both sections build on predecessor guiding documents developed for some types of SBM, such as BIPs[12]. To ensure clarity in terms of alignment with the quality standards applied to SBM, presented in the previous chapter, each checklist item is tagged with its corresponding ESG(s).

Given its foundational nature, Phase 1 functions as an enabler for the feasibility and operational planning conducted in Phase 2. Institutions may also benefit from structured internal policy dialogues to ensure that SBM related objectives are understood and endorsed by senior leadership and key units.

4.1 Strategic considerations and policy development stages

Higher education institutions seeking to upscale or mainstream one or several SBM types across the institution or to develop new formats, while simultaneously enhancing the quality of existing SBM formats, would benefit from a comprehensive strategic reflection and feasibility assessment, before proceeding with the design of an implementation roadmap.

These reflections are particularly relevant for the **institutional leadership**, regardless of the specific governance model or job titles used across higher education systems. Depending on country traditions and institutional structures, responsibility for strategic decision-making may be held by senior academic or administrative leaders—such as executive heads, vice-leaders, directors, or heads of central units—who oversee internationalisation, education quality, programme development, or mobility services.

Within the **HIBLend Framework**, the **strategic reflections** are grouped into **four main stages**, as follows:

Stage 1: **Mapping strategic relevance, interest and potential**

During this stage, the institutional leadership would clarify why the institution should support SBM more strategically. Concretely, this would entail, as a minimum:

ESGs 1.1, 1.6

Checking for alignment with the institution's broader institutional strategy, as well as with its internationalisation, digital transformation, inclusion and environmental sustainability objectives and policies. If this alignment is missing, it is recommened to

[12] Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation & The Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education (Nuffic). (2024). *Erasmus+ blended intensive programmes: Basic toolkit.* https://erasmusplus.oead.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/erasmusplus.at/Hochschulbildung/Mobilitaet_Programmlaender/Mein_laufendes_Projekt/2024/OeAD_BiP_E_Toolkit.pdf

identify where related SBM goals can be integrated into existing policies to maintain strategic coherence.

Integrate SBM into the broader internationalisation strategy, ensuring it complements existing mobility formats. Position blended mobility as an embedded element of study programmes to enhance inclusion and reduce participation barriers that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups. Where relevant, highlight that SBM may reduce the need for long-distance travel, while also acknowledging and managing the environmental footprint of digital infrastructures (e.g. energy use, data-processing requirements, e-waste) to ensure a balanced and evidence-based approach to sustainability. Ensure coherence with the strategic directions of the institution's key partnerships (e.g. alliances).

📌 In Practice: CIVIS Alliance

The CIVIS European University Alliance is among the leading organisers of Blended Intensive Programmes, having delivered over **200 BIPs** in just three years. Each BIP is co-developed and taught by academics from **at least three partner universities**, combining online learning with a **five-day physical mobility** at one host institution. Despite most partners being Erasmus+ programme countries, CIVIS also actively includes universities (as full or associate members) from other countries, including in Africa.

Key success factors

- A **common alliance-wide model** with a dedicated support structure (CIVIS Units, HUBs, Officers)
- Predictability and standardisation through shared formats
- Strong interdisciplinary anchoring in societal challenges
- Accessible structure enabling participation from diverse students
- Commitment to **green mobility** (train or bus travel when feasible, eco-friendly route guidance, financial support)

Takeaways for replicability and sustainability

CIVIS placed BIPs at the centre of its educational vision, helping them evolve into a **platform for innovation** leading to COILs, micro-credentials, micro-programmes, and joint degree development. Early investment in a structured model enables **scaling, accessibility, and high academic quality**. Additional efforts to broaden participation and reduce carbon impact further strengthen the model's sustainability.

ESG 1.1 Analysing the key strengths of SBM and how it could be used for different strategic goals at the institutional and faculty levels.

ESG 1.3 Analysing how SBM could support the needs of different students in the specific institutional context.

ESG 1.2 Mapping key institutional actors that would need to be involved (see Table 2 below for most typical actors involved in SBM).

Table 2. Key SBM actors by role and phase (list non exhaustive) [13]

Key SBM Actors	Pre-Implementation roles	During Implementation roles	Post-Implementation roles
International Relations Coordinators/ Officers	Strategic planning, funding, partnerships, agreements; coordination and student outreach; aligning SBM with Erasmus+ priorities; Identifying long-term funding strategies	Student support; administrative processes for student mobility; ensuring compliance with funding rules during mobility; financial management	Programme evaluation, long-term planning; Improving administrative processes based on feedback; evaluating compliance with funders' rules; sustainability strategies for future SBM
Teachers/ Professors	Course design, curriculum integration, pedagogy	Teaching, student mentoring, assessment	Feedback collection, curriculum improvement
Study Programme Coordinators	SBM alignment with curriculum objectives	Ensuring compliance with programme objectives	Reviewing programme impact & lessons learned
Instructional Designers	Developing digital learning methodologies	Advising on digital pedagogy strategies	Refining digital pedagogy for future iterations

[13] Psychogyiou, A., & Kupriyanova, V. (2024). *Approaches to blended student mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. (pp. 18) https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13383253

IT Officers	Technical infrastructure setup	Providing IT support and troubleshooting	Assessing technical infrastructure effectiveness
Quality Assurance Officers	Ensuring / supporting compliance with QA frameworks	Supporting monitoring programme quality and evaluation	Conducting / supporting quality assessments and audits, disseminating QA results, supporting the closing of the feedback loop, follow-up on international QA framework development that can be used as methodological tool to support the further qualitative development of SBM.

📌 In Practice: University of Antwerp

University of Antwerp: Alternative Internationalisation & Quality Assurance
University of Antwerp: The "ideal team"

ESG 1.1, 1.9

Considering what the internal quality assurance approach/policy needs, in order for it to be specifically applied to SBM (including relevant assessment standards, minimum hours for online component, academic oversight, student support, and digital standards).

📌 In Practice: Algebra Bernays University

Algebra Bernays University in Croatia has extensive experience in designing and delivering short-term educational programmes, such as international summer and winter schools, including micro-credentials.

The university implements robust quality assurance in the assessment and recognition of Blended Intensive Programmes, guided by Quality Policy, **which focuses on continuous improvement, transparency, and stakeholder engagement**. Quality assurance ensures that learning outcomes are consistently met and that achievements are internationally recognised. The approach features systematic monitoring and evaluation aligned with European Higher Education Area standards, clear assessment criteria, timely feedback, and active collaboration among faculty, staff, and students. **External expert reviews and regular audits** ensure rigorous standards are maintained.

Stage 2: Assessing institutional readiness and feasibility

During this stage, the institutional leadership would strive to assess both the available capacity (IT infrastructure, staff and students, financial), as well as the institutional readiness to support or participate in new/upscaled SBM activities. Concretely, this would entail, as a minimum:

Technical infrastructure and readiness

ESG 1.6 Mapping existing LMS platforms (e.g., Moodle, Blackboard), video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), and digital collaboration platforms (e.g., Miro, Padlet).

ESG 1.6 Evaluating their compatibility with SBM and identify any missing functionalities or additional tools needed to support online components. Opt for collaborative learning tools that match the capacity of the digital infrastructure and comply with the university IT and data protection policies.

In a context of low capacity digital infrastructure, low-bandwidth tools, recorded materials, and free open-source platforms can serve as alternatives, supporting institutional virtual learning environments.

ESG 1.6 Ensuring that the digital infrastructure supports accessibility, including real-time captioning, adaptive technologies, and mobile compatibility, where applicable.

📌 In Practice: THM – Study Centre for Blind and Disabled Students (BliZ)

The Study Centre for Blind and Disabled Students at *Technische Hochschule Mittelhessen* shows how a dedicated inclusion unit can make blended learning/mobility accessible for students with disabilities. Founded in 1998 and funded by the Federal State of Hesse, BliZ supports students throughout their study and mobility life cycle, with a focus on digital accessibility and assistive technologies.

What works well

- **Accessible exam and learning materials:** BliZ adapts more than 500 examinations per year to students' health backgrounds, using specialised formats and assistive technologies. This includes, for example, accessible digital materials and audio-tactile graphics such as 3D campus maps with Braille and audio feedback, helping students navigate both online and on-site learning environments.
- **Support before and during mobility:** For outgoing and incoming students with disabilities or chronic illnesses, BliZ offers counselling, help with enrolment and preparation, and close cooperation with partner universities. This includes accessible literature and exams, support with accommodation and study financing, and peer-to-peer assistance, ensuring that both the virtual and physical components of mobility are accessible.
- **Research-driven assistive technologies:** BliZ is involved in research on digital accessibility and inclusive technologies, including audio tactile graphics for education and an "electronic guide dog" based on artificial neural networks to support independent mobility. These innovations feed back into teaching and support services, improving accessibility in blended and international settings.

Key takeaway: By combining adapted digital materials, specialised assistive technologies and dedicated counselling for incoming and outgoing students, BliZ demonstrates how universities can integrate accessibility into blended mobility in a systematic and sustainable way, rather than treating it as an add-on.

Staff members' capacity and interest

ESG 1.5

Assessing the interest of faculty and administrative staff in SBM, as well as their capacity to support blended delivery of mobilities and teaching.

Institutions with limited staff or administrative capacity are recommended to prioritise lighter SBM formats or phased scaling, supported by clear delineation of roles and simplified workflows.

Students' digital skills and interest

ESG 1.3, 1.7

Conducting student surveys to assess interest in SBM, digital competencies, and potential barriers to participation, such as accessibility issues, lack of prior experience with online learning, or technological constraints.

Financial resources and potential funding streams

ESG 1.1, 1.6

Exploring multiple funding sources to support SBM.

Institutions are advised to seek national and international grants, leverage public-private partnerships and industry collaborations, consider institutional support through institutional mobility or digital transformation funds or explore alternative funding mechanisms, such as sponsorships.

📌 In Practice: Erasmus+ Blended Intensive programmes Basic Toolkit

The Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes Basic Toolkit, developed jointly by **OeAD,** Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, and **Nuffic**, the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education, provides higher education institutions with a **practical, user-friendly collection of templates, checklists, and guidance materials** to support the full lifecycle of **Blended Intensive Programmes**. It covers essential elements such as partnership coordination, digital preparation, student communication, quality assurance, and reporting requirements.

Designed to reduce administrative burden and increase consistency across institutions, the toolkit offers **concrete examples** and **ready-to-use materials** for programme organisers. Its structured approach helps new and experienced teams navigate **Erasmus+ procedures**, align internal workflows, and streamline blended mobility implementation. As a **national-level resource**, the toolkit promotes coherent practices across Austrian universities and strengthens the overall **quality and sustainability of BIPs**.

Stage 3: Formulating clear SBM goals within the institutional strategy

During this stage that builds on the results of the feasibility assessment, the institutional leadership would need to formulate and integrate SBM related goals into existing institutional strategies and adjacent policies. Concretely, this would entail, as a minimum:

ESG 1.1

Defining SBM-related objectives and tangible targets to be included in the institutional strategy or in the internationalisation strategy, ensuring coherence and complementarity with other internationalisation objectives and concrete activities referred to in the strategic documents.

ESG 1.1, 1.9

Defining how the internal Quality Assurance policy (or practices, if a formal policy is lacking) should be adapted to apply to SBM formats envisaged by the institution.

ESG 1.4

Defining how the internal Recognition policy (or practices, if a formal policy is lacking) should be adapted to apply to the SBM formats envisaged by the institution.

ESG 1.5

Reflecting on how to formally recognise the additional work of academic and administrative staff in developing SBM models and take concrete steps to ensure this recognition in practice. This may include reduced teaching loads, career development incentives/credits, financial compensation, workload recognition models, etc.

<u>Stage 4:</u> Preparing for the three-phase implementation, including monitoring and internal evaluation mechanisms

During this stage, the institutional leadership, with the support of a team composed of institutional actors with key roles in SBM development and implementation prepare for the three-phase implementation. Concretely, this would entail, as a minimum:

ESG 1.1, 1,5

Identifying – based on the institutional policy and practice – expert staff who should be involved in the design or delivery of SBM at different stages, establishing a cross-institutional SBM team or task force (see Table 2) for most typical actors involved in SBM).

ESG 1.1, 1.2

Clarifying the status and engagement modalities of each actor in the team at all implementation phases.

ESG 1.5

Offering targeted training, on digital pedagogy, hybrid/collaborative course design, specialised administration etc.

Where possible, institutions can support staff by using or developing practical templates for course design, coordination workflows, assessment rubrics, and communication protocols.

📌 In Practice: Ghent University

Ghent University developed **Education Tips**, a comprehensive website providing pedagogical guidance to lecturers and study programmes. Recent additions focus on **online learning in international contexts**, including **virtual mobility, virtual exchange/COIL, and blended mobility**. The platform contains a detailed BIP guide covering key elements such as formulating relevant learning outcomes, aligning online and physical components, fostering collaboration, effective group formation, digital didactics and inclusive teaching practices. This resource was collaboratively developed by a diverse working group including **international officers, educational developers, diversity experts, assessment specialists, and digital learning experts**.

Ghent University is currently developing a **training series on online teaching and assessment**, accompanied by a **parallel toolkit** within its **ENLIGHT University Alliance**. In terms of policy, all centrally funded student mobility—including participation in BIPs—must be **integrated into students' curricula**, replacing existing course units and counting toward their degrees. Ghent University has been a **frontrunner in ensuring full academic recognition** of learning outcomes achieved abroad.

ESG 1.5, 1.6 Encouraging participation of staff in informal learning communities allowing for peer learning, bottom-up exchange of experiences, good practices, and innovative approaches in SBM (e.g., the Blended Mobility Practitioners Community of Practice, the European Digital Education Hub).

ESG 1.1 Designing jointly an implementation roadmap, laying the foundation for the three-phase implementation, aligned with resource allocation strategy.

📌 In Practice: FH Salzburg

FH Salzburg developed a **BIP Handbook** to support academic staff and students who are interested in organising or participating in a **Blended Intensive Programme**, available to all FHS staff and student in the intranet. Because many users are not familiar with **Erasmus+ requirements**, the handbook provides a clear and accessible roadmap that outlines the essential steps in a structured and easy-to- follow way. It clarifies what is needed at each stage, helping both organisers and participants understand processes, expectations, and timelines.

To complement the handbook, FH Salzburg offers **one-on-one sessions** for staff members planning to organise a BIP within their study programme. This personalised support helps staff navigate the procedural aspects and ensures they feel confident when engaging with the format. This combination of a **practical handbook** and **tailored staff guidance** facilitates smoother implementation, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens institutional capacity to deliver high-quality BIPs.

ESG 1.1, 1.9 Designing an internal monitoring and evaluation framework, that will enable both real-time and post implementation feedback collection and structured impact assessment, leading to the enhancement of quality, scalability, and sustainability of SBM.

4.2 Phased implementation approach

This phased implementation approach, envisaged during the policy development process together with the institutional leadership and further enhanced by the cross-institutional SBM teams, is to serve as a **practical guide** – a **checklist** of actions for the **relevant actors within the HEIs** (such as international relations coordinators/officers, academic staff, instructional designers, IT officers, and quality assurance teams).

It is intended for those interested in creating new or enhancing existing SBM formats, successfully implementing them, and sustaining different types of SBM.

4.2.1 Pre-Implementation Phase

The pre-implementation phase involves a series of activities supporting the design of the SBM activity and its administrative framework. Some of these activities can be done in succession but there can be variations in planning among institutions. Concretely, this would include, at a minimum:

ESG 1.2, 1.4 Identifying the SBM type to organise along with the involved actors, as this will influence funding options, student eligibility, and academic integration (see Table 1 for more guidance).

ESG 1.2, 1.6 Securing funding for the delivery, including Erasmus+ funding, national funding schemes, university funds, student participation fees, industry sponsorships, etc.

ESG 1.4 Updating existing or secure new inter-institutional agreements for credit transfer and administrative coordination, adapted to SBM.

The agreements should define clear equivalencies between virtual participation and face-to-face engagement (e.g., participation in online component counting toward course engagement scores).

ESG 1.8 Publishing online clear, accurate and up-to-date information about the SBM activity.

ESG 1.4, 1.6 Establishing clear student selection criteria for participation in SBM.

Student selection in SBM should rely on fair, transparent and inclusive approaches. Selection should be merit-based, considering motivation, academic performance and other relevant factors. However, given the inclusive nature of SBM, selection should also involve students with disabilities and financial constraints, balancing academic requirements and accessibility.

ESG 1.6, 1.8

Managing logistical arrangements for students.

This step entails facilitating learning agreements, institutional registration, accommodation, and travel (with sustainable options where possible). Additionally, institutions should provide clear pre-programme guidance to students, in terms of academic requirements, course schedules, grading, and credit recognition and ensure that digital infrastructure is in place, granting access to key tools and platforms (e.g. Moodle, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom) to support virtual learning components. Inclusive practices should be embedded throughout these processes to accommodate students with disabilities, financial constraints, or other mobility barriers, ensuring equitable participation for all.

ESG 1.2, 1.6

Devising a technical contingency plan for online learning disruptions in case of platform failures.

ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.5

Designing the blended course/programme.

The objectives of SBM should be aligned with the programme's or institution's internationalisation policy and with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Sufficient attention must be given to the academic purpose, content and quality of each SBM component. To achieve this, the online element should be structurally embedded within the course design rather than treated as an add-on, ensuring both virtual and physical components are interactive, pedagogically sound and connected through a seamless instructional strategy.

Clear and measurable learning outcomes for both the online and physical components, aligned with the assessment methods to be used, are essential to ensure continuity and transparency in learning expectations. Setting explicit benchmarks for these outcomes supports coherent course design and reinforces the assessment of collaborative tasks across modalities. When shaping the course structure, proportional and transparent ECTS allocation should be defined early on, prioritising substantial virtual learning that is fully recognised. The adoption of shared rubrics and alignment models, with a focus on online components and consistent ECTS allocation can help clarify assessment standards and ensure transparent recognition processes.

A structured scaffolding pathway should guide students in progressively building competencies throughout the blended experience, with each component reinforcing the other. Strategies should also be developed to prevent dropouts and encourage student participation in required surveys, reflections and feedback cycles, ensuring sustained engagement and reliable evaluation data.

Co-developing the blended course with academic staff and instructional designers from partner institutions can strengthen interdisciplinary exchange, align learning methodologies and support pedagogical innovation, ultimately contributing to richer and more coherent learning experiences.

📌 In Practice: University of León

Strengthening the Online Collaborative Component of BIPs
Structuring the online collaborative element of a BIP in a way that is as interactive and pedagogically enriching as the physical phase. Many teachers feel more confident with in-person formats, and the online component risks becoming passive and lecture-driven. Ensuring intercultural learning, active engagement, and collaborative working cultures online is a core challenge.

Main goals of the initiative

- Enhance intercultural and collaborative competencies through a well-designed BIP model.
- Ensure the online phase is active, inclusive, and grounded in project-based learning.
- Provide preparatory training for both students and teachers to support smooth progression across online and physical components.
- Integrate local class activities with the BIP to reinforce learning and address misunderstandings early.

Key success factors

- **Structured preparation and training:** Pre-BIP cultural sessions, clear group roles (chair/secretary), and the use of collaborative digital tools.
- **Intentional group composition:** Small, intercultural teams that promote exchange, accountability, and mutual learning.
- **A coherent 4-week blended model:** 1–2 weeks online → 1 week physical → 1 week online, ensuring continuity and reinforcement of learning outcomes.
- **Teacher engagement:** Information sessions for faculty, including newcomers, help build alignment, awareness, and motivation.

To complement the handbook, FH Salzburg offers **one-on-one sessions** for staff members planning to organise a BIP within their study programme. This personalised support helps staff navigate the procedural aspects and ensures they feel confident when engaging with the format. This combination of a **practical handbook** and **tailored staff guidance** facilitates smoother implementation, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens institutional capacity to deliver high-quality BIPs.

- **Reflective student portfolios:** Including intercultural reflections, these deepen learning and provide meaningful assessment beyond content knowledge.

Key takeaways for replicability and sustainability

- Invest in online facilitation training and intercultural tools to ensure the online component has high impact.
- Clearly define roles, expectations, and workflows for students in virtual collaboration.
- Use case-based preparatory materials to anticipate common challenges and develop intercultural agility.
- Co-design the BIP with a committed core team from partner institutions, while allowing flexibility in annual participation cycles.

ESG 1.2 Aligning academic calendars, to the extent possible, and develop clear scheduling protocols to allow students to participate in both virtual and physical learning phases.

To reduce administrative burden and improve consistency, institutions are advised to consider developing internal checklists, indicative timelines, or templates for agreements and coordination workflows. These tools can be particularly beneficial for staff with limited prior experience in SBM and can help ensure smoother coordination across departments and partners.

📌 In Practice: Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences

Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences developed a **clear, practical visual guide** to support academic and administrative staff in hosting BIPs. The **poster** maps out the institutional workflow from early conceptualisation to implementation and post-programme follow-up. It highlights **five key criteria for successful BIP delivery**—time-management, commitment building, process clarity, intercultural competence, and sustainability—and offers concise guidance to help staff avoid common planning and coordination pitfalls. The resource also includes a **month-by-month BIP timeline**, covering partner coordination, agreement preparation, content development, student nomination processes, virtual phase preparation, on-site delivery, and follow-up tasks. By summarising the full process in an accessible format, the tool supports first-time and experienced organisers alike in navigating **Erasmus+ requirements** and structuring efficient, well-coordinated BIPs.

📌 In Practice: Ulysseus – Blended Intensive Programmes Handbook

The **Ulysseus Blended Intensive Programme Handbook** provides essential guidance for **creating** and **delivering** BIPs under Erasmus+ KA131. It offers clear definitions, **practical advice** for organising blended mobility, and explanations of partnership roles and participant engagement. **Designed for academic staff**, the handbook supports anyone who wishes to develop a new Blended Intensive Programme or contribute to the co-creation of one.

4.2.2 Implementation Phase

The Implementation Phase encompasses key activities, including structured orientation, innovative teaching strategies, student support mechanisms, and continuous evaluation processes to enhance learning outcomes and engagement. Concretely, this would include, at a minimum:

ESG 1.3 Ensuring innovative teaching and learning in the student blended course to strengthen student engagement and motivation.

Institutions need to adopt innovative, versatile and active learning methodologies—such as problem-based learning, case studies and collaborative digital projects—supported by adaptive learning pathways and digital collaboration tools (e.g., Padlet, Miro, Trello, Google Docs). Engagement strategies like gamification, flipped classrooms, and structured discussion forums can sustain participation across the blended environment. Table 3 highlights commonly used practical tools that can facilitate these forms of online learning, collaboration, and student engagement.

Learning approaches should promote inclusivity by integrating interdisciplinary challenges, culturally sensitive exchanges and team-building activities that facilitate equitable participation, including for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Smaller working groups can enhance collaboration, knowledge transfer and a sense of belonging, while intercultural competence can be strengthened through reflection exercises and peer interaction. Institutions also need to consider incorporating structured social or intercultural activities to strengthen emotional bonding and group cohesion during SBM.

To further motivate students, institutions need to identify drivers and barriers such as employability expectations, networking opportunities or perceived workload, and communicate clearly how SBM contributes to ECTS credits and supports the development of transversal skills linked to future employability pathways.

Table 3. Practical Tools for Online Learning, Collaboration, and Student Engagement

Collaboration & Communication		
Tool	**Description**	**Link**
Slack	AI-assisted project management and team communication tool enabling real-time and asynchronous discussions, file sharing, app integrations and more.	slack.com
Trello	Visual task-management platform using boards, lists, and cards, helping to coordinate activities and tasks.	trello.com
Miro	Interactive whiteboard allowing users to brainstorm, plan, and co-create in real time or asynchronously, and offering templates for workshops and project mapping.	miro.com
Padlet	Online tool for creating interactive digital boards where users can post text, images, links, or	padlet.com

	videos, useful for brainstorming and sharing ideas, while supporting asynchronous participation.	
Mural	Digital workspace for visual collaboration, providing a canvas with sticky notes, diagrams, and templates for real time or asynchronous interaction.	mural.com
Learning Platforms		
Tool	**Description**	**Link**
Canvas	Learning management system ideal for hybrid course delivery, allowing educators to create and manage learning materials and assignments, and students to submit work, track progress, and communicate through digital tools.	instructure.com/canvas
LearnWorlds	All-in-one learning platform for blended or flipped classrooms, with tools for video interaction, assessment, and course design. It allows creators to sell their courses, making it more suitable for private training providers.	learnworlds.com
Perusall	Collaborative reading platform allowing students to read digital texts together and leave comments or questions, while educators can assign readings and assess understanding automatically.	perusall.com
Accessibility		
Tool	**Description**	**Link**
Voiceitt	AI-powered speech recognition tool that translates non-standard speech into clear digital text or voice, supporting mobility participants with speech impairments during classes.	voiceitt.com
ReachDeck	Supports reading, writing, and comprehension across web and digital learning environments through screen reading and language support.	texthelp.com/products/reachdeck/
Wheelmap	A crowdsourced accessibility map that helps incoming or travelling students locate wheelchair-	wheelmap.org

	accessible buildings, public spaces, and transport options.	
Audience Engagement		
Tool	**Description**	**Link**
Poll Everywhere	Real-time polling, quizzes, and word clouds for interactive sessions.	polleverywhere.com
Mentimeter	Interactive presentation platform that enables real-time audience participation, through the creation of polls, quizzes, word clouds.	mentimeter.com
Slido	Platform enabling participants to take part in live polls, quizzes, and Q&A sessions, while helping presenters collect feedback and gauge opinions in real time.	slido.com
Doodle	Ideal for group polling and sign-ups to online sessions/meetings.	doodle.com
Kahoot	Gamified platform for individual or team learning through quizzes and presentations. Increases participation and creativity while facilitating the assessment of results.	kahoot.com
Promotion and Visibility		
Tool	**Description**	**Link**
ThingLink	Tool for creating interactive images, videos, or 360° virtual tours, ideal for virtual campus visits or showcasing mobility destinations.	thinglink.com
Genially	Platform for creating visually engaging and interactive presentations, games, infographics, and microsites.	genially.com

📌 In Practice: European Commission – Good Practices in the Virtual Component of BIPs

The European Commission's publication **"**Erasmus+ Higher Education Student and Staff Mobility: Good Practices in the Implementation of the Virtual Component of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs)**"** presents practical **examples and insights** from institutions across Europe on how to **design, deliver, and enhance the virtual elements of BIPs**. The document highlights **innovative approaches to collaborative online learning**, methods for fostering interaction and teamwork, and ways institutions have addressed common challenges in digital and blended mobility formats. By **showcasing concrete cases and successful models**, the publication supports higher education institutions in strengthening the quality, inclusiveness, and pedagogical coherence of the virtual component of BIPs. It offers inspirations for both **academic and administrative staff** involved in planning or improving blended mobility activities.

📌 In Practice: Unite! European University Alliance – U!Train 2024

The **U!Train 2024** initiative, developed within the **Unite! European University Alliance**, offers an example of an **innovative BIP** combining virtual preparation with a **challenge-based, real-world learning journey**. After completing the online phase, **30 students travelled by train across all eight Unite! cities** before reaching Barcelona in small groups and then Grenoble collectively.

The design allowed students to analyse the European railway network directly, observe different infrastructures, and reflect on the practical challenges of **sustainable cross-border mobility**. Through this experiential approach, participants generated insights into **green mobility systems**, collaborated in **multicultural teams**, and proposed solution-oriented ideas grounded in real European transport contexts.

U!Train demonstrates how blended mobility can merge academic learning with **hands-on, challenge-based experiences**, while promoting **sustainability**, **European interconnectedness**, and the development of **transversal skills**.

ESG 1.3, 1.5

Maintaining a vibrant collaborative ecosystem.

This step entails both university / faculty collaboration, ensuring that teaching teams can co-deliver, co-evaluate and supervise SBM courses, as well as student peer learning exchange, allowing them to engage in virtual group work and discussion. Clear communication protocols and regular coordination meetings between partner teams engaged in SBM are necessary to address differences in academic calendars, workflows, and platform use. Where possible, institutions need to establish centralised communication channels for students, such as unified information hubs or single contact points, to ensure clarity and reduce fragmentation. Institutions are recommended to explore resource-pooling mechanisms across faculties or partner universities to streamline support services, optimise staffing, and reduce duplication of effort.

ESG 1.6 Providing real time academic and technical student support.

This step entails, among others, assigning faculty members to guide students on SBM coursework, learning expectations, and workload management, connecting experienced participants to the new ones, providing technical helpdesks for troubleshooting and accessibility support and enabling escalation procedures for problem resolution overall.

ESG 1.7, 1.9 Conducting mid – SBM evaluation.

This step entails gathering regular student and staff feedback through satisfaction surveys, live polls, LMS-based feedback tools, weekly or bi-weekly student reflection logs and cross-institutional reflection meetings, among others, to assess and refine the student experience with SBM.

4.2.3 Post-Implementation Phase

The Post-Implementation Phase focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of SBM, supporting the integration of lessons learned into future iterations, and ensuring long-term sustainability beyond Erasmus+ funding cycles. Concretely, this would include, at a minimum:

ESG 1.4 Ensuring that recognition of credits gained through SBM is fully carried out for students, and that staff participation is formally acknowledged.

This includes ensuring that, in specific cases such as BIPs, local students also receive full and transparent recognition for their work. Partner institutions have to ensure credit recognition, also in cooperation with national recognition authorities, if beneficial for students. Clear and timely recognition is essential to avoid delays in students' academic progression and to ensure that SBM participation contributes meaningfully to their study pathway. Institutions should provide students with official documentation (e.g., in the diploma supplement) outlining SBM activities and achieved learning outcomes, particularly if needed for further studies or employment. Similarly, staff contributions to SBM, whether through teaching, mentoring, coordination, or course design, should be formally acknowledged within institutional frameworks. This may include workload recognition, integration into evaluation or promotion procedures, or inclusion in professional development records. Ensuring transparent staff recognition supports motivation, sustainability, and long-term engagement in SBM activities.

📌 In Practice: CIVIS Alliance

Participation in a CIVIS BIP is recorded in the student's **CIVIS Passport**, issued in the form of a **digital certificate through Open Badge**, an innovative tool that documents all CIVIS activities, credited and non-credited, received upon graduation. The **CIVIS Passport** is issued at central level by the **CIVIS Coordination Office**, through the **Digital Campus Unit**, and is seen as a complementary tool for students to showcase their **CIVIS experiences**.

ESG 1.7, 1.9 Conducting post – SBM evaluation.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, focus groups and interviews, help capture student and faculty experiences, technical challenges, virtual component contribution to learning outcomes, and institutional goals. Structured debriefing sessions involving students, academic staff, administrative staff, and partner institutions can support shared reflection, alignment on key findings, and coordinated improvement actions. These sessions help consolidate lessons learned and ensure consistent follow-up across all actors. Using key performance indicators (KPIs) such as completion rates, credit recognition, engagement levels, and digital learning effectiveness can help measure success. Inclusivity metrics should also be introduced to assess how accessible SBM has been, particularly for students with fewer opportunities or diverse backgrounds. Institutions should evaluate SBM's contribution to academic progression, employability skills, and internationalisation impact. Additionally, ensure that internal QA audits explicitly evaluate the physical and virtual components of SBM in a standardized way for both students and academics.

ESG 1.9, 1.10 Informing future iterations and ensure continuous improvement.

Evaluation findings directly inform the refinement of future iterations of SBM, impacting their design, delivery, and administration. Institutions can also exchange good practices with peers—for example within university alliances—to identify areas for improvement, such as streamlining administrative workflows, enhancing virtual engagement strategies, and optimising student support mechanisms.

ESG 1.1 Facilitating the transition from *ad hoc* SBM activities to mainstream cooperation (where applicable).

Where SBM is still implemented in an ad hoc or optional manner, institutions can work towards more structured and sustainable cooperation formats. This includes embedding SBM more clearly into programme design, aligning it with learning outcomes and existing internationalisation activities, and reducing uncertainty regarding recognition and long-term planning. As part of this transition, institutions can create an internal catalogue of existing blended activities and identify recurring partner institutions whose curricula and pedagogical

approaches are compatible. These partnerships can be prioritised for more structured and systematic development of SBM activities.

5. From practice to policy - Strategic recommendations

The successful implementation and sustainability of SBM at the institutional level is not solely dependent on the efforts of individual higher education institutions. A supportive policy environment at multiple levels is crucial. Key policy and implementation actors at national and European level play a vital role in shaping measures that enable institutions to develop and sustain high-quality SBM initiatives. This section outlines strategic recommendations for EU policy makers, National Agencies for Erasmus+, and Quality Assurance Agencies in higher education.

5.1 EU policy makers

To strengthen SBM, EU policy makers should consider:

→ **Offering adequate financial support**, recognising and addressing high costs associated with digital infrastructure, staff training, and blended course development as well as the overall need to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

→ **Considerably simplifying administrative requirements for BIPs in the future Erasmus+ programme** to ensure possibilities to upscale them for a wider group of learners.

→ **Enhancing SBM monitoring mechanisms across the Erasmus+ programme**, particularly for the online component, to improve consistency and enhance qualitative assessments of SBM, allowing for more effective evaluation of impact and outcomes.

→ **Clarifying and updating the ECTS Users' Guide**, which remains primarily oriented toward physical mobility, to ensure that learning outcomes achieved through blended mobility formats are fully and consistently recognised across institutions.

→ **Fostering good practice sharing and collaboration** by strengthening networks like the European Digital Education Hub and similar peer exchange platforms.

→ **Supporting knowledge-sharing initiatives** that connect higher education institutions to facilitate the development and scaling of SBM.

→ **Commissioning research on SBM impact**, student engagement, and institutional best practices, to provide data-driven policy enhancements and optimise support structures for blended mobility.

5.2 National Agencies

To strengthen SBM, NAs should consider:

→ **Strengthening SBM monitoring mechanisms** by integrating SBM-specific indicators assessing implementation, outcomes, and overall quality into project evaluations (e.g. institutional monitoring visits or audits) at higher education institutions.

→ **Enhancing the qualitative assessment of SBM activities** by complementing the measurement of participation with metrics capturing student experiences and learning outcomes, as well as institutional best practices, through surveys, interviews, or other qualitative methods performed in collaboration with institutions.

→ **Offering targeted training sessions, workshops, and advisory services**, particularly for smaller or specialised institutions, on the specific issues of SBM design, implementation, and internal evaluation.

→ **Facilitating institutional collaboration** by fostering peer exchange between HEIs to share knowledge and strategies for effectively embedding SBM into their structures.

→ **Developing or curating model tools and templates** (e.g., strategic alignment checklists, institutional readiness assessment templates, blended course design templates, implementation workflow guides, recognition mapping tools, and monitoring/evaluation templates) that institutions may adapt and use to document, implement, and report student blended mobility activities more consistently.

5.4 QA agencies

To strengthen SBM, QA agencies should consider:

→ **Applying an enhancement-led QA approach**, guiding HEIs to develop autonomous and robust internal quality assurance mechanisms for SBM, focusing on long-term sustainability and continuous improvement.

→ **Adapting external QA frameworks** to recognise the specific demands of digital and hybrid mobility formats. QA agencies assessing student mobility should update their standards to include blended formats, ensuring that digital components are rigorously evaluated. This may include developing SBM-specific quality indicators to assess the effectiveness of both online and physical mobility components, ensuring balanced student engagement and learning outcomes.

→ **Introducing a voluntary quality label for SBM** for recognising and incentivising quality SBM practices, complemented by enhancement workshops and peer learning opportunities[14].

→ **Encouraging dialogue between relevant stakeholders** to harmonise expectations and avoid conflicting interpretations of quality in hybrid formats.

[14] The Estonian quality label for e-courses represents a national mechanism for recognising high-quality digital learning design and could serve as a model for incentivising quality SBM practices more broadly. See: Psychogyiou, A., Frederiks, M., Provijn, D., Dermati, S., Heikkilä, E., Vilppola, J., Annala, H., & Osouchová, V. (2025). *Quality perceptions and quality assurance approaches to student blended mobility.* Academic Cooperation Association. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14811827

6. Conclusion

While Student Blended Mobility has gained traction as a flexible and inclusive internationalisation model, several systemic challenges persist—ranging from uneven institutional readiness and fragmented digital infrastructures to inconsistent recognition practices, variable pedagogical quality, and limited staff capacity for designing engaging online components. Challenges also arise from the supplementary positioning of the online phase, funding imbalances between virtual and physical components, and the absence of standardised internal QA mechanisms across institutions. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and structured approach, beginning with strategic planning and feasibility assessments, followed by the development of clear implementation roadmaps and the establishment of robust internal quality assurance mechanisms that ensure coherence, transparency, and sustainability across all phases of SBM.

The HIBLend framework provides a timely and adaptable solution for fostering innovation in SBM. By integrating institutional, pedagogical, and quality assurance considerations, it serves as a strategic and practical tool to help universities implement and enhance SBM initiatives, ensuring compliance with European quality standards.

The framework highlights the importance of ensuring that SBM initiatives are well-designed, properly resourced, and effectively evaluated, with transparent selection criteria, structured learning pathways, and established recognition mechanisms. They should rely on investment in digital infrastructure, professional development for staff, and innovative pedagogical approaches, collaboration between key stakeholders within and across institutions, and systematic monitoring and evaluation embedded within SBM practices, incorporating student feedback, performance indicators, and cyclical reviews to drive continuous improvement.

In their quest for quality-driven SBM, higher education institutions also require sustainable policy and programme level support at both European and national levels, to support institutional capacity-building and implementation.

Looking ahead, ensuring the long-term success of SBM will require continued commitment from institutions and policymakers alike. Future research could explore SBM's contribution to sustainability and inclusivity goals, its integration within accredited curricula, and emerging models of excellence in SBM.

7. Annexes

Annex 1. The HIBLend project

The HIBLend project was designed with an overall aim to raise interest in and enhance HEIs' 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 SBM. 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 a 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 activities or the design and delivery of brand-new ones for students.

The second pillar will involve the internal testing of the framework by TAMK and MU based on their ongoing cooperation in physical and online mobility, and the external validation by interested HEIs 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.

December 2025, Brussels