

*A MANUAL GUIDE FOR
BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMME (BIP)*

SKILLS@UNI

DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS THROUGH
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT
UNIVERSITY

AN INTERNATIONAL PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE

SORAIA GARCÊS
GIULIA CONTI
JOSÉ ALBERTO GONÇALVES
ANA ANTUNES
HÉLDER LOPES
ANA RODRIGUES



***Skills@Uni: developing soft skills
through experiential learning at
university.
An international pedagogical
experience***

Coordinators

*Soraia Garcês, Giulia Conti, José Alberto Gonçalves, Ana Antunes, Hélder Lopes, and
Ana Rodrigues*

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Coordinators: Soraia Garcês, Giulia Conti, José Alberto Gonçalves, Ana Antunes, Hélder Lopes, and Ana Rodrigues.

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Chapter 10

From an Idea to the Skills@Uni Blended Intensive Programme

Soraia Garcês^{1,2,3}, Giulia Conti⁴, and Ana Rodrigues^{5,6}

¹Psychology Department, University of Madeira, Portugal; ²Research Centre for Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being (CinTurs), Portugal; ³OSEAN, Portugal; ⁴Department of Communication and Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy; ⁵Physical Education and Sports Department, University of Madeira; ⁶Physical Education and Sports Department, University of, ⁶The Research Centre in Sports Sciences, Health Sciences and Human Development (CIDESD), Portugal.

The Skills@Uni Blended Intensive Programme did not begin with a formal call or a detailed proposal, but with a simple conversation between colleagues, almost two years before the actual BIP happened. This first initial conversation occurred in a moment when Blended Intensive Programmes were only starting to appear as a new possibility within the Erasmus framework. At that time, the outlines of BIPs were still relatively new and with many interrogations surrounding how BIPs actually worked. Thus, this conversation took more of an exploratory idea that was driven by a shared question of how we could make such an experience for our students that could be academic relevant but also meaningful for their lives. Almost two years after this initial conversation the Skills@Uni BIP took (finally) place.

The possibility of a BIP centred on soft skills appeared, therefore, as a natural extension of our work as professors and also shared research interests. Equally important was our common commitment and belief of the importance of experiential learning and gamified activities to promote enjoyment and motivation in learning environments.

We believe that learning is most powerful when students are invited to act, decide, negotiate, and reflect in concrete situations rather than only engage with concepts in abstract form. At the same time, games and playful activities had already proved, in our teaching and research practice, to be effective and motivating ways of making learning more effective and enjoyable for students. From this perspective, the format of a BIP seemed particularly promising by merging our interests. Its intensive, time-limited nature and its emphasis on collaboration made it a suitable environment for constructing learning paths in which games, and field-based activities could be systematically linked to reflection on soft skills, which is also a much-needed topic in today's academic and professional environments.

In the time space between first talking about a BIP and actually being able to start preparing it, the BIP idea and programme matured, and this time also allowed us to be more aware of what was needed for its effective implementation. This meant that we now had a stronger sense of which learning outcomes might be realistic in a short programme, which types of activities could effectively support students, and how a blended structure could be used to prepare, sustain, and extend students' engagement with this learning experience.

Additionally, from the very beginning, interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary were seen as essential characteristics for this programme. Soft skills are inherently transversal, and we wanted the BIP to reflect that reality by involving different disciplinary perspectives and professional cultures. This intention was not only about diversifying content or the mandatory number of partners needed within the Erasmus+ framework. It was also about creating a learning environment where students would experience collaboration across fields, approaches, and roles. Such an environment was expected to make the development of soft skills more authentic, because students would need to negotiate meaning and expectations with peers and staff who did not necessarily share the same disciplinary or cultural background.

Thus, the team was built around a diversity of backgrounds from Psychology to Sports and Physical Education, to Communication and Technology and Education Teaching, where colleagues from different countries and universities became a decisive element to bring this BIP to fruition. The staff contributions helped to build the programme and at the same time, they strengthened the conceptual coherence of the BIP by reinforcing the link between experiential learning, embodied action, and the development of interpersonal skills.

The partnership around Skills@Uni did not emerge in isolation. It was built progressively through professional encounters that had taken place over the years in different contexts. Staff mobilities, conferences and collaborative projects, created a network of colleagues that was now coming all together for the first time. When we started to think seriously about this BIP, we drew on this network and invitations were made. The resulting group was therefore both cohesive and heterogeneous, combining shared pedagogical values with varied experiences and areas of expertise.

Once the idea had been revisited, the interdisciplinary orientation clarified, and the core partners identified, the project moved into a practical building stage, secure funding. The allocation of Erasmus support was a turning point. It signalled institutional recognition of the project and provided the practical means to bring it into existence. Funding did not resolve all questions, but it created a framework within which detailed planning could proceed with confidence.

The planning phase of the BIP was demanding, and, between many other tasks, it involved deciding how the online and onsite components would complement each other, designing activities that could make soft skills visible and discussable, and ensuring that games and experiential tasks were meaningfully integrated rather than simply added as isolated moments of novelty. It also required attention to institutional and logistical details, such as calendars, credit recognition, selection of students, communication strategies, and mechanisms for evaluation.

Throughout this process, the initial conversation that spark this BIP remained a reference point and also our belief that experiential learning and games can provide powerful and motivating contexts for skills development. Also, a belief of the value of interdisciplinary and international collaboration, and a recognition that BIPs, as an emerging format, offer a unique opportunity to bring these elements together in a structured and intensive way, but also an amazing experience to our students and staff.

In retrospective, the path from that first exploratory dialogue to the fully designed Skills@Uni programme, that will be presented next, reveals that new initiatives often begin in informal exchanges. They draw strength from earlier pedagogical work and from networks of colleagues built over time. They become feasible when institutional frameworks, such as Erasmus, open a space in which existing ideas can be developed into concrete programmes. And they gain educational depth when interdisciplinary collaboration and experiential methods are used to create learning environments where students can practise, observe, and reflect on the abilities that universities seek to foster.

Skills@Uni hopes to be only one small example of this trajectory, in showing how a conversation about collaborating together, can eventually become an international blended programme grounded in shared pedagogical commitments and supported by a diverse partnership. The following chapters describe how this programme was structured, implemented, and evaluated.