

Organising successful student mobility

A guide for mobility officers



COLOFON

Series: Organising successful student mobility
- A guide for mobility officers -

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FOREWORD

In 2008, the King Baudouin Foundation commissioned a survey among students at Western Balkan Universities to find out more about their motivation to study abroad and the challenges they are facing in this regard. The survey showed three worrying facts:

1. Studying abroad for a limited period of time was not part of students' reality in the Western Balkans. Only very few students in the Western Balkans studied abroad and came back to their home university.
2. Many students considered to study abroad but faced heavy problems which prevented them to do so. The survey showed that many students saw as main challenges the heavy administrative burden, the long and frustrating procedures, the lack of money and the lack of easily available information.
3. In some countries of the Western Balkans a high number of students didn't even consider to study abroad.

Six years later, the situation has changed dramatically – to the better. The interest among students to study abroad has been multiplied. Ten thousands of students visited scholarship fairs, information sessions and workshops. Application

numbers for scholarships are higher than ever. More and more foreign students are interested in studying in the Western Balkans and are warmly welcomed by universities. Student mobility as corner stone of the internationalisation at Western Balkan universities became part of the regular practice.

The Foundation is proud of having contributed to this development by having supported 12 universities in the region to foster their student mobility activities. The foundation invested more than 650.000 EUR over a period of 5 years. While we are ending our support by the end of 2014, we are convinced that the impact is long lasting as the activities started in 2009 are now standard practice.

This publication is aimed at sharing the built-up knowledge and experiences by the participating universities with other universities in the Western Balkans and beyond. We would like to thank the authors of this guide for their past, ongoing and future commitment and enthusiasm. The success of this programme is their success. This guide is their legacy.

King Baudouin Foundation
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introduction

This publication provides guidelines for strengthening student mobility through better and increased promotion and support activities fostering the internationalisation of universities. It explains the growing importance of academic mobility and discusses many benefits for higher education institutions as a whole as well as for the individual.

Promoting and developing student mobility at Western Balkans (WB) Universities was boosted in 2009 when the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) started to support several International Relations Offices

(IRO) at universities in the region. The foundation enabled the IROs to assign one specially trained officer at each participating university to implement mobility promotion activities directed towards students and graduates.

Various schemes were tried to promote mobility and scholarship opportunities, and some were more successful than others. The following guide is written by the group of mobility officers which were funded by KBF and synthesises the experiences and best practices developed since 2009.

Why mobility?

Studying and living abroad is one of the key elements in reducing regional (self) isolation and to combat the increasing radicalisation of youth. Student mobility and especially studying abroad are particularly important for student personal development with positive effects also for regions themselves.

Student mobility is a unique opportunity for every candidate to gain invaluable new experience, to learn foreign languages and to develop interpersonal skills in a new and culturally diverse environment.

One of the most valuable results is the increased number of young professionals who can make a positive impact on their local environment, thanks to their exposure to wider experiences through studying elsewhere.



Successes of student mobility promotion

The experiences since 2009 have shown that student mobility can be substantially increased by adequate promotion and supporting activities. On the following table you can see the numbers of applicants within different iterations of the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 project BASILEUS being one programme among several focusing on students and staff mobility in the Western Balkans.

	Basileus I	Basileus II	Basileus III	Basileus IV	Basileus V
Belgrade	40	291	200	177	188
Novi Sad	39	253	173	200	204
Kragujevac	23	89	30	41	46
Nis*	7	36	9	17	17
Sarajevo	33	165	106	68	142
Montenegro	38	189	108	130	98
SEEU	36	111	68	32	30
Mitrovica	NA	12	1	2	0
	216	1146	695	667	725

Activities directed towards students and graduates and using the right communication channels that reach this target group will be described in the following chapters.

Student mobility is not only about outgoing students but also incoming students. To successfully increase the number of incoming students is more difficult and needs more time to show results but is equally possible. How this can be done will also be outlined in this guide.

Basileus I	523 applications, 4 calls	AY 2009-2010
Basileus II	2352 applications*, 3 calls	AY 2010-2011
Basileus III	1381 applications, 1 call	AY 2011-2012
Basileus IV	1352 applications, 1 call	AY 2013-2014
Basileus V	1465 applications, 1 call	AY 2014-2015

* the first call in Basileus II was also open for Basileus I so in fact a number of Basileus I scholarships were awarded to applicants of this joint call the applicants are however indicated under Basileus II to avoid double counting.

* Nis was full partner until Basileus III, then they became associate partner

The numbers contain all Target Groups, meaning: students registered at that university and students graduated from that university

OUTGOING STUDENTS AND STAFF

How to organise internal structures

The Western Balkans universities are comprehensive independent and self-governing institutions, consisting of the central unit, called a Rectorate, and faculties, public or private. Each university is headed by a rector, who appoints vice-rectors to take charge of departments such as education and student affairs, financial matters, science, and international relations. Each Faculty is headed by a Dean, who is a senior member of academic staff, supported by vice-deans and the various departmental heads.

Compared with American universities, the majority of WB universities are not integrated. The difference is that integrated universities provide stronger formal links between a university and its units, while in a non-integrated university, faculties are groups of legal entities linked with the central units, with a decision-making process dependent on faculties' bodies.

This structure means that the decision-making process can be very slow and complex. This can affect cooperation between the Rectorate and its units, creating internal misunderstandings affecting some basic projects and programmes, such as student mobility. This problem has certainly affected the student mobility process in the Western Balkans, and, through this publication, we wish to spread the word about how to improve mobility by sharing experience of best practice.

Whether integrated or non-integrated, WB universities have much in common, especially with regard to international cooperation and relations. The internationalisation process at Western Balkan universities has involved cooperation with the Bologna system and the launch of mobility-focused Erasmus Mundus (EM) projects between the EU and WB.

Before the EM programme, student mobility was restricted to bilateral agreements between universities and some scholarship schemes, with very limited numbers of awarded grants. The EM programme has opened the door not only to greatly increased mobility for students, but also for academic and administrative staff. Internationalisation is an important element in each and every university, and the work is mostly done by International Relations Offices (hereafter the IRO). The IRO is a central unit at both integrated and non-integrated universities, usually headed by the vice-rector for international relations, and the work of international relations officers is coordinated by the head of the office. The IRO coordinates and manages international cooperation activities and manages student/staff mobility,

and must have good links with all departments, faculties, units, and services to ensure a regular flow of information.

The IRO must also cooperate with counterparts in similar services, especially centres and offices dealing with academic recognition, promotion of scholarships, student support services, student units and associations.

Institutional support, from central level, is provided not only through a legislative framework, but also through the active roles of the IRO and Vice-Rector for International Cooperation, and their cooperation in turn with the Deans and vice-deans, especially in preparing strategies and rules on student mobility.

Having a Rulebook on student mobility and recognition of ECTS adopted at university level greatly helps improving these processes.

Based on the experience of several WB universities, the best practice in organising internal structures to improve your mobility of students and staff, would be to:

1. Have a person, i.e. mobility coordinator at each faculty and/or department to support students and actively communicate with central IRO. This person should be responsible for bilateral agreements at faculty (or department level), exchange students and staffs, checking which universities and programmes are eligible for students of their faculty, i.e. departmental and other relevant responsibilities.



If that person is a member of the academic staff, they should be student oriented. But the best option would be the appointment of a new administrative person to work as a local international relations officer, especially if student mobility numbers are rising significantly. This person should also keep records of exchange students and staff, and credits that have been taken abroad and recognised. Also, he/she should keep in touch with the exchange students while they are abroad, taking charge of receiving the transcript of records after mobility, and help students with the recognition process.

2. Using mobility software. Since it has not been easy to track and keep records of both outgoing and incoming mobility, an initiative has been launched to coordinate information- gathering by appealing to separate faculties within a university to use mobility software for data collection on mobility.
3. International relations officers at universities don't usually have specific responsibilities at WB universities, as most of their activities overlap. The best solution, if possible, would be to split the duties, with different people in charge of different issues, such as Bilateral Cooperation, Student Mobility, and coordinators of specific programmes or schemes.

The University of Novi Sad has developed its own software but you can also use some of the commercial software that are available.

4. Recruiting interns for a short period (three to six months), as tested at many WB universities, has been a great success. They are usually final-year students or graduates keen to start their careers and gain experience in this field, which makes them a great asset.



Thanks to the KBF projects IROs at several WB universities are reinforced with an additional staff member (a student mobility coordinator), who focuses on mobility related issues, gives support and updated information on possibilities for studying abroad, collects information on scholarship opportunities, organises activities to promote study abroad and supports students who are applying for mobility programmes. The result has been significant increases in student mobility.

OUTGOING STUDENTS AND STAFF

How to promote mobility among your students

For years we have used different strategies for mobility promotion, some more successful than others. But generally, we agree that it is important to have different approaches in trying to reach the widest possible audience. Most of our efforts have been carried out under the KBF initiative. The first year

was spent testing as many different promotional methods as possible, to identify the most successful. During the following years many more promotional activities were tried, but the focus was mainly on those which proved the most effective in the first year. From our experience, we would recommend the following activities:

1. Presentations and info days. Presentations are the most comprehensive promotional activities. Students can receive all relevant information and can ask questions and take notes. These can be organised prior to and during the application call, at all faculties within a university. Info days can also be organised at the university and at every faculty and academy. You can also prepare information leaflets about scholarships for exchange or degree programmes and give them to students at the presentation, while having an info-stand in the faculty lobby, or even while visiting students at the beginning of lectures.



2. Promotional activities should be as interactive as possible, and roundtables, discussions, panels and debates should be organised at the university or faculty. We recommend inviting not only students, but also teachers, who often have a very important role during the process, especially in writing recommendation

letters that are key to every application, and in advising and motivating students to apply for a scholarship programme. In addition, the learning agreement (study plan) is a crucial document for students. It has to be signed by the academic coordinator at the faculty or by the head of department.



3. All WB universities invite student ambassadors (former scholarship holders) as guests on info days or presentations, to give students first-hand information and enable them to ask detailed questions, particularly in specialised study areas you might not be familiar with. Students who have studied abroad reported that they had gained good intercultural, personal and social skills (apart from academic achievements), which can be used to motivate more students to take the opportunity of further education abroad. Student ambassadors share their experiences on everything from the application process to their time spent abroad, and their opinions and recommendations are trusted, because they come from the same background and faced the same or similar doubts.



Within the KBF project the WB universities have jointly prepared a Book of Memories which contains the stories of many exchange students.



4. As the academic year gains momentum, it is a great time to organise the autumn **Scholarship Fair** (usually at the end of October). This big event is a chance to present all active mobility programmes, from short exchanges, exchange scholarships and Masters and PhD studies, to student internships abroad, summer schools, and language courses. During this one-day fair, which you can organise in the lobby of your university or at one of the faculties, all relevant organisations and institutions should be represented, so all students and graduates can learn about different types of scholarships for different types of mobility directly from providers-representatives of foundations, foreign and national organisations and foreign universities.

Scholarship fairs, annually organised by the University of Sarajevo and University of Kragujevac, are now well known in the region with several thousands of students visiting them every year.

5. Using the advantages of internet and electronic communication in general is also effective. Many WB universities have improved their websites, or even developed a new internet presentation devoted to student mobility.



The University of Sarajevo (www.erasmus-unsa.ba) has developed separate website which deals with mobility process, application requirements, necessary documents and experiences from former scholars as a way of better mobility programs promotion. It also provides quicker communication through frequently asked questions and questionnaires, where answers are provided within 24 hours.

Some of our universities have created a list of scholarships awarded each year, available on the website to help students prepare in time to apply for relevant scholarships.

If you are a student from the WB you can check Scholarship database www.s4wb.eu (Scholarships for Western Balkans) developed by KBF where you can find a lot of scholarships for all types of mobility available for Western Balkan students and graduates.



- All universities should use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter for communicating with students about mobility, as these are widely used by most of our students and graduates. Faculties and different departments also have FB profiles or groups, so you can easily reach them when you have a programme or scholarship intended for students in a specific study field.

7. If yours is a large university, a newsletter will help you reach all your faculties and students, regardless of location. Newsletters (with all active and open calls for all kinds of scholarships, student mobility programmes, programmes for formal and non-formal education, etc.) can be prepared once or twice per month, and sent directly to all registered students and graduates. You can collect emails from students at each presentation, or you can create a registration form for your website.
8. It is important to attract media attention as a key element in promoting mobility. You can cooperate with local media to raise the chances that radio and television, as well as newspapers and online magazines will publicise open calls for student programmes. You should also invite the media to all events you organise.



University of Kragujevac has developed good cooperation with one of the local TV networks and they have created a TV-Programme "Amphitheater" which deals solely with student topics. Through this programme student mobility is quite often promoted to a wider audience.

9. To approach the mobility promotion in a more systematic way, establish **cooperation with different units of the university**. Besides university faculties and departments, the IRO should collaborate with the Career Service, with Student Parliament and student organisations. They can provide volunteers to help organise big events, and they can provide access to their own facilities and events. The Career Service can help you organise mobility workshops, to introduce your students to the whole idea of mobility, and how to search for a scholarship. You can discuss the application process and required documentation, advise them on recognition of academic exchange results and generally provide support throughout the process. These workshops can cover many important topics, such as: how to write an effective CV, a motivation letter, a personal statement, and essays that are a very important element of every application. Likewise, with colleagues from the Career Service, you can organise a workshop on interview preparation, which is often included in scholarship application processes.



10. Many students prefer individual consultations and some might need more information and assistance, so IROs should definitely arrange days or parts of a working day as “**open doors**” for students interested in mobility options. All students are different: some will approach the application process very independently, while others will rely more on your advice and support. So, you can either organise **group consultations**, when a group of students applies for the same programme (these meetings are a good opportunity for students to get clarification and tips from IRO, to learn from each other and exchange ideas in a relaxed and informal atmosphere) or you can arrange an **individual consultation** at your offices. This is really useful when students have doubts about their application, or even about their motivation for mobility.
11. Most students encounter the same problem - not having one of the internationally- recognised language certificates that are mandatory for most mobility programmes. This requires planning and preparation. It's a good idea to remind your students at the end of the academic year and just before summer break to plan for mobility, especially if they have to brush up their language skills and take exams for official language certificates. You can promote your university to future students, but you can also use this event to emphasise the importance of mobility.

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3. Make sure that all information is regularly updated and communicated to your students (websites, scholarship databases, social networks, newsletters).

2. Prepare a plan for organising info-days and presentations at all of your faculties. You could start this promotional tour with a big event, such as a Scholarship Fair at your institution.

4. Prepare introductory workshops during the open call. Discuss mobility, required documentation, CV, personal statement, etc. Help your students to prepare a good application!

5. Take time - make room for group and/or individual consultations.

6. Use every opportunity to invite representatives of various scholarship providers to visit your institution and present their programmes to students. Don't forget the power of media, and include them in the mobility promotion.

7. Cooperate with your colleagues from other units of the university. Make your work more visible.

8. Round up your promotional activities at the end of the academic year- invite students and future students to the University open door and remind them of the importance of mobility and their opportunities. This way they can use the summer break for planning and preparing.

HOW TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IN THE APPLICATION PROCEDURES?

Helping your students with their applications is a significant step in supporting the whole mobility process. Our experience has shown that students feel much more secure if there is concrete assistance from their university during the application preparation stage. As a rule they greatly prefer applying for programmes that are administratively under the responsibility of their universities than any other mobility programmes. It is important to remember this when deciding on the type of activities you would like to offer to your community to boost mobility.



It is not always easy to distinguish promotional activities from those aimed at supporting the application process, as promotional activities usually provide at least basic hints on how to prepare scholarship applications. However, while these awareness- raising activities provide the overall picture about mobility, other, more specific, detailed information should be available provided through tailor-made support. So, information sessions should be considered as an introduction to a series of other activities to be followed during the time a call for applications is open (and not only during that period).

Before going into detail about different possible support activities, here we should once more emphasise the value of institutional support for mobility, since ensuring recognition of mobility opportunities is certainly the most significant assistance you can provide for your students.





Part of your support activities should be dedicated to explaining the overall process of mobility to the students, about their obligations, but also rights. In the Western Balkans, where a significant number of universities are not integrated, some of our teachers and professors are unfortunately not well acquainted with existing mobility rules, so informing students on these general issues is usually of great value to them. When defining more concrete support activities, the best thing is to `dissect` the application and see what is required, and try to address at least the most crucial aspects. Most common issues that are repeated in many, if not all, available mobility programmes are:

- A good CV (taking into consideration different types of CVs – EUROPASS format if an EU offered scholarship scheme is in question, or other),
- A concise yet explanatory motivation letter, personal statement, different essays (e.g. US scholarships require writing of several essays answering different questions).

These issues can be addressed either individually or collectively, depending on the situation.

1. One of the typical support activities is organising **workshops** dedicated either to mobility in general (similar to information events, but focusing a bit more on specifics) or to the preparation of any of the previously-mentioned elements of the application. You can organise several of these sessions during the application period, possibly limiting the number of attendees to make it as efficient and useful as possible to individual participants. Bear in mind that, in organising workshops, you can bring in other support structures within your university. For example, centres or offices in charge of career development are a natural choice for cooperation in organising workshops for the development of CVs, motivational letters, essays, interview preparation, and other parts of the application.

The University of Belgrade and the University of Kragujevac have enjoyed very fruitful cooperation between their career centres for several years, and they organise different types of workshops as well as other activities aimed at students.

Another partner in this process, if there is no career centre at your university, is the local employment agency or similar body. It will most probably have a service and a couple of experts involved in the preparation of the young for the labour market, to help them present themselves in the best possible way. And they will probably be more than willing to help.

This type of cooperation was successfully established at the University of Montenegro before the Career Development Centre was formed. The local Employment Bureau office helped not only the students in preparing applications, but also acted as `trainer of trainers` for the Centre staff. The Career Development Centre has taken over all of these activities, working jointly with IRO on organizing workshops and other activities, and coordinating the Buddy Network for incoming students.

2. Another type of activity often used is **consultations**. Consultations can be either **group consultations or individual consultations**. Group consultations are usually organized by IRO staff periodically, and are aimed at groups of students already preparing applications, providing the opportunity to clarify any questions about the application process. One benefit of this kind of consultation is that the students can learn not only from IRO staff, but can also share experiences with their peers. **Individual consultations** are also organised by IRO staff, and are again open to all students with concerns and questions about the application process, for which they get answers one-on-one, usually in the IRO office. You can hold this kind of consultation for a couple of hours a day or throughout the day, depending on the workload.

3. As well as general promotion events, it is advisable to involve the **student ambassadors (former grantees of scholarships)** in at least some of the other activities. Their 'been there – done that' attitude and first-hand experience are reassuring for students applying in the current round, so if there are people willing to participate, do your best to find them and involve them. Not surprisingly, you will also learn from them.
4. A lot can be done through communication via **e-mail, web-sites and social networks**, especially since students often cannot think of all of the questions about the application at the brief encounter with you. So, be willing and available to answer as many e-mails as you may get. They really can be useful since you also have time to structure the answer to fit the needs of that individual. A lot of information can also be put on the web-sites, of the universities, IROs, and specialised student mobility web-pages.



5. **Printed material** such as guides for application preparation are also useful. It can also be posted electronically on the IRO webpage, central university page, Facebook, etc. Make sure that you mention the link to the publication in your presentations, which are a cheap yet very useful means of promotion. Of course, if you have sufficient funds, you can also have it printed and distribute it during events.

As mentioned, all of the universities have Facebook pages dedicated to mobility. They are mainly aimed at promotion, but can also be used for support, especially as they are another forum for students to exchange of ideas and experiences.

The KBF group of IRO staff, appointed at WB universities, developed a guide for the outgoing students, which explains the whole process of preparing the application for different scholarships and mobility.



6. Adequate language skills and a **language certificate** - more and more often an internationally recognized one - are another important part of a successful application. It is also important to help students in **obtaining** certificates that prove sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction. So, some of the universities organise courses in English (most common) and in German for their students.

In the end, no matter how much you are willing to help, students need to be aware that it is ultimately up to them to present themselves in the best possible light, and that they need to do the `hard work` and deliver a high quality application that reflects them as strong and special individuals.

At the University of Kragujevac, free courses in English and German are organised. Moreover, during summer months, there are preparatory language courses using TOEFL and IELTS literature, so that students can take the exams in the autumn, in time to receive certificates for the application round.

INCOMING STUDENTS/STAFF

Internal structures, courses and support services

In the last couple of years, internationalisation has become much popular within Higher Education Institutions and their managements. More and more students are travelling abroad, changing universities after every level of their education and even attending several universities during one level of their studies. One of the EU's goals is that at least 20% of the student population should spend some period of their studies on mobility abroad. But it is not enough

to say that you want more incoming students and staff at your university. In the case of WB universities, a lot has to be done to reach the level of some of the top universities around the world. Some WB universities have done much to improve their services regarding incoming students, with visible results. Although lack of funds is one of the biggest obstacles at WB universities, determination can deliver results, if there is support from the university management.

Having all this in mind, and applying the experience of WB universities included in KBF project, below you can find some of the measures you should think about to attract more incoming students and staff:

- 1. A person in charge of incoming students.** This person should be located in the central IRO of university. Depending on the work load, this person can also be the mobility coordinator for the university (as described earlier) for outgoing students. Main responsibilities should be communication with foreign students before they come to the university as well as when they arrive.

If your university is not integrated and has a lot of faculties with many study programmes, it is very hard for one person to retain all the information about specific courses on all faculties. That is why good contact is key between this person and relevant staff dealing with incoming students on all faculties within the same university. Usually these will be members of academic staff, but it is much better if every faculty has an international relations officer who is in charge of incoming and outgoing mobility.



At the University of Belgrade, several faculties that have appointed more than one person to work full time on international activities, such as mobility, international projects, etc., have achieved much greater results in attracting foreign students and international projects. It is worth pointing out that the increase in international activity was a result of hiring more people to deal with the issue.

2. **English courses.** If your university is not located in a country with native language English, German, French or Spanish, you should definitely consider introducing English language courses. Students coming from abroad are mostly interested in English and their first question will always be "What is available in English?" This doesn't mean that every course at every level should be taught in English. With undergraduate studies, it is common to have a majority of courses in the language of that specific country, but for Master and Doctoral studies, English courses should be widely available if you want to attract foreign students. Some faculties don't have enough foreign students to justify all lectures in English but they are providing consultations and literature on English as the next best thing to do.
3. **Courses in your national language.** A majority of visiting students staying for more than one month want to learn the language and culture of that country, so it is good to provide the option, especially if you don't offer English courses.

The University of Belgrade and the University of Novi Sad have introduced online courses in Serbian as a foreign language for incoming students via the Moodle platform. This is very useful because students can learn the language before they come to the region.



Promotion, how to increase the number of incoming students/staff

The European Commission, through EU partner universities, recognises the efforts and impact of the Western Balkan universities in their internationalisation efforts by offering mobility programmes such as Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, CEEPUS, or through bilateral agreements. Also, with the implementation of the Bologna education process, as required in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), it strengthened ties with mobility projects. With its enrolment in EU programmes, Western Balkans universities successfully proved that they have the capabilities, human resources

and infrastructure to become partners in mobility programmes with other EU universities fulfilling the EHEA criteria.

International Relations offices are working hard on securing much-needed internationalisation of higher education institutions, because the image of the country strongly influences decisions on where to study abroad. The key factors in choosing the university are: programmes given in English, the international reputation of the university and the level to which programmes are tuned to the student's home studies.



To attract students and staff from abroad, it is important that the offer from the university meets requirements, such as study programmes in English, lectures, providing mentors, and the provision of research tools and other forms of educational activities. Internationalisation as a process is part of a group of inter-related activities, which includes recognition of the mobility of incoming and outgoing students and staff members. However, many activities are supposed to be completed before and after the mobility period.

Throughout the academic year, the university IROs promote mobility as a “still optional” process for students and staff members to spend a certain period of their education at the partner universities. Information is disseminated by organising info days, fairs, media exposure and other means of promotion to attract people to apply for mobility programmes. These activities are not only intended for domestic students, but for foreign students, too. It is important to understand how to attract students/staff member that are thousands of kilometres away and convince them to come to a region which may be very unfamiliar.

Many activities are proving to be an excellent promotional method, but the key words are: information in English.

- 1. Website** – first port of call for the foreign student/staff member would be the internet, before going to the IRO for further information and applying for mobility programmes. University websites must be user- friendly with an English language version of the site, and with appropriate information such as study programmes, academic and practical information for the application, enrolment, registration, housing, lectures, research lines, etc. The students/staff member must be drawn to the offer they receive from the internet. Research shows that the majority of decisions about applying for mobility programmes start with internet information. Websites need to deal with the entire mobility process, requirements of application, documents required and experiences from former scholars as a ways of better promoting mobility programmes. They should also provide quicker communication via pages such as frequently asked questions and/or question forms, where answers are provided within 24 hours.
- 2. Social pages** – we are living in a world where social pages such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube have become important tools for advertising offers from the receiving universities. A majority of students and staff members use the social media pages for their personal as well as business activities. It is important to recognise the Facebook “fan page” as another web presentation opportunity for the university to attract exchange students. These pages represent first contact with the hosting university rather than the regular webpage. Creators of social media pages have recognised this business opportunity and created different activities that will help to expand your information and promote your “fan page” to more people, students and staff members.

The University of Sarajevo has used Facebook and its advantages in communicating with students (Facebook group Buddy network for incoming students to ask questions regarding academic and practical information, fan page for International Relations office communication, etc).

University of Novi Sad posts video blogs made by exchange students on their YouTube channel.

3. Email communication, eNewsletter, posters and folders – visual promotions are important as well as written ones. To keep students/staff members updated with the activities at the potential host university, the IRO must create information as visual promotion, in the form of posters, folders, or eNewsletters, which are easily accessible on the web. eNewsletters

offer information about current affairs at the university as well as information about exchange processes and offers for potential exchange students/staff members. This format should be available on the net, but also distributed to all partner universities and every email in students databases.

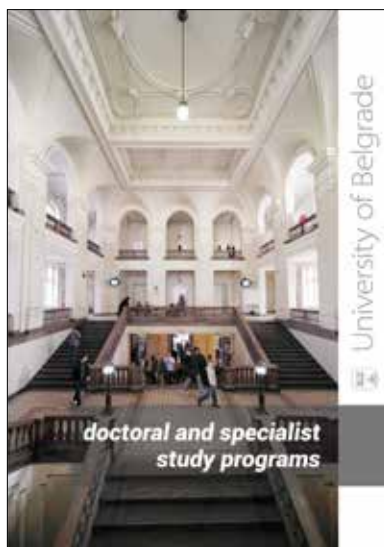


The International Relations Office at the University of Sarajevo has an active eNewsletter every month with information about international activities at the university and sends it to all partners in the region and beyond.

4. **Study Programmes catalogues** – it has become imperative that every university offers Study Programmes catalogues which give all necessary information about study programmes, curricula, exams, teaching, career options, research, contact information, pictures and other information for both students and staff members, preferably including a full English version. The catalogue needs to be placed on the web for easy download, as well as sent to IROs abroad for better dissemination.

5. **Word of mouth** – this is recognised as the best advertising, because students are more emotionally-connected with a personal story from the student who participated in the mobility experience, rather than just via a promotional ad. Some universities also provide printed promotional material for returning students to pass among their colleagues, perhaps, influencing their decision on applying for mobility programmes. If the presentation of the host university is organised at their home university, they, as alumni, can participate in promoting it, by explaining their experiences and hopefully attracting potential candidates.

6. **Guide for Incoming Students** – a concise guide in English and/or other foreign languages, containing information useful to foreign students about: studying at a specific institution (general enrolment conditions, study offer, facilities etc.) but also practical information on visa procedure, the town and the country as well. Electronic version of the Guide can be posted on the important web pages, and printed can be distributed to cooperation partners from abroad, students and at international events.



The University of Montenegro developed Guide for Incoming Students that can be accessed at: <http://goo.gl/chOzca>

7. Testimonials – many universities in the Western Balkans already have a large number of foreign exchange students/staff members. Their stay at the host university should not only be used for statistical purposes, but for further promotion, too. Some universities ask their guest students to write a short story about their experiences in the host city and at the host university. These stories are presented as a promotional tour and placed on the web and in study programme catalogues for potential future mobility students/staff members. This reinforces “word of

mouth” accounts of personal experience in academic and non-academic life in the host city and at the host university.

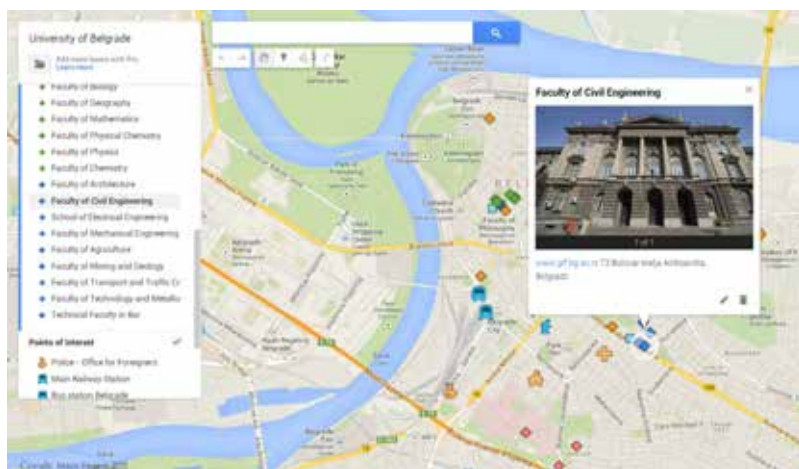
8. Summer and Winter International Schools – this activity has been proved an efficient way of promoting the university. Offering lectures in English for short periods gives the opportunity for students and staff members to experience academic university life and attract interest in making an application to become an exchange student.



Welcoming activities and integration

Integration activities are a crucial part of the adaptation of foreign students to the host university and its environment. All universities should aim to provide good communications and offer prompt responses to foreign students before, during and after their mobility periods.

Foreign students on exchange at the University of Novi Sad said that the online maps and information on most relevant university facilities, cultural and historic buildings assisted them in accessing the same facilities easily.



The University of Belgrade has prepared a custom Google map for incoming students with all relevant information and locations pinpointed on the map, such as faculties, dormitories, student cafeteria etc. goo.gl/zdxBrY

Organising Welcome Days for foreign students every year has proved successful. Students are officially welcomed through a range of activities. They are introduced to university/faculty services and facilities and informed about their rights and responsibilities related to their studies and their stay. The Welcome Week also gives foreign students an opportunity to inform interested fellow students about their respective culture and customs through intercultural dinners, films, music and similar intercultural activities. A high percentage of foreign students describes the Welcome Days as a very helpful and important step towards fitting well into campus life.



Good supervision of foreign students involving domestic students via available Buddy network has been noted to significantly aid the integration process. It consists of students who have volunteered (buddies) to help their fellow students from abroad get settled into everyday life at the university. Buddies provide assistance during the arrival of foreign students, finding accommodation, accessing university facilities and services, administration requirements etc. Given these situations, foreign students reported that taking part in the Buddy

Network not only helps them learn about studying and about life in the town but also helps reduce potential cultural shock and social isolation. Some incoming students refer to the Buddy Network as first aid which brings together a wide range of students of similar interests and values to exchange linguistic and cultural experiences, helping to deal with cultural stereotypes and language barriers. Most of the domestic students report that through the Buddy network their language skills improved along with their cultural, social and communication skills.

The University of Novi Sad has an active Buddy Network with over 200 members and actively collaborates with ESN Novi Sad on the range of international activities. As a result, they together develop brochures and leaflets on student mobility issues. The University of Belgrade has developed very good cooperation with ESN Belgrade so the whole Buddy Network in Belgrade is coordinated by ESN Belgrade with support of the University.



The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is another way of easing the integration of foreign students into both the university life (where International Relations Offices of the universities support joint activities for foreign students) and into the wider community. The ESN offers additional services to foreign students via an ESN card allowing access at reduced prices to activities including excursions, sports, and

social events. It also provides an opportunity for domestic exchange students and foreign students to inform prospective students about the social and cultural dimension of study exchange just before prospective students more from high school to the university. The ESN even gives a chance for foreign students to explore their other skills through community volunteering

The University of Novi Sad engages regularly foreign students in the range of activities related to different aspects of student mobility, including presentations and discussions on student-employability topics at an international workshop held at the University of Novi Sad in 2013.

The IRO at universities should communicate with the student organisations and the student parliament not only to spread information on available educational, social or cultural events but also to aid more intensive interaction between foreign and domestic students. Foreign students are observed to be most proactive in these activities. They join mobility programmes as guest speakers and give information on their home university courses to domestic

students wishing to study abroad at the beginning of the year. So, when international students make early contact with fellow students, their interaction usually increases with other types of initiatives, such as international conferences on student mobility. The most popular participation involves official presentations/discussions of students' respective culture and language as well as small-scale international-domestic projects.

Engagement of foreign students in making mobility promotion videos and their participation in local TV and radio shows should be encouraged by universities to widen public knowledge of student exchanges. Student story telling via television and radio is very popular

among incoming students and has been shown to raise not only the awareness of different cultures in domestic students but also to strengthen their involvement in activities that promote different cultures, social cohesion and intercultural relations.



The majority of foreign students visiting the University of Novi Sad gave interviews in the TV show Sve Stranci (available on YouTube channel) as well as featured in the Portugueses pelo mundo VI (second part) available on <http://goo.gl/284KA0>

This is especially useful when it is done in countries and cities still facing prejudice from other countries. In the beginning of the Bologna process, the first students that came to the WB were unsure what to expect because of the political situation during the 1990s. But their positive experiences were soon spread by word of mouth and through the media and the number of EU applicants from EU to WB universities multiplied several times in just a few years.



How to organise academic recognition

With increasing mobility, universities are facing a new problem - academic recognition of the study period abroad. This is an important issue that is improving, although some faculties or departments can have better results on academic recognition compared with other faculties, even within the same university. As student mobility grows, WB universities have

decided to introduce an official document regulating academic recognition and mobility. This document should become legally binding once it has been officially adopted by the Senate of the University. It explains the obligations and rights of students in the process of recognition of their mobility period. The document is also binding for the professors.

Each university should have an official document that regulates mobility of students and recognition of study period that students have spent on other higher education institution.

It is vital that students know, before their exchange programme starts, that their study period and results will be recognised when they get back to their home institutions. Therefore the document contains acts, regulations, and forms. There is a Student application form, a Learning agreement and a Transcript of records. In an ideal situation, students shouldn't need to consult their home faculty professors about courses they are planning to take during the exchange period. This is exhausting and not all professors will accept the fact that the

home student will skip their course in favour of some foreign colleague. The best solution is for the student to see one person at his faculty or department who can approve the suggested list of courses. When agreement is reached, a "learning agreement" is prepared. This should be signed by three sides (at least): the home institution, the receiving institution and of course the student himself. Thus the Learning agreement is like a "pre-nup" between the student and the home institution.

Having an ECTS coordinator at each faculty, who is an administrative staff with power to approve academic recognition, has produced great results at some of the faculties at the University of Belgrade, almost eliminating problems with recognition of ECTS.

It is not always easy to convince Faculties that the learning agreement is a legally binding document. At times the teachers pioneering these reforms have had to fight battles against professors uninterested in negotiating a learning agreement beforehand and then afterwards potentially disputing the results the students achieved abroad.

Some professors believe that the course content abroad should be almost identical to that at their home university. But hopefully, the situation is changing for the better each year, because more staff are aware and actively engaged in the recognition process, often as a result of their own faculty mobility experience.

Keep record of the credits (courses, internships, etc.) taken abroad and recognised in the past for each degree course and provide information in advance to prospective outgoing students.



Therefore, to ensure recognition of academic mobility and make life easier for all, here are some recommendations to be followed:

1. Try to turn mobility into an important element of evaluation by the higher education institutions. Indicate student mobility as a strategic target.
2. Allow the transparent description of study periods abroad in the Diploma supplement.
3. Select very carefully the partner institutions, checking in advance the equivalence or the compatibility of study programmes. In addition, agreements with institutions providing complementary programmes can also be useful to provide students with further interesting opportunities.
4. Appoint an Institutional Mobility Coordinator or ECTS Coordinator and Academic Coordinators for each Faculty (School) allowing them to manage and to sign all relevant documents related to student mobility and provide to the International Relations Offices sufficient staff experts in mobility issues.
5. Encourage Institutions to publish on their websites all mobility data and other information required by the ECTS.
6. Publish online all procedures related to student mobility in the national language and in English.
7. Monitor the agreements to assure quality control.
8. Organise presentations at Faculties to inform all academics about new possibilities and regulations regarding mobility and academic recognition.

You can find more recommendations in the Guide for Academic Recognition for Universities of the Western Balkans, resulting from a conference on 'Student Mobility and Recognition of Study Periods Abroad,' which was initiated by the King Baudouin Foundation and took place in Ljubljana on 10-12 October 2010. You can download the guide here: <http://www.kbs-frb.be/publication.aspx?id=295117&langtype=1033&src=true>

