

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

SKILLS@UNI

DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS THROUGH
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT
UNIVERSITY

AN INTERNATIONAL PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE

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

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Universidade da Madeira

Portugal, 2026

Technical Page

Title: Skills@Uni: Developing Soft Skills Through Experiential Learning at University. An international pedagogical experience.

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Editor: Universidade da Madeira, Funchal, Portugal

Formatting and Text Review: Soraia Garcês and José Alberto Gonçalves

Cover: Soraia Garcês and Ana Rodrigues

ISBN: 978-989-9230-14-9

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34640/univmadeira2026garcescontigoncalves>

May 2026

Disclaimer.

This publication is an output developed following a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) 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, nor do they represent, necessarily, the views of the book's coordinators or the publisher.

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Chapter 16

Final Reflections and Recommendations for Future Blended Intensive Programmes

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The Skills@Uni Blended Intensive Programme, explored throughout this volume, aimed to offer a concrete example of how a short international learning experience can be designed to promote soft skills through experiential, collaborative, and in a blended format. From the beginning, this book presents Skills@Uni not merely as an isolated case, but as a pedagogical example through which broader questions about higher education, internationalisation, and student development may be examined. In this sense, this final chapter aims not to repeat the previous ones, but to somehow integrate their main insights and to draw from them a set of reflections that may inform the future design of Blended Intensive Programmes in higher education.

Therefore, one of the central ideas emerging from this book is that the educational value of a BIP does not exist simply in its short duration or in the fact that it combines virtual and face-to-face components. Rather, its value depends on the coherence of the pedagogical design that connects objectives, activities, facilitation, and assessment into a meaningful whole. As shown across the chapters on the overall

structure of Skills@Uni, the online component, the onsite week, and the assessment strategy, learning becomes more consolidated and meaningful when students are guided through a structured progression rather than exposed to a set of disconnected tasks.

Hence, a first major lesson from the Skills@Uni BIP is the need to consider soft skills as explicit educational goals. Throughout the BIP, communication, teamwork, leadership, creativity, and problem-solving were approached as skills that must be intentionally practised and reflected upon. This is particularly important in higher education, where soft skills are often valued theoretically but still remain “outside” of many curricular designs and implementation. The Skills@Uni experience suggests that when these skills are clearly focused, students are better able to recognise them, work on them, and connect them to their academic and professional development.

A second insight is related to the importance of experiential learning. The chapters in this volume repeatedly highlight that students engage more deeply with soft skills when they encounter them in action, through tasks that require interaction, negotiation, creativity, and shared responsibility. In such contexts, soft skills become visible not as abstract concepts, but as lived processes that shape how students communicate, decide, adapt, and collaborate. Experiential learning is therefore not simply a matter of making activities more dynamic or enjoyable, it is a mean of creating pedagogical conditions in which complex skills can be observed, discussed and trained.

At the same time, the Skills@Uni BIP makes clear that experiential learning should not be confused with spontaneity or lack of structure. The programme described in this book was not based on carelessly connected activities, but on a carefully sequenced path that moved from orientation and self-awareness to interaction, collaboration, application, and reflection. The virtual component prepared participants conceptually and socially, while the onsite component intensified group work and in-person interaction and collaboration. This progression mattered because meaningful

short-term learning depends on the quality of the support provided before, during, and, sometimes, after the programme.

Beyond all what was already mentioned before, the role of the blended format deserves particular attention. In many educational settings, blending online and in-person modalities can be seen as difficult to combine or manage, and while that has some truth to it, the Skills@Uni experience showed that while it can be logistically and pedagogically demanding it can also be a meaningful and complete learning experience for students. The online component can create conditions for preparation, early group connection, reflective engagement, and conceptual grounding, while the face-to-face part can amplify cooperation, emotional involvement, and consolidation. When these two dimensions are intentionally articulated, the blended structure becomes an educational advantage rather than a logistical compromise.

Another lesson emerging from this BIP concerns the importance of group dynamics. Because BIPs are short and intensive, participants are required to form relationships, negotiate expectations, and work across linguistic, cultural, and educational differences in a short timeframe. This creates powerful opportunities for learning, but also demands careful facilitation. Activities that support trust-building, norm-setting, constructive feedback, and reflective dialogue should therefore be understood as core pedagogical elements rather than complementary social moments.

Another important aspect of the Skills@Uni BIP is the emphasis put on reflection moments, which were thought to be important elements for transforming experience into learning. The virtual forums and reflective essay, and in some measure all other activities, all contributed to help participants make sense of their own development. Reflection allowed students to interpret what happened, identify the skills involved, recognised their own patterns of behaviour, and consider how what they experienced may be transferred to future contexts.

This same logic applies to assessment. The multidimensional approach was thought to be appropriate in a BIP focused on soft skills, because it recognised that such skills are not adequately captured through conventional testing alone. Assessment, in this sense, became not only a mechanism of certification, but also a pedagogical tool that gave value to the process, engagement, application, and critical and cultural awareness. However, it is worth mentioning that at the same assessing multiple elements within such a short timeframe placed considerable pressure on the teaching team to have final grades delivered on time and to simultaneously maintain the level of academic rigor of higher education assessments.

Likewise, the Skills@Uni experience also highlights the fact that a successful BIP depends on much more than student participation. Behind the visible educational experience lies a substantial amount of institutional and relational work involving planning, coordination, communication, administrative support, and staff collaboration. Hence, their apparent simplicity often conceals a considerable amount of effort required to align calendars, expectations, digital environments, assessment practices, and mobility logistics.

While many may think that this organisational dimension is secondary to pedagogy, it is not. In fact, it is one of the most important conditions for a successful implementation of a BIP. When communication between partners is weak, when roles are unclear, or when logistical planning is insufficient, the educational quality of the programme will be easily compromised. On the other hand, when staff collaboration is strong and the pedagogical vision is shared, the BIP can become not only a student experience, but also a platform for professional learning, pedagogical innovation, and future academic cooperation.

For that reason, one of the broader contributions of the Skills@Uni BIP lies in showing that BIPs may generate value beyond the duration of the programme itself. They can strengthen international partnerships, encourage curriculum innovation,

support new teaching practices, and give rise to further projects, publications, and collaborative initiatives. This book is in fact evidence of that! The impact of a BIP should therefore be understood not only in terms of immediate student outcomes, but also in terms of the networks, practices, and possibilities that it helps to build.

Some recommendation for future BIPs

Drawing on the reflections developed throughout this book some recommendations can be proposed for future Blended Intensive Programmes, from our own experience with Skills@Uni. Therefore, it is important to:

- Define clear and limited learning outcomes, from the very beginning.
- Ensure that the virtual and face-to-face components are pedagogically interconnected and not treated as separate from each other.
- Use early online activities to build social presence, intercultural openness, and shared expectations before the onsite component begins.
- Design experiential tasks that require students to practise in real situations rather than only discuss them conceptually.
- Include moments of reflection so that students can interpret and transfer what they have experienced and share with other participants.
- Align assessment methods with the pedagogical learning outcomes but being realistic of timeframes for deliverables.
- Prepare for organizational and logistics workload and unexpected issues that may arise.
- Consider the BIP as part of a wider environment of international collaboration and innovation rather than as a one-time event.

- Gathering feedback from participants during both the online and in-person phases allows for timely adjustments and contributes to the continuous improvement of future editions.

These recommendations are just that recommendations and reflections and are not supposed to be rigid. In fact, one of the strengths of the BIP format is precisely its adaptability to different disciplines, institutional cultures, and pedagogical purposes. Yet the Skills@Uni experience suggests that some principles remain consistently important across contexts, such as coherence, intentionality, reflection, collaboration, and the alignment of design with learning goals. When these principles are respected, short-blended mobility can become a genuinely meaningful educational experience.

International learning should not be measured only by duration abroad or by the formal existence of mobility, but by the quality of the pedagogical and learning experiences it provides. In this respect, BIPs offer a particularly promising format because they combine accessibility with intensity, flexibility with collaboration, and digital preparation with face-to-face interaction. They open new possibilities for institutions seeking to create inclusive and pedagogically rich international experiences for students who may not participate in longer forms of mobility, thus opening a new door of opportunity for many students and staff.

Ultimately, in our opinion, the value of Skills@Uni lies not in presenting a universal formula, but in showing what becomes possible when universities take seriously the challenge of creating learning environments that are at once rigorous, collaborative, reflective, and human. A Blended Intensive Programme, when thoughtfully designed, can do more than compress mobility into a shorter timeframe. It can become a space where students learn with others, through others, and about themselves, where professors experiment with new forms of teaching; and where international partnership is translated into a shared educational practice. In that sense,

the journey documented in this book is not only the story of one programme, but a contribution to the broader future of higher education.