

# Making mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities

## Inclusive Mobility - Guidelines for higher education institutions



## Colophon

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**EPFIME**  
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# Introduction

**The trend for internationalisation in higher education continues to grow and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has helped to pave the way for student mobility on a large scale, increasing the quality and attractiveness of study abroad opportunities.**

Higher education ministries collectively set a target for 2020 that at least 20% of graduates in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should have engaged in study or training abroad, a commitment which was reaffirmed in the 2020 Rome Communiqué. However, for students with disabilities, while much work has been done to attempt to increase participation in recent years, statistics show that they are still significantly underrepresented in international mobility programmes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020).

The project Establishing a thought-out Policy Framework for Inclusive Mobility across Europe (EPFIME) has extensively researched the barriers and enablers of inclusive mobility and disabilities from different perspectives through in-depth desk research and three large-scale surveys, the first of their kind ever to be conducted. These surveys collected data through online questionnaires from three key target groups: students with disabilities (1,134), higher education institutions (114) and ministries of education (23) across the EHEA.

The research highlighted that international mobility programmes have comparable advantages for students with disabilities as their non-disabled peers including higher academic achievement, personal development, increased language skills and confidence. In addition, students with disabilities reported a more normalised self-perception after undertaking mobility programmes, making them feel more similar to their peers. Barriers and enablers of participation at a EHEA, national and institutional level were identified.

## Using the suite of the inclusive mobility tools

Based on the research findings, the project partners have developed a multi-use ‘inclusive mobility toolbox’ featuring outputs that work in tandem, and users can explore different tools depending on their stakeholder needs, and what stage they are at in relation to implementing an inclusive mobility strategy.

### Contained within the toolbox is:

**Research Report** - use this report to understand the barriers to/ experiences of students with disabilities on mobility and well as existing policies and good practices in higher education institutions and ministries of education unearthed in the survey. Use the shorter **Recommendations and Good Practices** booklet to get a summary of the report recommendations and a glimpse at some good practices gathered.

**The Inclusive Mobility Framework** - aimed at higher education institutions, ministries of education and national agencies to support them to understand the policies, concepts and practices which need to be considered to build a good inclusive mobility national and/or institutional strategy. Views of this online framework can be filtered depending on the user’s needs.

**Self-Assessment Tool** - aimed at higher education institutions, ministries of education and national agencies, to support them to check their current practice against the Inclusive Mobility Framework and advise on action points for improvement.

**The Inclusive Mobility Guidelines** (this document) - aimed at higher education institutions, these guidelines provide institutions with tips, tricks and advice to implement the inclusive mobility framework and address areas for improvement identified through use of the self-assessment tool.

All of these tools can be located at [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu).

## Where to start

Before engaging with these guidelines, higher education institutions should start the process of reflecting on their mobility practices by using the Self-Assessment Tool at [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu). This tool supports institutions to check their current policy and practice against the Inclusive Mobility Framework and offers areas for improvement which can be further explored using these guidelines.

A valuable way for institutions to begin, is to ask members of staff in the International Office and the Disability/Inclusion Office, to undertake the Self-Assessment Tool from their own perspective, then bring them together to discuss the results of their individual attempts at the assessment. Staff can then reflect on the differences in how they each responded, discuss their understanding of the Inclusive Mobility Framework from their position, and seek agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of current institutional policy and practice concerning inclusive mobility.

These initial discussions can act as a platform for future collaboration on inclusive mobility by key stakeholders in the International Office and Disability/Inclusion Office, and provide a starting point to collectively plan the wider institutional dialogue on inclusive mobility recommended later in these guidelines.



## About these guidelines

To create a sustainable culture of inclusive mobility, higher education institutions must take both a top-down and bottom-up approach to the inclusion of students with disabilities on incoming and outgoing mobility programmes. This requires a culture of good inclusive practice for relevant staff on the ground, and the setting of clear strategic objectives and policies at an institutional level and these guidelines will support institutions to do both.

Throughout these guidelines, you will see reference to quotations from the EPFIME research participants and reference to the inclusive mobility framework itself. The key aim of these guidelines is to support institutions in implementing the framework, thereby reducing barriers for students with disabilities on incoming and outgoing mobility programmes and contributing to a successful student mobility experience.

These guidelines will help higher education staff members to shape the policy and practice of their institution in this area by providing information and advice in the following key sections:

- **Optimising the institutional strategy - inclusion in mobility strategies:** this section will help institutions ensure that their mobility strategy is set up to monitor and increase participation of students with disabilities and that inclusive mobility policies and procedures are built in collaboration.
- **Awareness - effective collaboration - internal and external:** this section will help institutions understand the importance of collaboration with stakeholders inside and outside of the institution in order to achieve inclusive mobility and highlights the roles various institutional stakeholders can play in inclusive mobility practices.
- **Inclusively promoting study abroad - information provision and communication:** this section provides advice for institutions on developing targeted promotional material for students with disabilities and ensuring materials and promotional events are accessible.
- **Applications, grants and funding:** this section provides advice on ensuring students understand the financing options available for their mobility, helping them to anticipate and estimate the added cost of disability supports and supporting them to complete their applications.
- **Supporting students pre-departure:** this section explores how institutions can support students with disabilities prior to their mobility by assessing their needs for mobility and working with them and the home/host institution to develop and deliver a Support Mobility Plan.
- **Supporting students during mobility:** this section provides tips and advice on welcoming incoming students with disabilities to the institution, keeping regular communication with students on mobility and supporting students during a crisis.
- **Actions and support post mobility:** this section explores how to capture the past experiences of mobile students with disabilities, and use them to inform/update institutional practices, as well as to promote mobility opportunities to prospective students with disabilities.

Each section closes with a snippet of related 'Good Practice in Action' from one of three institutions around Europe identified by the project partners as operating some good practice in areas of inclusive mobility.

These institutions are:

- Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven)
- University College Dublin (UCD)
- SRH University Heidelberg

The inclusive mobility practices in these institutions were identified and explored through structured case study interviews which were used to inform the good practice snippets included in these guidelines.

The tips, tricks and advice outlined in these guidelines represent excellent, evidence-informed strategies and practice across a range of topics concerning inclusive mobility. It is unlikely that any institution will have already addressed each area as comprehensively as they are covered in the guidelines, so it is important that institutions do not feel that they are very far behind others when reading them. Rather, institutions should recognise in the guidelines things that they are already doing well and use the information provided to come together as an institutional community and improve their inclusive mobility strategies and practices incrementally - whatever stage of the journey they are at.

It is also important to highlight that while these guidelines are aimed at higher education institutions, the responsibility for widening participation in mobility is shared with regional, national and European agencies. Staff should ensure alignment with targets and policies around participation in mobility set by national and regional agencies, and seek to bring issues encountered to the attention of relevant agencies where appropriate e.g., gaps in funding provision.

Like many practices associated with the inclusion of students with disabilities, what works for them is often good practice for all, so it's good to consider where some of the practice outlined can be applied to all students in line with the principles of universal design.

Many of the tips and tricks in this guidance are valuable for all students, great practice for disadvantaged students more generally, but vital for students with disabilities - especially those with complex support needs. The Peer Learning and Resources and Social Inclusion in Mobility Programmes Project (PLAR-4-SIMP) focuses on inclusion at large and includes guideline and e-learning training package to create inclusive mobilities.

EPFIME research shows that a significant number of students don't disclose their disability to the host institution, so by bringing inclusive mobility practices into the provision for all students where possible, we can ensure that barriers are also reduced for students with disabilities who choose not to disclose.







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**Institutional experience:**

Our internationalisation strategic plan ensures necessary structures so that all students and staff can gain an international experience by removing all possible barriers (including financial, physical and mental barriers) and by offering qualitative support for both incoming and outgoing students with specific needs (e.g., short mobility options, targeted mobility grants, qualitative support before, during and after a mobility period).

Vives University of Applied Sciences,  
EPFIME Higher Education Research Participant

# Inclusion in mobility strategies

**This section provides advice, tips and tricks on developing and updating your institution's mobility strategy in a way that:**

- Optimises the strategy for inclusion, providing equal opportunities for all students to participate in mobility programmes.
- Ensures the strategy is evidence-informed, and that progress around inclusive mobility is monitored and evaluated.
- Gets input from the whole institutional community and promotes a whole-institution approach to inclusive mobility.



## What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:

The higher education institution gives a central place to inclusion in both its institutional strategic plan and its internationalisation plan.

## More specifically, higher education institutions should:

- Take a broad-based dialogue approach for the development of an internationalisation strategy that addresses inclusion.
- Offer a wide mix of short and long-term mobility programmes for a range of activities.
- Have a needs-based and individualised approach to support the wider participation of students with disabilities in international student mobilities.
- Have institutional targets for the participation of students with disabilities in mobility programmes.
- Have a standardised methodology to monitor the participation of students with disabilities in all types of mobility programmes (incoming and outgoing mobility).
- Have a systematic approach to evaluate the impact of mobility and procedures on students with disabilities, and address issues that may arise within mainstream supports and services to realise mobility for all.

## Topics to address in your internationalisation strategy



Most institutions have a student mobility or internationalisation strategy which lays out the institution's plan to promote and deliver international mobility. And yet, most institutions do not make any specific commitments on actions to promote the mobility of students with disabilities within these strategy documents. Equally, general institutional strategic plans or inclusion/equity strategies rarely make specific commitments to widening participation on mobility programmes.

When your institution is developing and updating its internationalisation/mobility strategy, it is important to make strong and specific commitments to including students with disabilities in incoming and outgoing mobility programmes and to follow that up by outlining specific measures and objectives which aim to support inclusion and increase opportunities for students with disabilities.

### Institutional mobility strategies should:

- Set quantitative targets for participation of students with disabilities in both incoming and outgoing mobility programmes, and outline measures to track participation/progress. Where national targets exist, ensure that institutional targets align or exceed national target figures. Where national targets do not exist, seek opportunities to engage with the ministries and agencies to propose this.
- Set parameters around inclusion as a precursor to engaging in new inter-institutional mobility agreements (e.g., agreement around base levels of support provided to students between institutions, a common definition of disability etc.) or related agreements with third-party providers.
- Commit to providing a variety of mobility programmes to suit different needs and aspirations (short term mobilities, virtual exchanges, joint study programmes at different levels, summer and winter schools, etc.), offering more flexible, short mobility opportunities which the Inclusive Mobility Research Report shows are highly valued by students with disabilities. Short mobilities can often act as a first step and build student confidence to participate in longer mobility experiences at a later date.
- Commit to providing any virtual mobilities offered, and any other digital activities related to mobility, in a digitally accessible manner, in line with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG - see Inclusive and accessible communications](#)).
- Commit to promoting opportunities for mobility in an accessible manner and to producing targeted promotional material for students with disabilities.
- Provide targeted mobility grants for students with disabilities where possible and/or offer clear information on targeted mobility grants provided by external grant agencies.
- Commit to supporting the costs of preparatory visits before the mobility to host institutions for students with disabilities where possible - the Inclusive Mobility Research Report shows these visits have a positive impact on reducing fears and doubts about mobility for both students with disabilities and staff alike.

- Commit to providing qualitative support for students with disabilities by relevant staff before, during and after a mobility period and to supporting incoming students to at least the same degree as other students with disabilities in the institution.
- Commit to ensuring all staff directly involved in international mobility have the required basic training to understand the needs of students with disabilities on a mobility programme.
- Connect inclusive mobility actions in the institution's mobility strategy to wider institutional and national goals around equity and inclusion contained in the general institutional strategic plan or inclusion strategy, or similar national strategies.
- Commit to providing mobility opportunities and related support to staff with disabilities as well as students.

## Evidence informed planning and monitoring

As mentioned previously, institutions should set targets for the participation of students with disabilities in their Internationalisation/Mobility Strategy and use data and evaluation exercises to inform updates of the strategy.

In order to implement and monitor targets, institutions first need to ensure that they have a systematic and robust approach to gathering data about the numbers of incoming and outgoing students with disabilities on mobility programmes and the experiences of students who participate.

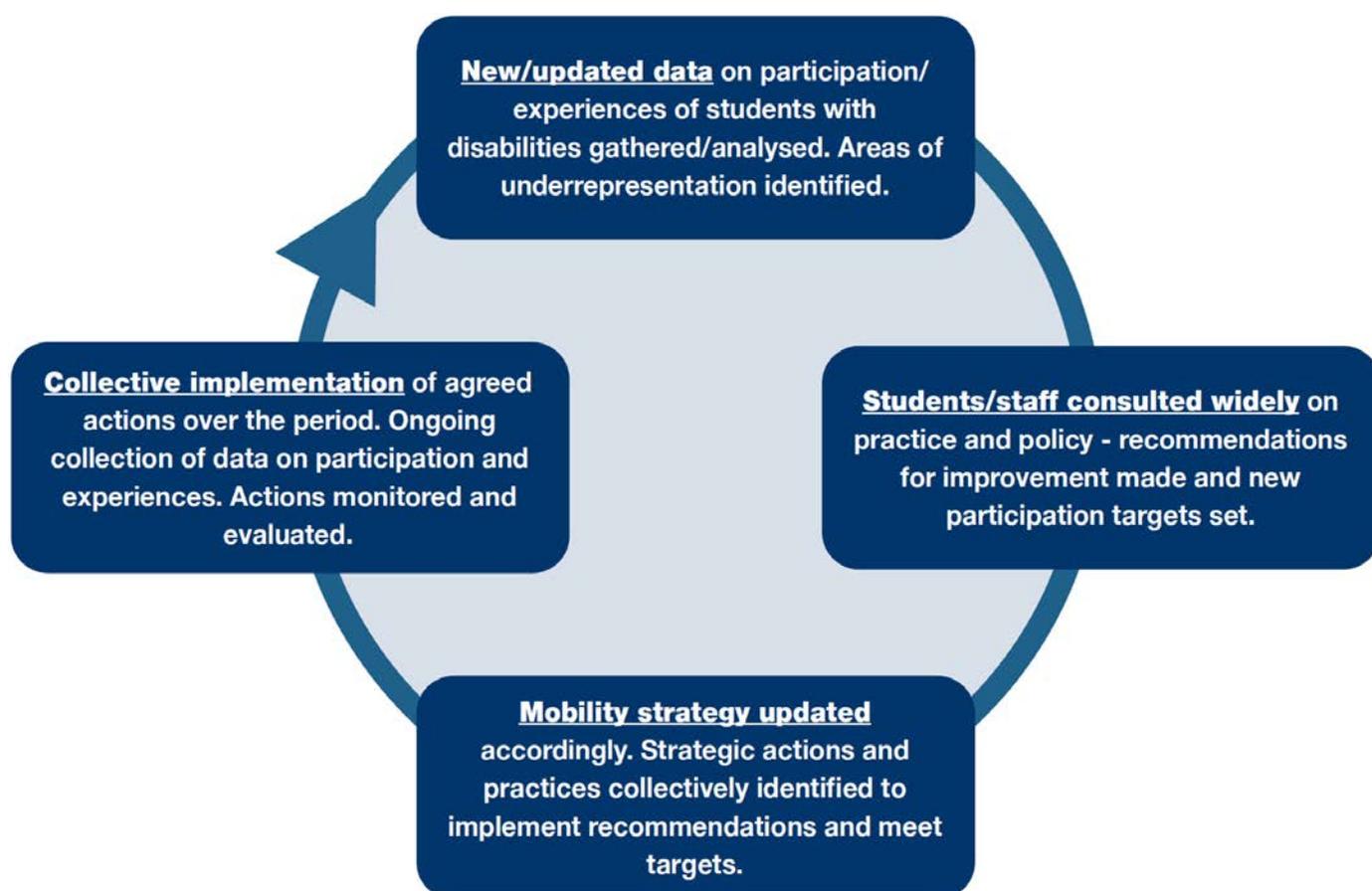
### **When designing processes and systems to collect, store and monitor data, institutions should:**

- Be mindful of both national and European data protection law, ensuring that privacy and confidentiality are key principles in the design.
- Connect where possible with national data collection systems on this topic and work with national ministries and agencies to feed in to them. Where national collection of such data does not exist, seek opportunities to engage with the ministries and agencies to propose this.
- Agree on a definition of disability for students to be included in the data set which aligns with national legal or regulatory definitions or those used to gather national data on students with disabilities more generally. Align the categorisation (e.g., sensory disabilities, specific learning difficulties, physical disabilities) of disability-types with national models where available.
- Ensure that students give informed consent for the collection of any data concerning disability and are informed of the intended subsequent use of such data. Ensure access to data is given only to staff members who need it to carry out their roles.
- Collect only data which is likely to be relevant in tracking progress and identifying areas of underrepresentation or need for improvement. This may include tracking age, disability type, field of study, mobility programme type, country of sending institution (for incoming students) or type of support required.
- Collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the experiences of students with disabilities and ensure that this data is reviewed and analysed periodically, with recommendations feeding directly into the update of policy and practice. Qualitative data collection could take the form of post-mobility interviews or focus groups.

- Ensure that data analysis offers both a 'big-picture' view of institutional progress on inclusive mobility and opportunities to look at potential areas of underrepresentation at a more granular level e.g., by disability type, mobility programme type, field of study etc.
- Ensure that data is gathered for both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities.
- Collect data relating to staff with disabilities as well as students.

Ultimately, all evidence gathered from data gathering and evaluation exercises should be used to monitor the institution's progress and inform future updates to internationalisation strategies and related procedures. Data gathered from students and staff should inform a wider institutional dialogue with relevant staff ([see Collaboratively creating your internationalisation plan - a whole institution approach](#)) about how to improve and update the institution's mobility strategy and associated procedures to optimise them for inclusion and participation of students with disabilities.

The diagram below shows how this process can inform the update and development of inclusive mobility strategies and practices on a periodic basis.



**Figure 1** - Using data and dialogue to periodically optimise your institution's mobility strategy for inclusion

Gathering evidence and consulting students and staff will enable institutions to better understand the positive impact of mobility on students with disabilities and to learn lessons which can help to improve service provision in the future. This in turn will support institutions to increase participation and provide the most inclusive experience possible for students with disabilities.

## Collaboratively creating your internationalisation plan - a whole institution approach

Students and staff with disabilities on incoming mobility programmes will enjoy a more successful experience in institutions where there is a culture of inclusion embedded across the institution and where staff members in all departments seek to play their part in providing a more inclusive experience for students on mobility.

To ensure this is reflected in the institution's mobility strategy, your institution should engage all relevant stakeholders when creating or updating its internationalisation/mobility strategy and its related policies and procedures. By involving all relevant parties in the discussion, the institution gets the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives to inform the strategy and create buy-in from staff who will be executing it.

Institutions should create opportunities for a meaningful institution-wide dialogue about current mobility strategies and procedures and be sure to include representatives from both students and staff involved in the process of delivering and participating in mobility programmes. Opportunities to feed into this discussion could include the creation of a dedicated steering group, the conducting of staff focus groups, the running of consultation workshops or institutional surveys.



Figure 2 - Institutional dialogue on inclusive mobility

## Relevant stakeholders and their responsibilities might differ from institution to institution but key parties are likely to include:

- Senior management/leadership
- Students with disabilities
- International office
- Disability/inclusion office (or similar)
- Access or widening participation office (sometimes grouped with the disability/inclusion office)
- Departmental mobility coordinators or champions
- Marketing/communications department
- Facilities/student accommodation office
- Students unions
- Careers service staff

**Other relevant stakeholders** which may need to be included in the conversation and consultation around the development of the institution's inclusive mobility practices and strategy include counselling services, IT, learning support, libraries and procurement services.

The different contributions these key stakeholders can make to successful inclusive mobility experiences is explored further in [Effective collaboration - internal and external](#), but it is vital to recognise the importance of including the voice of students with disabilities as a central partner in the dialog.

A useful starting point for this dialogue is to ask all relevant stakeholders to complete the Self-Assessment Tool at [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu), then bring them together to discuss the results of their individual attempts at the assessment. Staff can then reflect on the differences in how they each responded and discuss their understanding of the Inclusive Mobility Framework from their position.

They can then seek agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of current institutional policy and practice concerning inclusive mobility, establishing what data and procedures already exist, what formal and informal practices are already in place, what is already working well and what areas can be collectively identified for improvement.



## Updating the institutional inclusion strategy

It is useful to remember that the mobility strategy is not the only institutional policy/strategy in which you can promote inclusive mobility.

### Institutions should:

- Ensure that inclusive mobility is also a stated aim of the institution's inclusion strategy, and that any targets set in the mobility strategy are also referenced in the inclusion strategy and related policies.

## Good practice in action - KU Leuven



**KU Leuven has the ambition to offer every student an international experience. That's why they have a comprehensive internationalisation policy plan which drives participation on mobility programmes through the delivery of increased mobility opportunities, promotion activities and dedicated support for students on mobility.**

"Mobility for All" is a stated objective of the Internationalisation Policy Plan, focussing on ensuring disadvantaged students, including those with disabilities, have the same opportunity as others to participate in mobility programmes.

In line with the objectives of the plan, the university seeks to create and promote low-threshold opportunities in addition to traditional semester mobility, which EPFIME research shows are particularly valued by students with disabilities. These include short mobilities, participation in summer courses, internships and virtual mobility opportunities.

The Flemish international mobility scholarship programs facilitated in KU Leuven give specific priority to their outgoing disadvantaged students - including those in a difficult financial situation, students with disabilities and working students. This means that these students are prioritised in the process of selecting successful scholarship applicants and additional funding may be available for outgoing students. However, international students are expected to have funding from their home institution/country.

The central idea in considering scholarship allocation, is that all other factors being equal, disadvantaged students such as those with a disability are offered the opportunity over others.

For the International and Disability Office, the "Mobility for All" objective in the Internationalisation Policy Plan and the resulting actions have led to a much greater focus on the promotion of mobility to students with disabilities, and the reduction of barriers to their participation.

**Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.**



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**Student experience:**

When I requested information, I was sent to various departments who failed to offer help or support. The responsible person in the international mobility office did not have any supplemental information regarding the international mobility of people with disabilities, so we discovered things concerning my period abroad together. The lack of clear answers to my questions therefore made me feel unsure about the outcome of my period abroad.

EPFIME Student Research Participant

# Effective collaboration - internal and external

**This section provides advice, tips and tricks on collaborating with colleagues/ students within the institution, and staff in external institutions/ agencies in a way that:**

- Ensures that responsibilities of staff in the institution are clearly defined in order to facilitate successful mobility for students with disabilities.
- Promotes active engagement with both the student and host/receiving institution in understanding student needs and delivering on appropriate supports.
- Gives students with disabilities confidence in undertaking a mobility abroad and connects them to supportive student and non-governmental organisations.



## **What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:**

The higher education institution ensures that necessary awareness, staff capacity, co-operations and structures are in place to ensure a quality mobility experience for students with disabilities.

## **More specifically, higher education institutions should:**

- Offer basic diversity awareness/inclusive practice for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to staff directly involved in mobility programmes.
- Ensure that necessary cooperation and structures are in place to ensure a mobility experience for students with disabilities.



## Building internal relationships and identifying responsibilities

Building relationships between relevant departments and faculties on campus is vital to effectively promote inclusive mobility practices and build sustainable procedures which ensure that students with disabilities have a smooth and successful mobility period.

By following the advice in 'Inclusion in mobility strategies', your institution will begin building relationships within the institution by creating an institutional dialog to inform the development of associated policies and procedures. Some of the key internal stakeholders in delivering on inclusive mobility at a strategic and a practical level are outlined below and the contribution they can make to inclusive mobility practices explored:

- **Students with disabilities** - students are the experts in the lived experience of disability, and have the greatest understanding of the potential impact of disability on mobility and the barriers that may exist. In terms of the individual mobility experience, they should be actively included in the planning conversations between the sending and receiving institutions from the outset. More generally, their voice and experiences should also be central to any consultation exercises around building an institutional strategy.
- **Senior management** - it is vital to get both top down and bottom-up support for inclusive mobility targets and strategies, so ensure institutional leaders are included in the conversation as early as possible. Their responsibilities in delivering on inclusive mobility may include providing institutional support and resources to deliver on the strategy and ensuring there is sufficient institutional backing for targets set within it. To ensure senior buy-in, it's useful to align inclusive mobility outcomes with wider institutional and national strategic priorities concerning equity, inclusion and universal design.
- **International Office** - along with disability support staff, international officers are amongst the most important institutional stakeholders. They fully understand the procedures around mobility and act as key student contact points, so it is vital that their voice is central to the development of any procedures and strategies. Their responsibilities in delivering on inclusive mobility will include working closely with the disability support office to promote mobility and develop procedures and practices to collaboratively support students with disabilities to participate.





- **Disability Support Office (sometimes called the Inclusion Office, Access Office, Widening Participation Office or similar)** - along with international officers, disability support staff are amongst the most important institutional stakeholders. They have a good understanding of the impact of disability and the existing procedures in identifying student needs and putting supports in place, so it is vital that their voice is central to the development of any procedures and strategies. Their responsibilities in delivering on inclusive mobility will include working closely with the international office to promote mobility and develop procedures and practices to collaboratively support students with disabilities to participate. Often, disability support staff operate as part of bigger teams focused more generally on widening access and participation, and where this is the case, other staff members in this team can also be important stakeholders for inclusive mobility.
- **Departmental mobility coordinators/champions** - including the departmental level mobility coordinators/champions in the institutional dialogue around building an inclusive mobility strategy means they become invested in the process and will better understand their role in achieving targets. They understand better than anyone the demands of courses within their departments and the nature of the teaching and learning practices utilised. They also provide a key departmental contact point to support the development and promotion of mobility programmes. Their responsibilities in delivering inclusive mobility may include working closely with the International and Disability Office to ensure individual incoming and outgoing students are supported in the learning environment.
- **Marketing/communications department** - much of the information that incoming or outgoing students with disabilities receive in terms of the opportunities regarding mobility and how to prepare for it are designed in conjunction with marketing staff and delivered on social media/web platforms that they operate. Their responsibilities in delivering on inclusive mobility may include working closely with the International and Disability Office to ensure any institutional communications and promotional material about mobility opportunities are designed and delivered in an accessible and inclusive manner, and contain targeted information for students with disabilities.
- **Facilities/Student Housing Office** - staff in these services are important stakeholders in ensuring accessible campus environments and living spaces for students on mobility. Their responsibilities in delivering on inclusive mobility may include working with the International and Disability Office to ensure that accessible housing is provided for students where required or making alterations to the physical/sensory campus environment where an identified need exists.
- **Students Unions** - many of the social and extracurricular opportunities that students with disabilities encounter on mobility are delivered through student unions and associated clubs and societies. Their responsibilities in delivering inclusive mobility may include working closely with the International and Disability Office to ensure students with disabilities on mobility can be connected to accessible social experiences and other opportunities to access peer to peer support.

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- **Careers Service Staff** - staff in these services are important stakeholders in ensuring that students with disabilities use their mobility experiences to maximise their career opportunities post-mobility.
  - **Other relevant stakeholders** which may need to be included in the conversation and consultation around the development of the institution's inclusive mobility practices and strategy include counselling services, IT, learning support, libraries and procurement services.

Fostering relationships between these relevant professionals is vital but the most important internal relationship of all is the one between staff in the disability support and international offices, and in particular how they collaboratively engage with incoming/outgoing students and external institutions to achieve successful mobility experiences for students with disabilities. Staff working in these areas need to take time to work together, organising regular meetings, not only to gain insights into the challenges of mobility programmes but also to share what works for students with disabilities.

### **Institutions should:**

- Ensure that a strong relationship is built between the international office and disability office and that regular meetings occur.
- Provide opportunities for key institutional stakeholders to contribute to an institutional dialogue around inclusive mobility and collaboratively input into the development of policies and procedures. Opportunities could involve the creation of an Inclusive Mobility Steering Group led collaboratively by the Disability Support and International Office and featuring representatives from senior leadership and key stakeholders across the institution.
- Identify academic champions/departmental coordinators to work with the International and Disability Support Office in developing and promoting inclusive mobility.

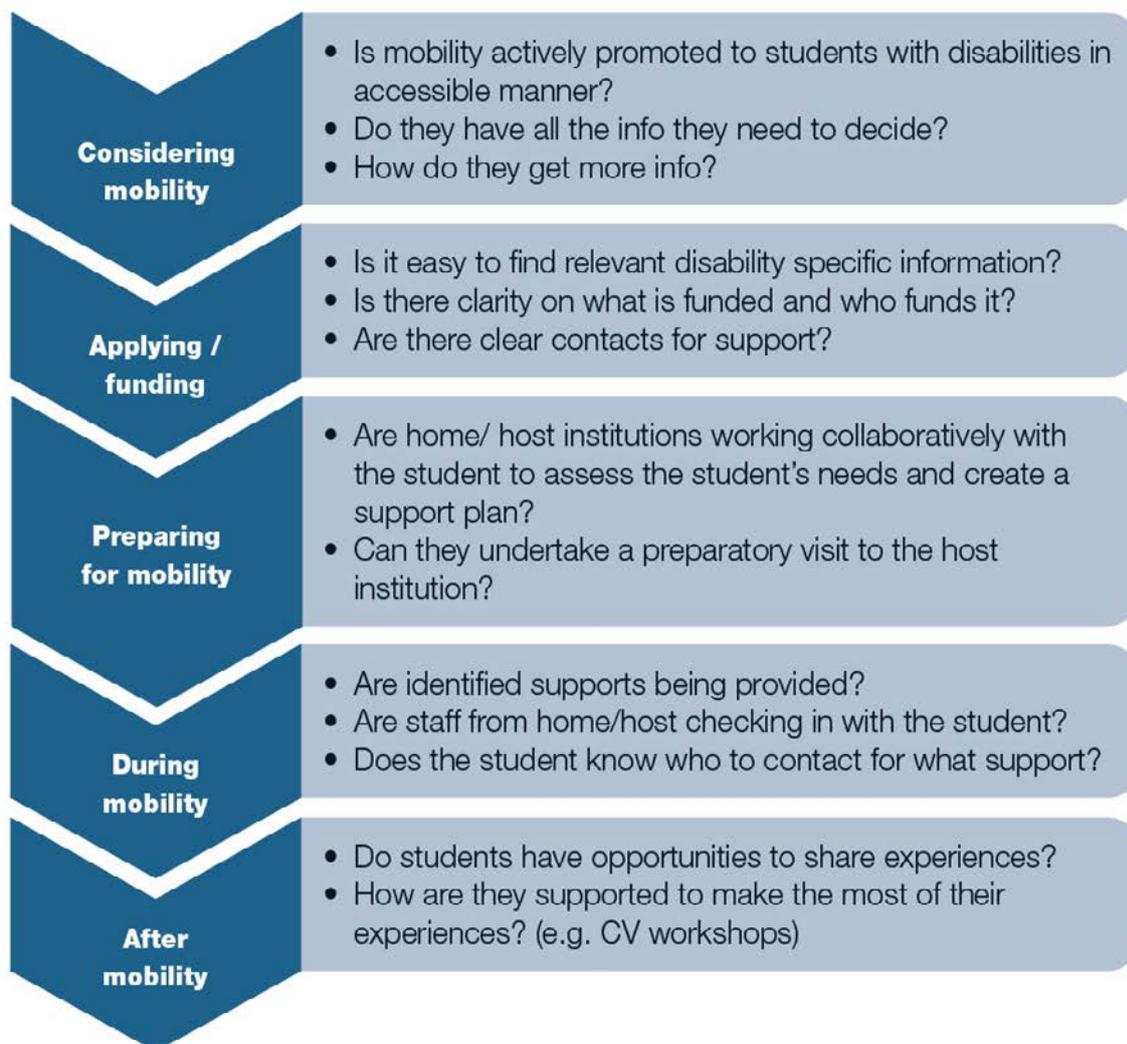
### **Identifying responsibilities - where to start**

Once good relationships have been established between the relevant staff/personnel, the institution should go about developing written procedures to improve mobility experiences and collaboratively draw up a written plan of staff responsibilities in relation to the mobility of students with disabilities. This plan should contain the details of the personnel responsible for carrying out both general tasks associated with inclusive mobility (e.g., targeted promotion to students with disabilities) and the more specific tasks associated with supporting individual students pre, during and post mobility (e.g., needs assessment, financial planning etc).

A good place to start when developing practical procedures is to use the advice and tips in these guidelines to collectively map out the journey of both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities on a mobility, from how they receive information in your institution, through making their application, planning their finances, preparing for their mobility, their experience on mobility and what happens when they return.

Once there is a greater understanding of what is currently happening in the institution and how students with disabilities currently engage with mobility opportunities, staff can use the inclusive mobility framework and these associated guidelines to collaboratively develop procedures to improve practices at each stage and identify staff responsibilities in delivering them.

## Student Mobility Journey



**Figure 3** - Mapping the student journey to support development of procedures and identification of staff responsibilities

Each of these stages and associated good practices are explored in greater depth in later sections of these guidelines.

### **Institutions should:**

- Map existing practices regarding inclusive mobility, identify gaps and collaboratively develop written procedures to address each stage of the mobility journey.
- Ensure roles and responsibilities of staff in delivering on inclusive mobility practices and procedures are explored and clearly outlined.

## Staff development and support

There are many challenges and potential barriers to participation in mobility programmes for students with disabilities, many of which institutional staff will be unaware of. It is not possible for all staff to have a full understanding of the challenges faced, but it is helpful for staff directly involved in delivering mobility programmes to have a basic awareness of the impact of disability on learning, so they can engage with their role in an informed manner.

Additionally, it may be useful to provide more tailored training for staff with specific roles to play in delivering on inclusive mobility, for example:

- Marketing & Communications staff - training/resources around the design of accessible communications.
- Teaching staff - training/resources around Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and/or other inclusive teaching approaches.
- Facilities/student accommodation - training/resources around the provision of accessible physical and sensory environments.

Institutions should work with staff to identify knowledge gaps in relation to disability and study abroad and provide training under their Continuing Professional Development programme/plan. In many cases, the expertise to deliver this training may already exist within the institution (e.g., in the Disability Support Office or Teaching and Learning Centre), while in some cases, hiring external training providers may be necessary.

### Institutions should:

- Provide basic disability awareness training to all staff directly involved in delivering mobility programmes.
- Offer targeted training/learning opportunities for staff in specific roles as necessary.
- Build opportunities for staff to network with professionals from different departments to share experiences around supporting students with disabilities and learn from each other.



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## Working with external institutions and agencies

Close working relationships with staff in external institutions and agencies are very important in delivering successful mobility experiences for students with disabilities and improving institutional knowledge and understanding of inclusive mobility practices.

When it comes to working with external institutions and agencies, there are five types of collaboration which define the partnerships:

- Engagement with national agencies and national authorities
- Inter-institutional mobility agreements and Erasmus+ learning agreements
- Direct collaboration with staff (and students) in delivering individual mobility experiences
- General inter-institutional networking and learning opportunities
- Partnerships with student organisations and NGOs which support inclusive mobility

### Engaging with national agencies and national education authorities

It is important to highlight that the responsibility for widening participation in mobility is shared by institutions with regional, national and European agencies. Staff should ensure at a minimum alignment with targets and policies around participation in mobility set by national and regional agencies, and seek to bring issues encountered to the attention of relevant agencies where appropriate e.g., gaps in funding provision, areas of low participation regarding specific fields of study or disability type, etc. In this way, institutions can contribute to the national dialog about inclusive mobility and impact on national policy and practice.

Building strong relationships between institutional staff and those in relevant national agencies and national education authorities, also ensures that individual issues for students regarding funding for mobility or other relevant topics can be explored and resolved quickly and efficiently.

### Ensuring inclusion within inter-institutional agreements and learning agreements

Inter-institutional agreements are signed between two or more higher education institutions to facilitate the mobility of students between the institutions through programmes like Erasmus+. These agreements outline the terms of engagement between the institutions and the responsibilities of each institution in facilitating the mobility.

Inter-institutional agreements offer a great opportunity to establish basic requirements and commitments around inclusive mobility to be adhered to by partnering institutions.

To promote inclusive mobility and provide clarity on responsibilities around supporting students with disabilities, **institutions should include within inter-institutional agreements:**

- a general commitment to equity of access to mobility for students with disabilities.
- a specific commitment to the provision of reasonable adjustments as identified by a needs assessment to enable students with disabilities to participate in mobility programmes.
- a common definition of disability to clarify national, cultural or legal differences in the understanding and acceptance of what is and is not considered a disability.
- if possible, a brief outline of baseline levels of agreed support to be provided and how students can access it. Examples could include a commitment to ensuring that students with disabilities on mobility are supported to at least the same extent as other students with disabilities in the home/host institution.
- if possible, an agreement over the responsibility for covering costs incurred which are not covered by the available grants (e.g., the cost of preparatory visits to the host institution).

These recommendations equally apply to agreements devised with third-party providers and institutions involved in delivering mobility opportunities outside of the Erasmus+ programme.

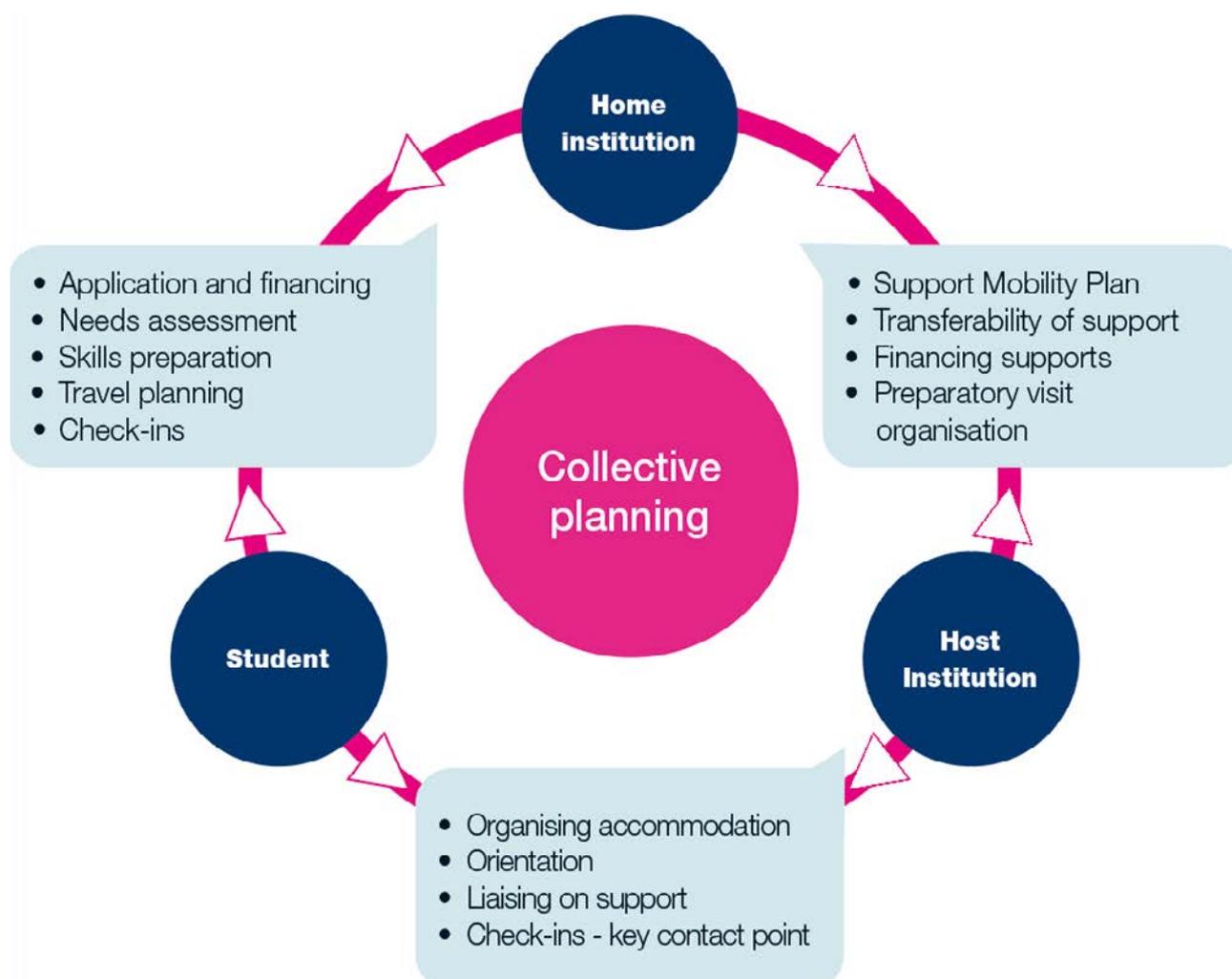
There are additional opportunities to include specific support commitments for students with disabilities in the individual [Erasmus+ Learning Agreements](#) which are a feature of every Erasmus+ exchange.

These Learning Agreements set out the programme of the studies to be followed abroad and must be approved by the student, the sending and the receiving institution, before the start of the exchange. Institutions can include a general commitment to cooperate and provide disability support to the student while on mobility.



## Collaborating with external staff (and students) in delivering individual mobility experiences

When working to ensure that an incoming/outgoing student with a disability has a successful mobility experience, equally as important as the internal relationship between the International and Disability Support Office, is that between those respective offices in the home and host institution and how they work collaboratively with the student to plan and deliver the mobility.



**Figure 4** - Strong communication and collective planning of a mobility experience

The nature of the collective planning (outlined in the diagram above) which needs to take place to achieve a successful mobility will be explored in later sections, but in order to support good collaboration, institutions should:

- Seek to build strong working relationships between their Disability/Inclusion and International Offices and those in institutions with which they have inter-institutional agreements.
- Agree general processes to actively engage with students with disabilities considering an exchange between the institutions in a three-way conversation involving all parties to explore the possibilities and plan the exchange.
- Agree processes around communication of needs between students and the institutions and the delivery and funding of supports.
- Seek to facilitate the possibility of preparatory visits to the host institution for interested students with disabilities.

## Inter-institutional staff networks

The institution's understanding of inclusive mobility can be enhanced and increased by building opportunities for staff from different institutions nationally and internationally to connect, share experiences and good practices.

### Institutions should:

- Facilitate staff to set up or join networks with staff working in other institutions both at home and abroad to share best practice around inclusive mobility.
- Provide resources and funding to support the administration and coordination of such networks and related knowledge sharing events/opportunities.

## Working with NGOs and student organisations

Remember that valuable connections which can enhance the experience of students with disabilities on mobility can be made outside of the institution too, such as those with:

- National student organisations who may be available to provide peer-to-peer advice for students or engage them in interesting social experiences and activities.
- National disability organisations who may be able to advise students about their legal rights, relevant medical services in their locality or to connect them to peers with similar experiences.
- Other third-party providers who deliver support or related services.

### Institutions should:

- Develop a database of relevant external agencies and foster relationships with them as appropriate.



## Importance of collaboration with students

As referenced in section 2.2, the importance of direct communication and collaboration with students prior to, during and post a mobility cannot be overemphasised. It's vital to recognise that students are the experts in their disability and their needs, and should therefore be at the heart of the support planning process.

In terms of planning and delivering individual mobility experiences, institutions will need to actively engage directly with students with disabilities (in conjunction with the other participating institution) to:

- Support the student's timely application and financial planning.
- Collaboratively assess the student's needs and design a Support Plan.
- Prepare the student for all aspects of the mobility experience.
- Engage with the student and the home/host institution to ensure agreed supports are delivered.
- Evaluate the experience post mobility and design opportunities to share their experiences with other prospective students.

Equally, students with disabilities have a strong role to play in feeding in to the development of institutional strategy and practice around inclusive mobility and structured opportunities should be provided for them to do so.

### Institutions should:

- Ensure students are actively engaged with both the home and host institution in the process of planning their mobility.
- Gather the views and experiences of students with disabilities who have considered or experienced a mobility abroad to enhance participation and inform policies and procedures in relation to mobility.



## Good practice in action - University College Dublin

University College Dublin (UCD) strives to be Ireland's Global University, so the university facilitates a large number of incoming and outgoing students every year. UCD Global works closely with a variety of stakeholders in the institution to ensure that all students have the opportunity to go on a mobility and have a successful experience. Regarding students with disabilities, strong ties have been formed between UCD Access and Lifelong Learning and UCD Global to ensure that students with disabilities have the information they need to make an informed choice about mobility and that incoming students are well supported in the institution.



If students disclose a disability to UCD Global or faculty coordinators during the process of their study abroad application, a process of referral to the Access and Lifelong (ALL) service takes place, where they are supported to explore potential additional support requirements for their exchange and to communicate their needs to the host institution. Incoming students who have disclosed a disability on their application are referred to ALL for information on supports and how to avail of them in UCD.

For outgoing students with complex needs such as a requirement for 24 hour medical/personal assistance, UCD Global and UCD Access and Lifelong Learning work closely together with the host institution to support the student to estimate support costs involved (required for grant applications), complete the relevant applications and organise appropriate support.

Incoming students with disabilities are referred by UCD Global to the Access and Lifelong Learning service for a needs assessment as soon they are made aware of disclosure so that a support plan can be developed. This service then liaises with faculty and other institutional stakeholders to ensure that identified supports are put in place.

For incoming students with more complex needs, all parties are available to engage with both them and the sending institution to field queries, give information about supports provided in UCD and to facilitate the advanced arranging of additional supports in advance, ensuring the student has what they need already in place when they arrive.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.



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**Student experience:**

Much of the information on the foreign exchange programmes is given via public talks without captioning, interpreters or video recordings, and questions are generally taken verbally or over the phone, which is inaccessible to me as a deaf person.

EPFIME Student Research Participant



## Information provision and promotion

This section provides advice, tips and tricks on promoting mobility opportunities to students with disabilities within your institution in a way that:

- Shows them that mobility experiences are available to them and are a great opportunity for them.
- Ensures they can access and understand the key information required to make an informed choice.
- Connects them with students with disabilities who have previously experienced a mobility programme.

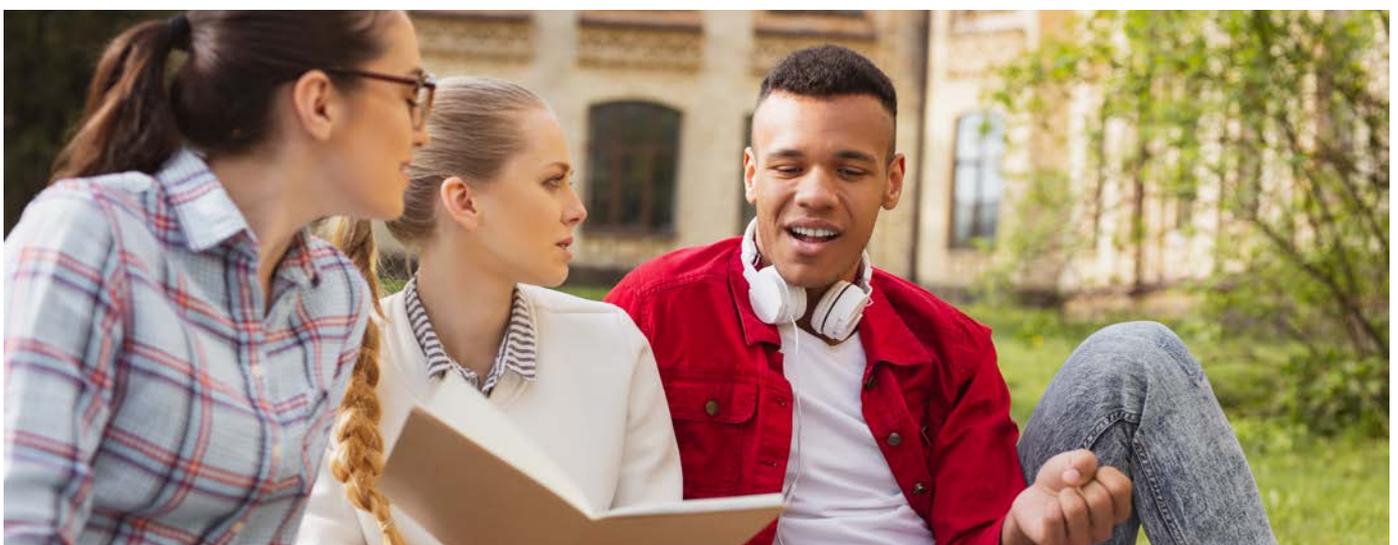
### What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:

The higher education institution informs and sensitizes students with disabilities about mobility programmes, procedures and support measures, and does so in an accessible format.



### More specifically, higher education institutions should:

- Provide targeted information about mobility opportunities for students with disabilities, and do so in an accessible format.
- Market mobility extensively through multiple channels, using a variety of activities and do so in an accessible format.
- Build a network of student ambassadors and schemes to promote mobility opportunities to other students with disabilities.
- Promote itself as a destination for incoming students with disabilities.



## Types of information institutions should provide

All students need information about the various aspects of mobility programmes before they feel confident and comfortable making the decision to study abroad. But for students with disabilities, there are additional things for them to consider. By providing clear information they need about the process and a clear point of contact for queries, institutions can reduce uncertainty and encourage them to take the next step.

Institutions should:

- Ensure positive statements regarding mobility for students with disabilities are included in all information provision with sign-posts and links to how to get more specific information targeted at students with disabilities.

### What additional information do students with disabilities require?

#### Added information that institutions should provide specifically for students with disabilities in promotional material and on request include:

- Clear details of grants and scholarships for students with disabilities and how to apply for them, highlighting any additional funding specifically for students with disabilities such as the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support. [See Applications, grants and funding.](#)
- Support with the upfront calculation of real costs and understanding of how much the associated grants will cover.
- Typical support services available to students with disabilities within the institution (for incoming students) and within host institutions which the institution has signed mobility agreements with (for outgoing students).
- Reassurances and information about the support your institution will provide by working with both the student and the home/host institution to ensure they are fully supported.
- Information about any available opportunities.
- to conduct a preparatory visit to potential host institutions ([see Ensuring students are prepared for mobility](#)) for outgoing students or to facilitate a preparatory visit in your institution for incoming students.
- A named contact in your international/disability office for students with disabilities considering a mobility period to ask for more information.
- Outline of the process of how to avail of disability related support both as an outgoing and incoming student on a mobility programme.
- Detail on whether or not a separate application process exists for students with disabilities and any support available with the application process.
- Detail for incoming students about the accessibility of the host city/location and accessible transport and housing links.

This information should be housed in a prominent, easy to find place on the website, institutional intranet, or in other targeted promotional material. Provide/register the information also on the institutional page of the [inclusivemobility.eu platform](#) to ensure that prospective incoming students can easily access information.

**Additional information which some students with disabilities will require on request in your discussions with them may include:**

- More detailed information about international language requirements. This may be more problematic for example for a deaf student who uses sign language or a student with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia.
- Information about accessibility of host institution and associated housing. Some students, particularly those with mobility impairments may require extensive information about the accessibility of the host institution and surrounding location i.e., city/town/transport system. EPFIME research shows that this information is critical for students when making a decision on where to apply.
- Information about accessing local support networks/groups or medical care in the host location.
- Relevant cultural considerations. For example, in some countries certain disabilities are not recognised and therefore may not be supported, so it's important that students get this information before they apply. Additionally, typical supports provided may vary from country to country so supports offered in host institutions may be different from what they receive in their home institution.

More information about supporting students pre mobility can be found in [Supporting students: pre-departure](#).



## Inclusive and accessible communications

Once institutions have established what key information they need to provide to students with disabilities to support them to make an informed choice to go on a mobility programme, it is vital to ensure that students can access and understand that information.

### Institutions should:

- Use a variety of communication formats and activities and offer choice in how students access key information. The Inclusive Communication Chart below provides guidance on inclusive actions they should take when planning and designing communications for all students to ensure accessibility, and some further options which they can provide for students with specific needs as an alternative or on request.
- Offer key information through more than one of the formats listed below and apply the inclusive actions outlined.

Communication Type	Inclusive Actions in the Design of Communication	Provide Alternative Options/Options Available on Request
Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add closed captions</li> <li>• Ensure on-screen titles and text have good colour contrast</li> </ul>	Audio described version Sign language version
Text and Images - Web page/Word/PDF document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use sans serif fonts (e.g., Calibri, Arial, Verdana) - min. 12pt in size</li> <li>• Use heading tags and styles to structure</li> <li>• Apply alt text to images</li> <li>• Use clear and easy-read language</li> </ul>	Braille version Word alternative to PDF format Large print materials
Live In-Person Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose accessible venue</li> <li>• Lay out room for easy wheelchair access</li> <li>• Ask in registration form for accessibility requirements</li> <li>• Provide materials (e.g., slides) in advance</li> <li>• Use microphones for clear sound and have handheld mics available for questions</li> </ul>	Sign language interpretation Large print materials
Virtual Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use an accessible virtual platform</li> <li>• Provide live closed captions</li> <li>• Record and provide captioned version afterwards</li> <li>• Ask in registration form for accessibility requirements</li> <li>• Provide materials (e.g., slides) in advance</li> </ul>	Sign language interpretation
Information Contact Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide Phone and Email/SMS Contact Point</li> <li>• Offer follow-up Meetings in Accessible Location/Online</li> </ul>	Meetings with sign language interpreter
Social Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply alt text to images</li> <li>• Add captions for video</li> <li>• Capitalise each word in hashtags for accessibility (e.g., #InclusiveMobility)</li> </ul>	Alternatives on request for any video shared as above
Web Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply WCAG standards (Designer)</li> </ul>	Contact point for web accessibility issues

Figure 5 - Inclusive communications chart

## Inclusive communications jargon buster and further guidance

Provided below is some key information to help institutions understand important terms and actions outlined in the Inclusive Information Chart and put these actions into practice:

### Accessible venue

An accessible venue is one in which a wheelchair user has easy access to the building entrance and the room, has space within the room to move around easily (wide passages) and can choose where to sit (e.g., avoid tiered lecture spaces and high pod tables). When selecting a venue, pick one close to a wheelchair accessible restroom and select a room that is easy to find. If the room is not on the ground floor, ensure that there is a convenient elevator nearby. If students/staff with physical disabilities are involved in presenting the event, ensure the stage is wheelchair accessible too.

### Alternative text

Also known as Alt Text, alternative text is one method of presenting a text description of an image for use with screen reading technology. This allows visually impaired users to access descriptions of photographs, illustrations and graphs. Alternative text can be applied to both images in documents or on the web. When adding alt text, it's important to focus on conveying the key information in graphs, illustrations and charts, and for photographs, the content, setting and tone of the image.

Adding alternative text is typically a simple process. To insert alternative text for an image in word for example, right click the image then click 'format picture' or 'format object' (depending what version is being used) and select the 'alternative text' tab on the format window that pops up. Here, one can type in alternative text. Remember that alternative text will not appear in print format.

### Audio description

Audio description is a form of narration used to provide information surrounding key visual elements in media work such as videos, television programmes and film, for the benefit of people who are blind and visually impaired. Typically, audio description will provide information about the setting of a scene of actions taking place which are not evident from the dialog.

### Braille

A form of written language for blind people, in which characters are represented by patterns of raised dots that are felt with the fingertips.



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## Closed captions

Closed captions are subtitles for video/audio which can be switched on or off by the user as required - usually accessed on video streaming sites via the CC button. For your institution's own videos, the institution can either pay a professional captioning service to provide an .SRT captioning file to be added to the video or staff can create them themselves using free online tools. When a video is uploaded to YouTube for example, it will auto-generate closed captions which can be edited to correct errors and add punctuation. Alternatively, if a script already exists for the institution's video, YouTube has a feature which can automatically sync the script to the video, creating accurate closed captions automatically. For more information about closed captions and how to create them, [visit the AHEAD website](#).

## Easy to read language

Easy read is a method of presenting written information to make it easier to understand. Easy read recommends using sentences of no more than ten to fifteen words, with each sentence having just one idea. Easy read materials express ideas/content in simple language and accompanying images.

## Heading tags and styles

Headings and styles are formatting instructions which provide information about document structure in web pages and digital documents, which make them more accessible for a variety of users. For example, using headings and styles in documents are particularly useful for visually impaired screen reader (see below) users as they act as signposts which assist with navigating through digital documents and webpages, allowing them to easily locate the content they require. Microsoft Word for example, has a set of built-in styles which one can apply to denote structure e.g., apply the heading 1 style/tag to main chapter titles, apply the heading 2 style to titles of subsections of the main chapters etc. For more information on how to apply heading tags and styles in Word, [visit the AHEAD website](#).

## Screen reading software and text to speech

A screen reader is a form of assistive technology that renders text and image content as speech or braille output and allows users to navigate software and documents without the use of a screen. Screen readers are often essential for people who are blind/visually impaired to engage with digital content. Text to speech software is useful for other users with print-based disabilities, such as dyslexia, to digest written content. This type of software reads documents aloud or converts them in to mp3s so users can listen to them instead of reading them.

## Sign language

Sign language is a language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and postures of the body, used primarily by people who are deaf. Often sign language is the first language of deaf/hard of hearing people so remember that if they also speak the native language, it may be their second language. Like with verbal languages, countries typically have their own dialects of sign language which are completely different to each other so bare this in mind when dealing with incoming deaf students.

## WCAG

WCAG is the acronym for the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which are an international standard defining how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. WCAG provides a common definition and benchmark for accessible web content globally and your institutions web designer/ICT team will likely be able to confirm that the institution's website meets the standard.

## Targeted promotions for students with disabilities

By creating specific campaigns and events designed for students with disabilities interested in mobility programmes, a clear message is sent to students that they are available to them and are a great opportunity for them to consider.

### Institutions should:

- Organise a joint event between the international and disability/inclusion office to directly target future students with disabilities.
- When organising promotional events either in person or online, make sure the venue is physically/virtually accessible and that a range of access needs have been planned for. To ensure accessibility of events, institutions should:
  - Prior to an event put a mechanism in place that allows interested students to request a support or accessibility requirement and monitor the entries (e.g., as part of an event registration form).
  - Ensure there is a wheelchair accessible restroom at the venue. If the event is not on the ground floor, make sure that there is a convenient elevator nearby. If students/staff with physical disabilities are involved in presenting the event, ensure the stage is wheelchair accessible too.
  - Set aside a quiet time at an event when no music is played to facilitate students with sensory disabilities and those on the autism spectrum to attend in comfort.
  - Ensure all staff and volunteers at events have had some basic disability awareness training (for example, on how to be a sighted guide for a visually impaired student).
  - Ensure (PowerPoint) presentations are accessible. Provide (PowerPoint) slides or other relevant documents to participants in advance where possible. To view a 90-minute webinar on making PowerPoint presentations accessible, [visit the AHEAD website](#). Alternatively view [this web resource from SIHO](#) on the topic.
  - Provide sign language interpreters on request.
  - Provide closed captions on any videos/streamed materials shown at events or throughout for virtual events.
  - Provide promotional materials in easy-to-read and alternative formats.
  - For online events, select an accessible virtual platform and hire a captioning service to provide closed captions.
- Involve previous study abroad student ambassadors to promote mobility opportunities at these events (see next paragraph).
- Offer a range of other ways for students to connect and get key advice or support outside of promotional events.



## Ask student and staff ambassadors to share and highlight the message

Asking students with disabilities in your institution or those involved with local student organisations to share their previous experiences of mobility programmes, at promotional events and in promotional materials is a great way to build the confidence of others who are considering their options.

Connecting them with their peers helps to make a mobility programme feel more achievable and offers a valuable chance for students to ask questions to someone who has really experienced what it is like.

### Institutions should:

- Create collaborations between the international and disability office to recruit previous study abroad students with disabilities to help promote mobility programmes by sharing their experiences and ‘buddying up’ with students considering their options.
- Engage with incoming students with disabilities and seek to recruit them as student ambassadors to share their experiences on mobility with other students.
- Use these ambassadors to share their experiences and encourage participation in mobility programmes in a variety of ways e.g., blogs on the institution website, promotional videos of social media campaigns or contributions to events.

Equally, encouraging and supporting the incoming and outgoing mobility of staff members with disabilities is a great way to promote inclusive mobility. When students can actively see staff members with disabilities on incoming mobility working on campus, they become more confident in the idea that they can participate on a mobility programme themselves.

Promote your institution as a destination for incoming students with disabilities

So far in this section, advice has been provided on how to inclusively promote mobility programmes to students in your institution. But it is also important to promote your institution as a destination for students with disabilities abroad who are considering their options.

### Institutions should:

- Actively ‘call’ for incoming students and staff with disabilities to consider a mobility period at your institution through information on your institution’s website and through the various social media channels used by your institution.
- Provide contact details for a knowledgeable staff member in the disability/international office on your website so students with disabilities considering a mobility period at your institution can contact this person directly for more information about the application procedure, financial information, and what sorts of support services are available to students with disabilities, including how to avail of them.

- Set and monitor targets for the participation of students with disabilities in incoming as well as outgoing mobility programmes. [See Evidence informed planning and monitoring](#) for more information about setting and monitoring targets.

## Good practice in action - KU Leuven

**In order to inform outgoing students with a disability as well as possible and encourage them to explore mobility opportunities, KU Leuven developed a web section ‘On Erasmus+ with a disability’ with specific targeted information.**

On that web section, students can find information about financing study abroad, tips for choosing the right host university and things to think about regarding the support they might need to live and learn abroad. It includes key information about the steps students should take if they are interested and a direct contact for a staff member who can work with them to plan the exchange together.

Additionally, the web section has a page where students can explore the past experiences of KU Leuven students with disabilities studying abroad. This is important for students to help them to feel confident that they can successfully study abroad too.

Also, they try to motivate students with a disability via their disability service newsletters to contact the service when considering their exchange if they have questions about their disability in the context of a mobility programme.

KU Leuven also provides extensive information for incoming students with disabilities on a dedicated section of their website. Here, students can find key information about applying to study in KU Leuven, what study programmes are available and how to register with the disability service and get supports. There is also information about getting the most out of their college experience, with a checklist to help students prepare for living at KU Leuven.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and yours can too by following the action points in this chapter.





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**Student experience:**

The problem is you have to calculate all costs before you go. The total amount with the explanation for your calculation is part of the application process and then you have to collect all invoices at your host country. If expenses are higher than calculated before, you have to pay this from your own pocket. If your expenses are lower than calculated, you have to pay the money back. The reality is you always have some unexpected costs which you hadn't included in your calculation before, so you have to calculate the worst-case scenario to have some space for unexpected costs.

EPFIME Student Research Participant

# Applications, grants and funding

This section provides advice, tips and tricks on supporting students with disabilities to apply for mobility opportunities in a way that:

- Ensures that they are encouraged to disclose their disability and shown the benefits of doing so.
- Provides clarity about what funding is available and how it can be accessed.
- Builds accessibility into the application process and offers them confidence-building support throughout.

## What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:

The higher education institution provides clear information and advice to students on their funding options, offers clear and user-friendly applications and provides assistance in the application process and targeted financial support.



## More specifically, higher education institutions should:

- Inform students on their funding options.
- Offer clear and user-friendly applications.
- Provide assistance in the application process to students with specific needs.
- Provide targeted financial support for students with disabilities.



## Disclosure of disability and why it matters

Disclosure in its simplest terms means to inform someone about one's disability or make information about it known. It sounds simple, but disclosure is frequently cited as one of the most challenging aspects of having a disability, and if students do not disclose to staff in the receiving or host institution, then vital preparations for supporting students on mobility cannot take place.

### Some reasons students with disabilities may not disclose include:

- they do not want to focus greater attention on their disability.
- they fear their abilities will be underestimated by staff or their peers and worry about stigma.
- they think other students or staff may feel uncomfortable engaging with them.
- they worry that others may feel they are being given an unfair advantage where supports are provided.
- they are not aware that they have a particular condition or do not have the required medical documentation to register for support i.e., it has never been officially diagnosed.
- their disability is not recognised as a condition in the jurisdiction of the home/host institution.
- they have previously been able to access all their support needs within mainstream provision in their home institution e.g., in a well-designed institution with a universal design ethos.
- they have never been encouraged to disclose and have not understood the benefits of disclosure.

Disclosure is complex and influenced by a number of factors such as self-identity, personality, type of disability, family context, previous educational experience and the institutional culture. But the importance of disclosure on mobility cannot be underestimated. Without it, students with disabilities risk not being adequately supported in the host institution/location. There may even be health and safety implications. This is particularly pertinent when it comes to students with higher support needs, for example, students with physical, sensory or mental health conditions.

Therefore, it's imperative that students are encouraged to disclose a disability or medical condition from the beginning of the application process, as well as in general promotional material about mobility. One key step is to include an opportunity to disclose within the mobility application form by including a question asking the applicant if they have a disability/medical condition.

Sample mobility application form disclosure question: Do you have a disability, learning difficulty or medical condition? (If so, you may be able to access increased financial support on your mobility programme and support from the institution in making arrangements with your host institution - contact us for more information).

International relations offices and disability services need to ensure they provide clear channels of communication and easy ways for students with disabilities to get further information about applying for a mobility programme and who to contact. Institutions should provide a named person and include their contact on promotional material/website etc.

The international office, disability support office and departmental mobility coordinators should actively promote the benefits of disclosure of disability to students during the application phase and provide as many avenues as possible for disclosure to occur.

**These benefits may include:**

- eligibility for extra funding for their support needs while on a mobility programme.
- greater access in the host institution to a range of possible supports on the mobility programme, such as additional tuition or extra time during examinations - easier access to help when it is needed.
- information sharing between the home and host institution to inform them if the student requires reasonable adjustments and to ensure support arrangements can be made in advance.
- ability for home and host institutions to put in place emergency or contingency plans for students who need it.
- the possibility to visit the host institution in preparation for mobility to experience the campus and city and make important arrangements.

Institutions should develop a procedure around what happens once an applicant discloses a disability or medical condition as part of a mobility application and who has responsibility for which actions. (For more information see sections on [effective collaboration](#) and [support pre-mobility](#)).



## Providing and promoting financial assistance and grants



The first step institutional staff should take is to ensure they understand themselves what grants and financial assistance are available to all incoming and outgoing students seeking to experience international mobility - both inside and outside of the Erasmus+ Programme. Next, they should research what added financial assistance may be available for students with disabilities in their jurisdiction on mobility and get clarity on which grants students currently hold in their institution are transferable and may be used abroad should they go on a mobility programme.

EPFIME research highlighted that a lack of personal/staff awareness of added grant availability and a lack of clear available information about the portability of grants and support services abroad, represent significant barriers for students with disabilities.

### Added financial support availability for students with disabilities to research could include:

- European grants which cover the additional living/travelling/support costs arising as a result of a student's disability such as the [Erasmus+ Special Needs Support](#). This grant is available to students with disabilities on Erasmus+ programmes, where added funds are required due to the impact of disability. It is typically administered through the Erasmus+ national agency in the country of the home institution.
- National maintenance grants or disability support grants which may be transferable on mobility programmes for outgoing students or accessible to incoming students e.g., continuing to access a state fund for the provision of personal assistance while abroad or continuing to access the standard student grant.
- National/regional grants or mobility scholarships aimed at students with disabilities which may be provided by:
  - the Erasmus+ National Agency or Ministry of Education.
  - regional councils or local authorities.
  - national disability focused NGOs or social enterprises.
  - philanthropic funds or businesses.
- Existing institutional grants for mobility.

During this exercise, institutions should gather information on eligibility for grants, what is covered by each grant, evidence required to demonstrate disability (if relevant), other key information required to apply for the grant and where to find grant application and submission information. It's also important to gather information at this stage about which of these grants institutional staff may also be eligible for and which national support grants are transferable to study in other jurisdictions.

Having this information also enables institutions to effectively promote grant availability, provide quality assistance in the application process, analyse gaps in the funding provided and use this information to develop targeted institutional grants.

## Promotion of additional grants available

Once institutions have clarity on the full range of financial assistance available to students with disabilities on mobility, they can ensure that students themselves have the information they need to make an informed choice.

### Institutions should:

- Ensure clear information is provided on their website on general mobility grant availability, coverage and eligibility. This information should be easy to understand and accessible - [see Inclusive and accessible communications](#) on inclusive and accessible communications for more advice on how to achieve this.
- Ensure targeted information is provided through multiple channels on additional grants available to students with disabilities. Information provided should include:
  - o eligibility criteria for grants.
  - o evidence required to demonstrate disability (if relevant).
  - o what key information is required when applying for a grant e.g., with the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support, an accurate estimate of the added costs that will be incurred as a result of disability for travel, accommodation, support, etc.
  - o what is covered by each grant e.g., general living and study costs or disability-related costs only.
  - o grant application timelines.
  - o where to find grant application and submission information.
- Provide named contact in your international/disability office for students with disabilities considering a mobility period to ask for support with grant applications.
- Provide information and links to any available national support organisations who may be able to offer advice such as the national Student's Union or the [local branch of the Erasmus Student Network](#).
- Encourage early application for students with disabilities to help ensure that the required time is available for the student to undertake the additional grant application process and for institutions to plan in advance for support provision ([see Supporting students: pre-departure](#)). EPFIME research highlighted that planning and preparation for an international mobility programme takes significantly more time for students with disabilities when compared to their non-disabled peers.

## Providing institutional grants

Institutions can demonstrate their commitment to increasing the numbers of students with disabilities on mobility by providing targeted institutional grants and scholarships for incoming and outgoing students with disabilities which address gaps in the national and regional grant provision.

Provision of such targeted grants should be included as a priority in the development of [an institutional mobility strategy which is optimised for inclusion as outlined in Inclusion in mobility strategies](#).

Once institutions have analysed information collected on the range of available grants for students with disabilities nationally and regionally, they should then use this information alongside evidence gathered from [the data collection and evaluation exercises outlined in Evidence informed planning and monitoring](#) to determine gaps in grant coverage and areas where institutional grants or scholarships could have the biggest positive impact.

## Some areas where targeted grants/scholarships could be provided include:

- Grants to cover the travel and subsistence costs of exploratory preparatory visits to prospective home/host institutions prior to application or mobility, which EPFIME research shows are highly valued by students with disabilities. Institutions should consider including reciprocal arrangements to cover the cost of preparatory visits in inter-institutional mobility agreements.
- Mobility grants which target students in specific disability categories who have been identified as having low participation in mobility programmes through national research or institutional monitoring.
- General mobility scholarships for students with disabilities which recognise the added cost of disability when living and learning in another country and seek to offer added incentives for students to participate.

Any gaps in the national/regional provision of mobility grants for students with disabilities identified by the institution when examining its own grant provision should be brought to the attention of relevant regional and national agencies and authorities.



## Providing support with applications and finance

EPFIME research shows that students with disabilities often experience significant barriers in the application process for mobility. Students often encounter a lack of clarity about which added grants are available to them, what they cover and how to apply. Many find that the application forms themselves are provided in inaccessible formats.

There are additional responsibilities and burdens placed on students with disabilities regarding the administration of grants and the organisation of additional supports too. Regarding the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support for example, additional costs as a result of a disability need to be fully investigated and estimated upfront and detailed in the grant application. For students with complex needs, this can involve exploring a Support Mobility Plan with the host institution and getting quotations from travel companies, specialist accommodation providers, medical equipment suppliers, personal assistance/care providers, or other relevant support providers as necessary.

Once on mobility, the student has to ensure that they record and keep receipts for all related expenditure so they can provide the required evidence that the grant has been spent appropriately once their mobility is completed. In many jurisdictions, if the original estimate is inaccurate and less than the actual costs incurred, the student has to cover the difference from their own resources.

This is why it is vital to support students through the application and financial reporting process and to encourage early application. Early application enquiries ensure there is sufficient time for the student to undertake a preparatory visit to the prospective host institution, to collaboratively develop a Support Mobility Plan ([outlined in Collaboratively developing a Support Mobility Plan](#)) and use that to inform accurate financial estimates.

### Institutions should:

- Ensure that the application form for mobility and associated grants are accessible and that the availability of support is inclusively promoted - [see Information provision and promotion](#) for more guidance.
- Promote the benefits of early application for students with disabilities through a variety of channels.
- Provide named contact in your international/disability office for students with disabilities considering a mobility period to ask for support with applications.
- Provide comprehensive support for students with disabilities throughout the enquiry and application process for both the mobility itself and the related grants. This is of particular importance for students with complex needs. Areas of support offered through the application and grant management process could include:
  - o provision of alternative format application forms on request.
  - o support with the organisation and funding of a preparatory visit to the host institution before the mobility, should one be required prior to application or the mobility itself - [see Ensuring students are prepared for mobility](#) for more guidance on preparatory visits.

- o working in tandem with the student and the home/host institution to develop an accurate estimation of added disability-related costs required for some grant applications such as the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support grant. This may involve collaboration in the development of an outline Support Mobility Plan ([see Collaboratively developing a Support Mobility Plan](#)) to determine required supports and/or a preparatory visit to the host institution to explore possibilities - particularly where students with complex support needs are concerned.
- o support for students with complex support needs to record and document expenditure related to additional support grants so that they can provide evidence to the grant provider that funds were spent appropriately.



## Good practice in action - SRH University Heidelberg

■ **When a student with a disability wishes to go on an exchange from SRH University Heidelberg the university helps them to navigate the application process for both the exchange itself and for the additional Erasmus+ Special Needs Support grant for disability support, if required.**

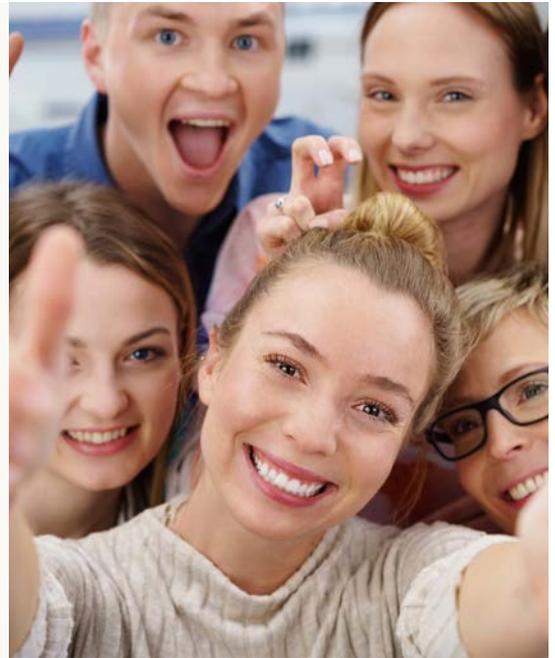
When a student first presents, they establish close communication between the student and key staff members in a faculty and the international office within the university, to ensure they understand the students' needs and the possibilities for exchange. They then communicate frequently with both the prospective host institution and the student, to work out the details of the study abroad experience.

If additional funding is required for disability support or extra living and travel costs as a result of a disability, the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support application can be complex and the university supports the student through this process. This includes working with the student to source appropriate evidence of disability for the application and liaising with the funding body on the application, if necessary.

When a student with personal support needs such as the requirement for a personal assistant is involved, the costs of support can be high and accurate estimates need to be provided well in advance of their exchange in order to access the funding and ensure the grant covers the actual costs involved.

The university supports the student to make enquiries and gather the information they need to make an accurate estimate of financial support required to cover their support needs while on an exchange, and helps them to incorporate this in their additional support grant application.

They also help them to arrange and submit their receipts and invoices during and after the exchange to evidence that the support grant has been spent appropriately.



Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and yours can too by following the action points in this chapter.

”

**Student experience:**

I had the possibility to find a good accessible accommodation, pre-visit the university and visit an information centre for people with disabilities in my host city, which helped me organize medical aids and to search for personal assistance in advance of my studies.

EPFIME Student Research Participant



## Supporting students: pre-departure

This section provides advice, tips and tricks on assessing the needs of students pre-departure and working to prepare them for mobility in a way that:

- Ensures the home/host institutions and the student fully understand their needs and responsibilities and can make arrangements for appropriate supports.
- Builds the confidence of students to undertake mobilities by offering opportunities to experience the host city and institution in advance.
- Equips students with knowledge and skills to give them the best chance of a successful mobility experience.



### What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:

The higher education institution provides qualitative support services both for incoming and outgoing students with disabilities before mobility.

### More specifically, higher education institutions should:

- Provide information and assistance to students related to insurance, visa, accommodation, funding, reasonable adjustments, disclosure, (international) travel, etc.
- Provide a needs assessment to identify the expectations and the support needs of incoming and outgoing students with disabilities, while contacting the host institution to discuss the study conditions and support.
- Ensure opportunities for preparatory visits.
- Create a pre-mobility network for students.
- Provide pre-mobility trainings (e.g. language teaching) in an accessible way.

## Assessing needs and risks

Before institutions can put appropriate support in place for students with disabilities on mobility, they first must understand the strengths and needs of the individual student, the demands of their mobility programme and any potential risks associated with it.

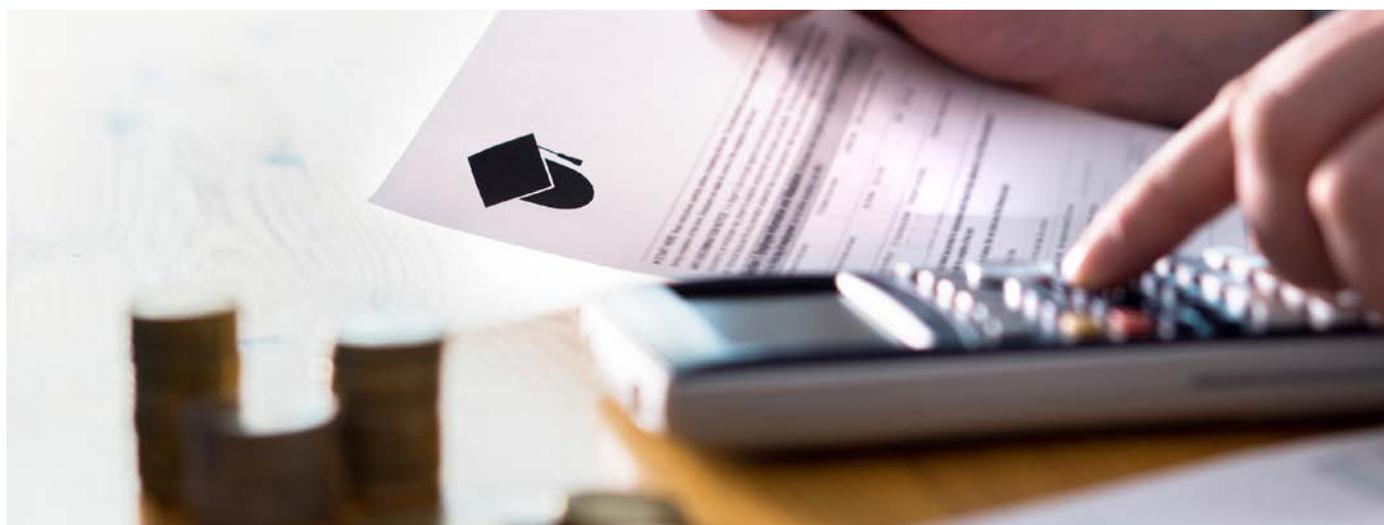
In many jurisdictions, having a disclosure of a disability from a student creates a legal requirement for education providers to undertake a needs assessment, to ascertain whether or not they have any disability related support needs while studying there.

A needs assessment can be described as a systematic process for the collection of information and data to accurately reflect the strengths and needs of a particular individual. This process of gathering information in an objective and comprehensive way is important, as it forms the basis for planning the provision of supports for students with disabilities, typically known as reasonable adjustments. It is an interactive process where not only the student's challenges and support needs are explored, but also the strengths of the individual and the interaction between the individual and the academic and personal environment.

For many students with disabilities, a needs assessment will have taken place when they first arrived in their home institution, long before mobility has been considered. Others however, may only disclose a disability to their home institution when applying to go on a mobility. In some cases, students may not have even disclosed to their home institution at all and may disclose to the host institution while on mobility. Whenever disclosure occurs, a needs assessment is an important first step in understanding the impact of disability on the student and what supports are appropriate for them. In the case of mobility, the process of assessing needs and developing a Support Mobility Plan should begin as soon as possible to ensure that vital information for grant applications can be gathered and plans put in place.

### Institutions should:

- If one has not already taken place, conduct a needs assessment to establish the impact of the disability and use the outcomes to inform the development of a Support Mobility Plan in collaboration with the student and the home/host institution.
- Where a needs assessment already exists, take further steps with the student and the home/host institution to evaluate additional needs during the mobility and develop a Support Mobility Plan.



## Why is a needs assessment important?

In general, the supports identified by a student's needs assessment can bridge gaps in their academic performance caused by the impact of disability and enable students to fully participate in higher education. Relevant supports or 'reasonable adjustments' could include the provision of equipment and services, online lecture notes, flexibility with deadlines, examination adjustments or professional personal assistance. Additionally, the needs assessment process ensures quality and transparency in the provision of support, offers clarity of responsibility for staff, and provides a documentary trail of evidence in case of complaints.

In the case of a mobility period abroad, a student with a disability may require additional supports over and above what they require for study in their home country, and that is why all relevant needs for mobility should be specifically evaluated, and supports detailed in a specific Support Mobility Plan which can be developed in tandem between the student and the home and host institutions.

## The needs assessment process

Although there may be variations in how institutions conduct needs assessments and in the assessment methodologies and tools they use, there are three common elements inherent in all needs assessment processes:

- 1. Course/basic student information gathering**
- 2. The student interview - identification of impact of disability and potential supports**
- 3. Reporting/planning**

### Step 1: Course/ basic student information gathering

The student typically registers with Disability Support/Student Services and provides relevant information and documentation such as psychological or medical reports if available and details of previous supports in education/employment, if applicable. The Disability Officer/designated staff member researches the course/mobility programme and the physical/sensory environment to identify demands on the student and highlight potential issues for discussion. For mobility, this process can be done collaboratively between the home and host institution.



## Step 2:

### The student interview - identification of impact of disability and potential supports

An assessment interview is conducted with the student to fully explore and identify their strengths and needs and the steps required to reduce the impact of their disability on their learning. Specific course/programme demands are discussed with the student, to work through potential areas where support may be required and agree an outline of supports and reasonable adjustments to be provided.

Remember that in terms of identifying support, needs assessors should seek to identify the overlap between the impact of a student's disability and the demands of the course/environment. In the case where the assessment is being conducted solely for a mobility period, this dialogue should involve an appropriate staff member from both the home and host institution.



Figure 6 - Identifying support needs

## Step 3:

### Reporting/planning

The assessment report is written up, an action plan is created with relevant staff and agreed supports are put in place. In the case where the assessment is being conducted solely for a mobility period, the supports and agreed actions should be documented in a specific Support Mobility Plan. The information derived from the assessment and the development of the plan can also be used to inform the grant application (i.e., the estimated costs of support).

These guidelines focus on support for mobility, but for a more general look at the impact of disability in higher education on students with different types of disabilities, [view this SIHO resource which lists facts about different disability types, common challenges experienced and examples of supports provided.](#)

## Who is generally Involved in the needs assessment process?

While the Disability Officer/designated person may seek input from other sources in their enquiries such as medical professionals (via supplied medical reports) and course coordinators (regarding the demands of the course), the needs assessment process itself is typically a structured conversation between the disability officer and the student. However, in the case where the assessment is being conducted solely for a mobility period, the supports and agreed actions should be developed and agreed between the student, home and host institution and staff from both the Disability and International Office should be involved in the dialogue.

## Building on an existing needs assessment

In many cases, students with disabilities will already have undergone a needs assessment when first arriving at the home institution and a support plan devised for their studies. In such cases, it is not necessary to conduct a full needs assessment from scratch. Instead, the home and host institution in collaboration with the student can update and use the already existing assessment and support plan for the basis of their discussions and the development of the Support Mobility Plan.

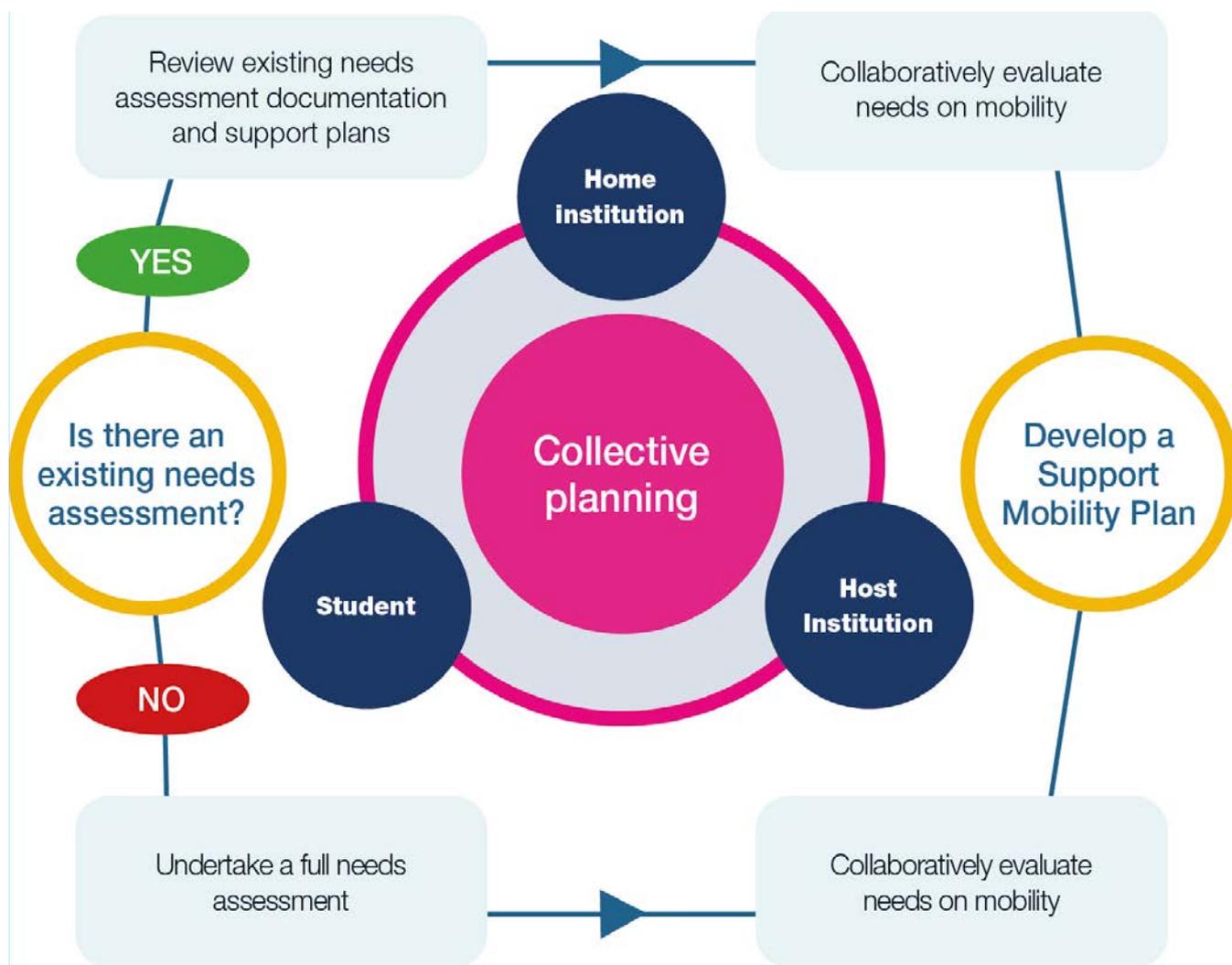


Figure 7 - Developing a support mobility plan

## Privacy and permission - data gathering & sharing

One of the core principles of the needs assessment process and resulting Support Mobility Plan is confidentiality and as such, sensitive information should be disseminated to relevant staff on a strictly need-to-know basis. For example, academic staff should be informed only of their role in providing what a student needs, rather than the disability or medical condition a student has.

However, regarding mobility, since both the international and disability office of both the home and host institution play key roles in confirming the availability of the supports required and working together on the implementation of the recommended supports, key staff members in these offices will need access to the relevant information and students should be consulted in advance to ensure they are comfortable with this information being shared.

Permission and informed consent for the sharing of the contents of a needs assessment and/or a Support Mobility Plan in particular should be gained in writing from the student before sharing and information provided on the purpose for collecting/sharing of the information, how it will be used, who will broadly have access to it and how it will be stored and disposed of in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Regarding the storing of confidential student information, institutions should ensure that they are conforming to data protection legislation and staff should liaise with their IT department as necessary to guarantee security of electronic file storage.



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## Collaboratively developing a Support Mobility Plan

A Support Mobility Plan is a document which outlines details of a student's needs on mobility, recommended actions which need to be taken to support the student and details of the responsibility for completing those actions. In order for students with disabilities to have the best chance of a successful mobility period, it is vital that the plan is developed collaboratively between the student, the home institution and the host institution.

### To go about developing an individual Support Mobility Plan, institutions should:

- Ascertain the general support needs for the student through conducting a needs assessment or reviewing of an existing assessment/support plan.
- Collaboratively explore:
  - o the additional challenges the student may face on mobility due to the change of institution, environment and course demands.
  - o the transferability/availability of any existing supports in the host institution and the provision of added supports if necessary.
  - o potential risks and actions in the event of a crisis.
  - o other actions required to ensure the smooth operation of the mobility (e.g., support with travel and finding accommodation).
- Use the outcomes of these discussions to develop a written plan agreed by all parties with clearly outlined responsibilities concerning the needs of the student, the smooth preparation and operation of the mobility, and the provision of support.

In some cases where a needs assessment exists and a student's needs are not complex, the process may only involve the sharing of information (with consent) via email and a virtual meeting between all parties. Developing a plan for a student with more complex needs however, may require lots of communication and multiple meetings between the parties, as well as a preparatory visit for the student to the host institution.

### Common challenges and questions to explore when developing the plan

Going on a mobility poses challenges for all students, but there are significant additional challenges for students with disabilities. In order for institutions to proactively put support in place for individual students, it is important for them to try to understand and pre-empt the challenges they may face. Home and host institutions can achieve this by working together with the student to assess their needs and develop a Support Mobility Plan.

Every individual's experience of disability is different and their needs will vary, so students themselves must be actively involved in the planning and preparation of the mobility period in order to provide the best opportunity for a successful experience.

Examples of some of the many possible challenges faced by students with disabilities specifically on mobility are listed below, along with related questions to be explored when developing the plan.

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**Depending on the nature of the disability, some questions or topics that may need to be collaboratively explored when developing the Support Mobility Plan include:**

- **Course demands:** What are the demands of the chosen course/programme (for example, language requirements, field visits, professional placements etc.)? Do they differ from those in the home institution and if so, how will this impact the student?
- **Cultural concerns:** What are typical cultural attitudes to disability in the host country like and is the student's disability recognised legally by the host institution/country?
- **Support provision:** Are typical disability related supports different than in the home institution? For example, what are the typical examination accommodations offered to students with these particular needs? If different, how will that impact the student? Can existing or similar support be replicated in the host institution and if not, how will this impact the student's learning?
- **Transferability of supports:** What (if any) support can be brought with the student (e.g., existing assistive technologies)?
- **Teaching and learning practices:** What standard teaching and learning methods are used and are practices different to those in the host institution (e.g., do academic staff regularly make their notes available online)?
- **Digital access:** Is the Learning Management System (LMS) accessible to people with disabilities (e.g., to visually impaired students using screen reading technologies) in the host institution? Does the institution provide accessible learning materials?
- **Physical access:** Is the physical environment in the institution accessible, in particular in the buildings where lectures will take place and services are accessed? How accessible is the local area and transport system more generally? Will students be able to navigate their way around and access the full mobility experience?
- **Accommodation:** Is there good availability of student accommodation close to the host institution and is it accessible if necessary? Is support provided to help the student source such accommodation?
- **Access to relevant medical services:** Does the student require access to medical services/ prescribed medication as a result of their disability and will these services be readily available in the host country? How difficult will it be to organise them?
- **Accessing mental health supports:** Particularly important for those with a diagnosed mental health condition - how will they react when they no longer have access to their usual counsellor/therapist and will they be able to access an alternative in the host country?
- **Health and safety risks:** Are there specific health and safety considerations in relation to the student? For example, if the student has epilepsy, what is the appropriate procedure in the event of a seizure and who needs to be informed?
- **Living support and personal assistance:** Does the student need daily living support, for example, an assistance animal or a personal assistant? If so:

- o Can they be sourced locally or will they need to be brought from the home country with the student?
  - o How many hours per day are required?
  - o Regarding an assistance animal, will they be able to travel and what related documentation may be required? Will they need access to veterinary services?
- **Separation from family/friend support networks and NGOs:** Many students with disabilities rely more heavily on these networks for support than others, so how will they cope without them?
  - **Communication and language:** Particularly challenging for those with language/learning difficulties and those who are deaf or hard of hearing - will they be able to interact with locals on a daily basis and if they require sign language interpretation, will they be able to access interpreters for their local sign language?
  - **Support funding:** How will personal assistance or other additional supports be funded? Will students be supported to accurately estimate the funds they need and navigate the process of applying for grants?
  - **The social experience:** Particularly for students whose disability means that social interactions are challenging - what opportunities will they have to make friends and build a peer network? What social supports can be put in place to support this?
  - **Preparatory visit:** Is a visit to the host institution prior to the actual mobility required, for the student to meet staff and experience the city and institutional environment before finalising their decision and application to go on mobility? These preparatory visits are highly valued by students with disabilities and are particularly important to assist with decision-making and planning for students with complex needs (e.g., blind/visually impaired students or those with physical disabilities).
  - **Traveling:** Can the student travel alone and is mobility assistance required? Are there accessible transport links from the airport to their planned accommodation? Do they have any required visas for their stay in the host country?



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These are just some of the questions which may need to be collectively teased out during the process of assessing needs and devising the Support Mobility Plan. For a more general look at the common impact of disability in higher education on students with different types of disabilities, [view this SIHO resource which lists facts about different disability types, common challenges experienced and examples of supports provided.](#)

## Documenting the plan

All agreed actions to support the student should be documented in a finalised Support Mobility Plan and signed by the student and an appropriate representative from the home and host institution.

### **Institutions should ensure the Support Mobility Plan contains:**

- Relevant details of the student's disability and needs. Examples could include:
  - o information about learning needs.
  - o daily living requirements, such as a personal assistant or assistance animal.
  - o physical access needs such as institution campus, local area, transport etc.
  - o communication needs.
  - o important relevant medical information.
- Agreed learning and living supports and details of responsibility for support organisation and provision.
- Agreed points of contact and responsibilities outlined for supporting the student with:
  - o completing grant applications for mobility and added applications to cover the costs of disability support where eligible.
  - o organising a preparatory visit if required.
  - o organising a pre-mobility workshop or other related preparation activities.
  - o preparing for travel.
  - o sourcing accommodation.
  - o finding relevant medical services if required.
  - o crisis response.
- Clarifications where required on funding of supports.
- Consent from the student to share information on a need-to-know basis with relevant staff in the home and host institution in order to implement the plan.

The important thing is that all relevant learning and living needs and supports are documented and responsibilities for implementing actions are clarified.

A sample Support Mobility Plan is available on the Inclusive Mobility website.

# Ensuring students are prepared for mobility

## Facilitating a preparatory visit

The EPFIME research report shows that students with disabilities highly value the opportunity to visit the host institution and city in advance of going on mobility, and if possible, in advance of making their final decision. The benefits of a preparatory visit are particularly positive for students with more complex support needs such as those with visual impairments and physical disabilities.

Such students will likely wish to fully understand the accessibility of the host destination prior to making a final decision on whether to go on a mobility. The best way for them to do this is to go on a preparatory visit so they can experience the physical environment for themselves and discover the available supports in the institution. They also offer the opportunity for students to explore the availability of local medical assistance or other supports. They can then make an informed decision about the suitability of the institution/location. These visits build student confidence in undertaking a mobility, ensure that student expectations are realistic and reduce the possibility of an unsuccessful mobility experience.

Ideally, a preparatory visit will take place before the student has made a final decision and the outcome of the visit can inform the support grant application and the Support Mobility Plan.

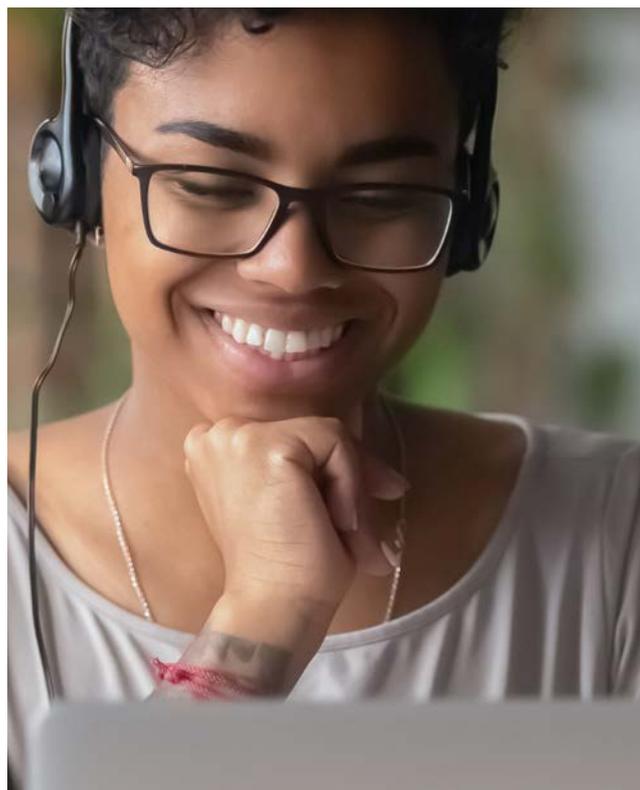
If a preparatory visit is recommended and desired, then there needs to be a discussion and an agreement between the student and home and host institution in relation to who needs to travel with the student (if anyone) and how the trip is financed.

Some institutions and national agencies offer and finance preparatory visits where beneficial to the student. Joint or reciprocal funding arrangements for these trips can also be included in inter-institutional agreements concerning mobility.

### Institutions should:

- Offer students with disabilities, especially those with complex needs, the opportunity to undertake a preparatory visit and work with the host institution to organise it.
- Explore whether national funding for preparatory visits already exists. Where no funding exists, institutions should seek to establish an institutional fund and explore the inclusion of reciprocal funding for preparatory visits in any inter-institutional mobility agreement.

Prior to the preparatory visit, an itinerary should be drawn up in consultation with the student and staff from the home and host institution.



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## Providing pre-mobility training

Going to live abroad is a daunting prospect for anyone, but with the right preparation, international students can settle in quickly and thrive. There are however extra considerations for students with disabilities, and by developing and delivering a pre-mobility workshop or more tailored training to students in advance of their mobility, you can support them to personally plan for a successful experience. Topics covered in a workshop or specific training could include:

- Intercultural awareness.
- Language classes - delivered in an accessible manner and taking into account individual student's needs, e.g., speech and language difficulties.
- Budgeting for a successful mobility experience.
- Getting involved in local life - tips on how to make the best of mobility and meet like-minded individuals abroad.
- Managing your wellbeing on mobility and what to do if you encounter a problem.

## Connecting students to their peers

One of the best ways for institutions to build a student's confidence in going on mobility is create a pre-mobility network for them by connecting them with:

- Any students who have been on a mobility in the region/institution they are considering.
- Any students who are also considering going on a mobility to the same region/institution.
- Students with disabilities (especially those with similar disabilities) who have more generally had a mobility experience before, or those who are currently on mobility in the institution.

This can be done prior to the mobility when students are considering their application or planning their mobility so that they can ask questions and seek advice about mobility experiences generally, or more specific advice about the institution and location.

You can build these connections in a range of different ways.

With prior permission from each student, you can send an email to two or more students you wish to connect, introducing them to each other and suggesting they meet up to share experiences and offer advice. Alternatively, you could arrange a coffee morning for students with disabilities planning their mobility, inviting students who have had previous experiences along to offer tips and field questions.

## Good practice in action - KU Leuven

**In KU Leuven, both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the disability service for support well in advance of their exchange.**

The general application form to go on a mobility programme contains a question asking students if they wish to disclose a disability. When disclosure occurs, the student is referred to the Disability Officer to support preparations for mobility.

Regarding outgoing students, those registered with the Disability Office will already have undertaken a needs assessment for studying at KU Leuven. Prior to mobility, the Disability Office works with the student to explore their extra needs in terms of studying and living abroad covering areas including learning supports, travel, housing and medical needs.

They, along with the International Office, inform students about the grants available to cover additional costs for students with disabilities on mobility, explore the possible added costs that may occur as a result of their disability with them, and support the student in drawing up a cost estimate, which is required for the added grant application.

KU Leuven then supports the student to communicate this information to the International Office/ Disability Office in the host institution by helping them to identify appropriate contacts. Where possible, they inform the students about opportunities for a preparatory visit to explore their host institution and planned accommodation. Once the student is on an exchange, they typically check in with the student, especially those with complex needs, to ensure their support needs are being met.

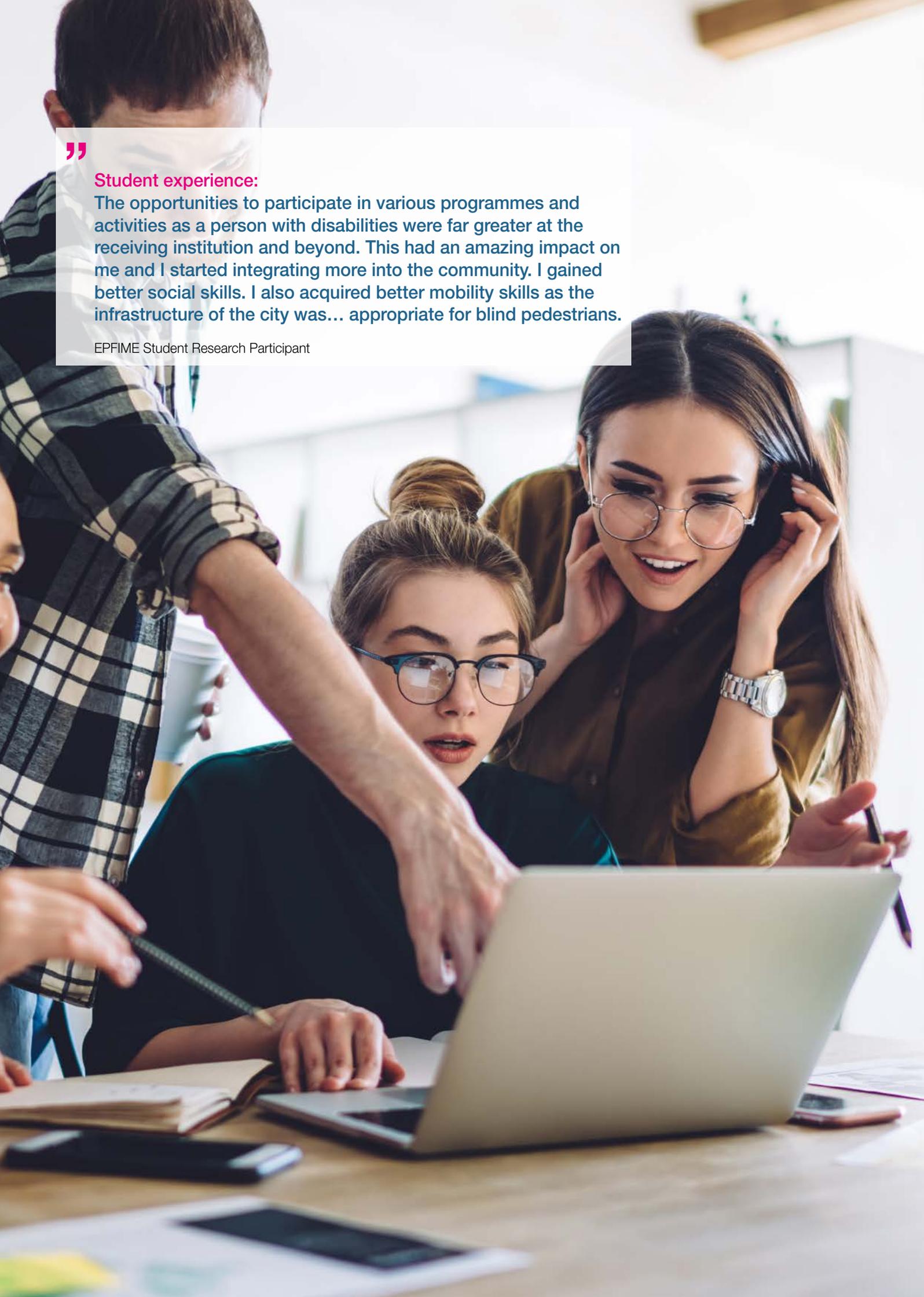
Regarding incoming students with disabilities, the first contact is often made with the faculty mobility coordinators and if they receive a disclosure of disability, they will inform the International and Disability Office so the appropriate support can be explored and arranged.

Sometimes incoming students will contact the KU Leuven Disability or International Office directly in advance of their mobility to make specific enquiries regarding disability support, and in other cases, the Disability Officer in the sending institution may make contact first.

Along with the incoming student, the home institution will typically share information about the student's diagnosis, the impact of their disability on their studies, their support needs and the current reasonable adjustments being provided at the home institution.

In some cases, key information from a needs assessment file from the home Disability Office is forwarded with consent of the student to the host institution. This information is then explored further directly with the student and the appropriate KU Leuven staff and a support plan is created and enacted.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.



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**Student experience:**

The opportunities to participate in various programmes and activities as a person with disabilities were far greater at the receiving institution and beyond. This had an amazing impact on me and I started integrating more into the community. I gained better social skills. I also acquired better mobility skills as the infrastructure of the city was... appropriate for blind pedestrians.

EPFIME Student Research Participant

## Supporting students: during mobility

This section provides advice, tips and tricks on supporting incoming and outgoing students with disabilities during mobility in a way that:

- Ensures they have the support they need when things don't go to plan.
- Makes them feel at home in their new institution.
- Connects them to the local student community.



### What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:

The higher education institution provides qualitative supports both for incoming and outgoing students with disabilities during mobility.

More specifically, higher education institutions should:

- Ensure the creation of a response plan.
- Organise a welcome session, and does so in an inclusive way.
- Provide a buddy scheme or peer-support.



## Delivering on the support mobility plan

The most important factor in ensuring the success of students with disabilities on mobility is to deliver a well-crafted Support Mobility Plan which has been ideally developed in collaboration between the student, and the home and host institutions. Ideally, this plan is crafted well before the student arrives, with necessary arrangements put in place in advance, which is why you can find information about assessing needs and developing the plan in [Supporting students: pre-departure](#).

For coordinating staff in the international/disability office of the host institution, delivering on the plan may involve engagement with a range of internal and external stakeholders such as faculty, facilities staff, departmental coordinators, the examinations office, student accommodation and external support providers.

It should be noted that often, students with disabilities may only make the decision to disclose while on mobility itself. In this scenario, institutions should undertake a needs assessment and put in place the identified support arrangements as soon as possible.

## Welcoming students to your institution

Adapting to life in a new institution in an unfamiliar place is difficult for most students, but there are added challenges for some students due to the impact of their disability. These can range from difficulties with separating from vital family support networks, difficulties with social interactions, challenges with finding their way around and understanding local cultural norms.

We can make students feel at home and build their confidence in making the transition to their mobility experience by offering them a comprehensive welcoming experience and connecting them to other students in the institution.



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## Host institutions should:

- Develop a buddy system by recruiting volunteer students from the institution (including those with disabilities) to offer peer support to incoming students with disabilities. Volunteer student buddies should be connected via email or text message (with permission of both) to the incoming students in advance of arrival and offer the opportunity to show incoming students around, be a point of contact for them and connect them to social opportunities.
- Organise the buddy of the incoming student, or a relevant staff member, to meet the incoming student at the airport/relevant bus stop and help them find their new accommodation.
- Organise a welcome and orientation session with the incoming student which:
  - o reviews the students' academic timetable with them to ensure they fully understand it.
  - o provides a comprehensive tour of the campus, highlighting:
    - key rooms where their lectures will take place.
    - the library and other useful study areas.
    - any existing quiet spaces for students with sensory overload difficulties.
    - spaces to charge mobile devices and access free WIFI.
    - the student restaurant, bar, gym and other key non-academic areas.
- if relevant, wheelchair accessible routes/entrances, the location of accessible bathrooms, etc. Be sure to provide a specialised orientation for the visually impaired which involves their personal assistant/guide dog if relevant.
  - o introduces key support staff and provides assurances that students can contact them to ask any relevant questions or ask for help.
- Offer to connect incoming students with disabilities to student organised activities and social events, particularly in the early weeks on mobility. To support this:
  - o Collaborate with the student's union or local branch of the Erasmus Student Network to highlight activities which may be suitable and consider accessibility of activities/events where relevant.
  - o Devise a template suggested itinerary for the first few weeks of mobility and edit it as students arrive with upcoming campus events, visits to key city landmarks and accessible cafes/hotspots close to their accommodation - all optional suggestions for students to consider.

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## Staying in touch and crisis response

The importance for students with disabilities of feeling comfortable in reaching out for support while on mobility cannot be overstated, especially for those with complex needs. Knowing that staff in the home and host institution are there to help them to resolve any issues and answer queries builds their confidence in adapting to their mobility experience and means that any issues can be identified early and addressed before they become more significant.

Equally, when unexpected or crises situations arise, whether of a personal nature or due to external factors, it is important that institutions provide direct support in a timely fashion which helps students with disabilities navigate the situation and bring about a successful outcome.

Ensuring clear contact points are established for the student in both the home and host institution is vital in this process.

### **Institutions should:**

- Ensure that incoming and outgoing students have clear information on who to contact for advice or help with academic support, accommodation issues or social opportunities. It's useful to establish a single key point of contact for students with complex needs in the disability or international office who they can build a rapport with and raise any relevant issues.
- Schedule periodic email/phone check-ins with incoming and outgoing students with disabilities, prioritising those with complex needs. These check-ins build student confidence and trust, and help to catch any potential issues early.
- Arrange to review the Support Mobility Plan for incoming/outgoing students after a period of a few weeks of academic study. This is particularly important for students with complex needs.
- Offer personal and tailored reactive support to help students with disabilities navigate crisis situations such as:
  - o travel issues - for example where an accessible transport provider has not collected as planned at the airport, leaving the student stranded, or they have unexpectedly been denied entry to the country.
  - o medical issues - for example where specialist medical assistance is unexpectedly required, or hospitalisation occurs.
  - o social issues - for example where a breakdown in social/family relationships has resulted in significant anxiety or mental health issues, requiring referral to specialist counselling services or early completion of the mobility.
  - o national external issues - where a national public health emergency is announced which may affect the student, or political/social unrest arises leading to a dangerous environment.

## Good practice in action - SRH University Heidelberg

The SRH University Heidelberg operates a buddy system for incoming international students in which a local volunteer student offers to be a welcoming contact point for the student on exchange, and this system is also facilitated for incoming students with disabilities.

The students are introduced to each other prior to the exchange in order to build a rapport, and this builds the confidence of the incoming student and enables them to settle more easily on arrival.



Often, the local buddy will arrange to meet the incoming student at the airport and help them to navigate the journey to the institution or their local accommodation and help them to settle in.

The buddy is available to the incoming student during their exchange to ask questions about the town or the institution and can help them to make social connections during their stay.

The university also supports incoming students to get involved in student-organised social activities and can support students with disabilities to access these activities.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.



”

**Student experience:**

The mobility period really had a moving impact on me as a person. I truly created a different picture of myself in terms of confidence, expectations, achievements I could make, and an overall new perspective on what I could do and could not do. I had never had the chance to live in a community other than my own, which most of the time was very oppressing to say the least.

EPFIME Student Research Participant



## Actions and support: post mobility

**This section provides advice, tips and tricks on supporting students with disabilities on their return from mobility programmes and learning from their experiences in a way that:**

- Uses their experiences to shape the future practice of the institution
- Recognises the value of their experience and offers them the chance to be mentors and role models for others
- Ensures they continue to make the most of their mobility experience in their job-search



### **What the Inclusive Mobility Framework says:**

The higher education institution provides qualitative support services for students with disabilities after mobility.

### **More specifically, higher education institutions should:**

- Support the reintegration into the home university
- Provide support to students to frame their mobility in a way that is attractive to employers
- Provide ambassadors opportunities

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## Welcoming back students and learning from their experiences

EPFIME research shows that students with disabilities often have very mixed experiences on mobility - some encounter very significant challenges and have negative social or academic experiences, while for others, it can be a transformative experience full of personal and academic development.

The opportunity to live independently in another jurisdiction and experience a new lifestyle, academic culture and institutional support structure, means that students can sometimes return as very different individuals than when they left.

Whatever the experience, it is important that institutions check in with students with disabilities on their return from mobility and capture their experience to inform their future practice and policy. This is particularly important for students with complex needs and support arrangements.

### Institutions should:

- Engage in a re-orientation meeting with students with disabilities on their return from mobility to discuss their experience and see if their support needs or expectations have changed as a result of their mobility experience. If necessary, conduct a revised needs assessment.
- Evaluate the experience of returning students with disabilities and use the resulting data to inform the development of policy and practice ([see Evidence informed planning and monitoring](#) for more).

Evaluation tasks could include student surveys and/or qualitative exercises such as focus groups with returning students with disabilities and staff involved in the planning for mobility. Evaluations should cover the personal experience of the students and their insights into the process of planning and delivering support, from the application phase right through to the end of their mobility experience.

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## Making the most of mobility experiences

It is important for institutions to support students to make the most of their mobility experience, and ensure that they highlight and exploit it in their job search. This is particularly important for students with disabilities whom often have fewer opportunities to engage with incidental employment and other extracurricular activities known to be valued by prospective employers.

Equally, its useful for institutions to utilise their lived experiences of mobility to encourage other prospective students with disabilities and provide opportunities for them to act as role models and mentors to others.

### Institutions should:

- Recruit returning students and staff with disabilities to act as role models and ambassadors for inclusive mobility ([see Targeted promotions for students with disabilities](#) for more information). These leadership opportunities are often valued by students and staff alike and could include:
  - o acting as a buddy or mentor for future incoming or outgoing students or staff with disabilities.
  - o volunteering as an ambassador to share their story at promotional events.
  - o writing blogs or recording videos about their experience which can be shared with others and featured on the institution's website.
- Provide tailored support to students with disabilities through the careers service to help them to:
  - o best showcase their mobility experience on their CV.
  - o prepare how best to use their mobility experiences at interviews and link their experiences to typical employment competencies in their field.

## Good practice in action - University College Dublin

When University College Dublin (UCD) recognises that one of the most powerful ways to encourage students with disabilities to consider mobility is to tell the successful stories of other students who have already been on the journey. Telling these stories in a variety of ways also raises awareness among UCD faculty that mobility experiences are available to students with disabilities.

That is why UCD Access and Lifelong Learning works with selected students with disabilities on their return from mobility to capture their experiences and share them with others. Knowing that students with complex needs find it the most difficult to make a confident and informed choice to go on mobility and face the biggest challenges, they place a focus on capturing stories from students in these categories.

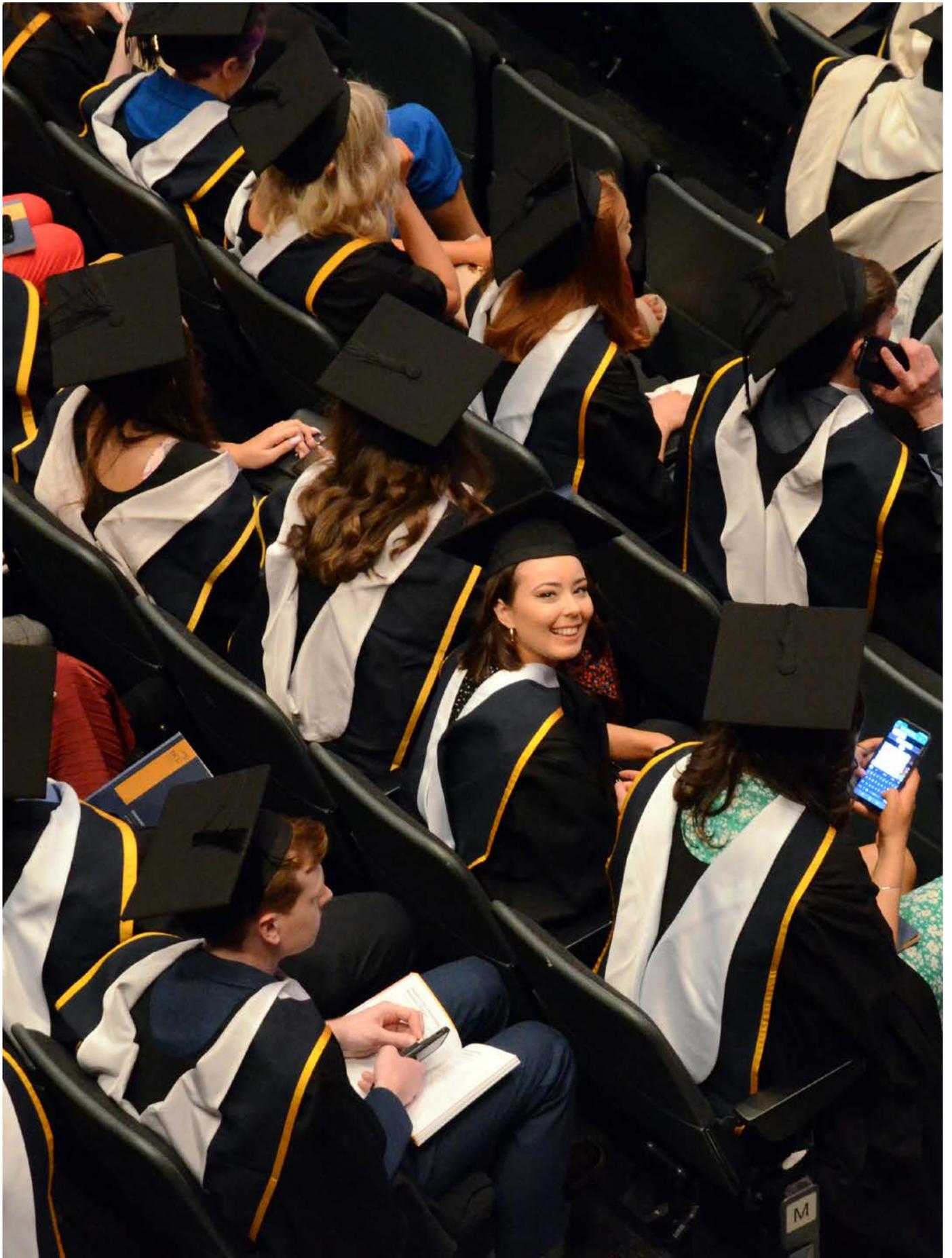


Once the stories are captured, they publish them in the staff-facing monthly magazine and share them with all students with disabilities through their website, social media and other channels.

Additionally, students with a range of disabilities are invited to become Access Leaders - institutional student champions representing access cohorts such as students with disabilities, mature students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These Access Leaders participate in a range of promotional and outreach activities in the university, sharing their higher education journeys and working with the institution to provide information and advice to prospective students.

Activities include working with the institution at careers fairs, contributing to outreach seminars and promotional video material and offering shadowing opportunities to prospective students.

Many institutions like the one in the example above are doing great work in this area already and you can too by following the action points in this chapter.





## Conclusion

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By implementing the higher education section of the Inclusive Mobility Framework using the tips, tricks and advice contained in these guidelines, institutions can widen opportunities to participate in mobility for incoming and outgoing students with disabilities.

The practices outlined will help to build student confidence in undertaking mobility, and through collaborative effort with students and staff, both internally and in other institutions, give students with disabilities the best possible chance of a successful mobility experience.

It is important to recognise that the practices outlined require added time, energy and commitment from staff, and in some cases, added financial resources, so it is vital to get senior buy-in from the leadership of the institution, and institutional recognition/support for inclusive mobility as a priority from national, regional and European agencies.

While these guidelines are aimed specifically at higher education institutions, the responsibility for widening participation on mobility is shared with these agencies, and that is why the Inclusive Mobility Framework has specific domains for ministries of education and national agencies, with tailored topics, objectives and action points.

It is the hope of the EPFIME project that a collaborative effort by these stakeholders to implement the framework - working in tandem with each other and with students with disabilities - will lead to much greater opportunities for participation in mobility, and all of the benefits it brings.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, ENERGY AND COMMITMENT TO INCLUSIVE MOBILITY!**

Visit [inclusivemobility.eu](https://inclusivemobility.eu) to explore the self-assessment tool, the framework and the other EPFIME project outputs.



# Glossary of terms

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## Buy-in

Acceptance of and willingness to actively support and participate in something (such as a proposed new plan or policy) e.g., ‘to get the buy-in from senior management for the creation of an inclusive mobility policy’ would be to secure the support and backing of the senior management team to develop the policy.

## Credit mobility

A temporary form of mobility - usually a maximum of one year - aiming at the acquisition of credits in a foreign institution in the framework of ongoing studies at the home institution. ‘Home’ and ‘Host’ institutions are used to describe the origin and destination of the mobility period.

## Degree mobility

A long-term form of mobility which aims at the acquisition of a whole degree or certificate in the country of destination.

## Disclosure

The action to make one’s disability known. Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) provides the general quality framework for European and international cooperation activities a higher education institution may carry out within Erasmus+. By signing the ECHE, higher education institutions commit to provide all the necessary support to mobile participants, including linguistic preparation.

## Erasmus+ Special Needs Support

Financial support to cover disability-related costs such as personal assistants, sign language interpreters, customised living accommodation, etc. in Erasmus+ mobilities.

## Grant

Any public financial support that does not need to be paid back. Such financial support can be targeted (available only for a specific target group) or mainstream (available to all or the majority of students).

## Home institution

Institution where the student is currently enrolled as a degree seeking student and may be eligible for financial aid at the same institution. This institution is in charge of selecting students and sending them abroad.

## Host institution

Institution in charge of receiving students from abroad and offering them a study/traineeship programme or a programme of training activities.

## Inclusive Mobility

Creating adequate conditions to learn, work or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs. It is a needs-based approach to what the individual beneficiary needs to ensure a safe and exciting mobility period abroad. It is important to not generalise needs, needs are specific and the individualised aspect in it is highly important. What the person/beneficiary says they need is what they should receive. It is not only about academic mobility but also about the social aspects that play an important role in the experience abroad and the potential link to connect with the local community (Inclusive Mobility Alliance, 2019).

## Incoming mobility

Refers to students that moved (i.e., crossed a national border) to a specified country to study.

## Inter-institutional agreement

Mandatory agreement in the context of Erasmus+ between the host and the home institution prior to the start of the mobility period. By signing an interinstitutional agreement, the institutions commit themselves to respecting the quality requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education in all aspects of the organisation and management of mobility and agree on a series of quantitative and qualitative measures to ensure mobility of high quality and impact.

### **Learning agreement**

The home and host institution, together with the students, must have agreed on the activities to be undertaken by the students in a 'Learning Agreement' prior to the start of the mobility period. These agreements define the target learning outcomes for the learning period abroad, specify the formal recognition provisions and list the rights and obligations of each party.

### **National authorities**

Refers to structures with responsibility for the strategic orientation and organisation/management of higher education institutions.

### **Needs assessment**

A needs assessment can be described as a systematic process for the collection of information and data to accurately reflect the strengths and needs of a person with a disability. In a higher education context, a needs assessment is conducted in collaboration with the student in question to determine their support needs.

### **Outgoing mobility**

Refers to students who left/are leaving their country of residence (i.e., crossed a national border) to study elsewhere (in which they are counted as incoming mobile students).

### **Portability**

Possibility to take abroad the supports or grants available to students in their home country, for credit mobility (credit portability) or degree mobility (degree portability).

### **Preparatory visit**

Visit organised at the future host institution before the actual mobility takes place, in order to visit the facilities, the campus, the city and get acquainted with all aspects of accessibility and support services available.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Necessary and appropriate adjustments to the environment to ensure persons with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with others (e.g., installing a hearing loop facility, allowing some extra-time for exams, etc.).

### **Short-term mobility**

Mobility with a duration shorter than one month.

### **Students with disabilities**

Students who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD).

### **Universal design**

Defined as "the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD). In a higher education context, it refers to designing flexibility and accessibility into the mainstream learning environment in order to cater for the majority of needs without the need for additional, individual supports. One universal design approach is to make supports which are currently only available to a specific target group (e.g., students with disabilities) available to all students so that everyone can benefit, and the need for the target group to engage with specialist services is reduced.

### **Universal design for learning**

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL aims to improve the educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching and assessment to cater for the diversity of learners in our classrooms. This approach is underpinned by research in the field of neuroscience and the learning sciences and is designed to improve the learning experience and outcomes for all students.

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