ECOLHE

Empower Competences for Onlife Learning in HE

IO2
IO3

ENGAGING HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH COLLABORATIVE E-ACTIVITIES

TRAINING PILOT REPORT

Organisation: LCU - UOC
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1. OVERVIEW

The ECOLHE project aims to create the conditions for an exchange of best practices at European level, and among its various outputs it has the design and delivery of a training course for teachers and tutors to improve online teaching in HE in the logic of LLL, inclusion and innovation recalled by High-Level Group on the Modernization HE.

To understand the effectiveness of the course, a piloting phase was planned.

The training pilot **"*Engaging Higher Education students with collaborative e-activities*"** aimed to encourage the production, experimentation and sharing of new approaches and training methods in the field of digital culture. It is focused on improving and upgrading teachers' digital competences, for the integration of online/blended learning activities in HE, through online collaboration environments in HE.

The setting up of a digital environment, guidelines, and tools for training teachers' HE is developed to reach the principal goal of this training. Considering the objectives of the project, the pilot needed to promote the transformation of stakeholders by a training model that will help them to use ICT and digital environments effectively in a HE context. In addition, it will provide an innovative training model that can be replicable to other HE institutions to promote online teaching and key teaching competences in the digital era.

The course is organised in two modules, each one with a specific focus:

- Module 1: Online teaching learning,
- Module 2: Gamification.

During the training, designed as a whole, participants designed a set of activities considering these two perspectives.

The training was addressed to university teachers, tutors, doctoral and post-doctoral students, and researchers who were interested in improving their teaching practices in online settings.

The training development was done through the creation of a Moodle platform hosted on the Unilink Virtual Learning Environment.

Each partner had its own setting and training page.

All the universities involved in the ECOLHE project participated in the pilot as well:

- **University of Patras** (UPAT) from Greece
- **Universitat Oberta de Catalunya** (UOC) from Spain
- **University of Applied Sciences** (LAUREA) from Finland
- **University College Cork** (UCC) from Ireland

- **Link Campus University** (LCU) from Italy
- **Università degli Studi Roma Tre** from Italy

2. STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING AND PROPOSED SCHEDULING

The training was structured in two webinars and four learning activities as summarised in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Structure of the training

ACTIVITY	AIM	WORKLOAD
Synchronous WEBINAR introduction	Introduction to the training	2h
ACTIVITY 1	Analysis of a learning activity	4h
ACTIVITY 2	Design of a learning activity	10h
ACTIVITY 3	Implementation of a learning activity	8h
ACTIVITY 4	Learning activities evaluation	4h
Synchronous WEBINAR conclusion	Conclusion and training evaluation	2h
	Total	30h

The entire training was online, with two synchronous webinars (one at the beginning and one at the end of the training) and four asynchronous activities, for a total of 30 hours.

The pilot duration was of three months: it started in March 2022 and ended in May 2022. It involved 121 enrolled participants and 16 e-facilitators from 6 Universities and 5 European countries.

The planning for the activities is described in the table below (Table 2)

Table 2. Scheduling of the training

		MARCH				APRIL				MAY	
ACTIVITIES	# hours	7-11	14-18	21-25	28-1	4-8	11-15	18-22	25-29	2-6	9-13
Intro Webinar	2										
Activity 1	4										
Activity 2	10										
Activity 3	8										
Activity 4	4										
Final Webinar	2										

The **webinar at the beginning of the training** was organised by **UOC** and **FLCU** and took place on google Meet. This webinar had the objective to illustrate the course structure, the methodology, the materials, the scheduled learning objectives and to present the functionalities of the Virtual Learning Environment.

After the webinar an **initial questionnaire** was provided with the aim to capture the starting point of the participants' experience in Digital Competences and Gamification.

Another task that had to be preliminary to the first activity was the **formation of work groups**. The participants of each country had to choose the group they wanted to join in order to carry out the four activities.

The structure of the training was divided into four main groups of activities where it was planned for participants to design, plan the implementation, and evaluate online blended learning situations.

For each activity group was established a number of hours to be carried out and a set deadline.

The **Activity 1** was "**Analysis of a learning activity**".

Participants analysed asynchronously two online training activities developed by UOC (collaborative creation of a tool catalogue) and FLCU (gamified learning activity).

To analyse these activities, participants worked in collaborative groups, guided by a template and shared their analysis with the rest of participants.

The activity had a double objective. On the one hand, to show some of the strategies and methodologies used in specific online activities, and on the other hand, initiate the participants in online collaborative work.

The **Activity 2** was "**Design of a learning activity**".

Once the participants had analysed the examples proposed in Activity 1, they needed to design their own teaching-learning solution. This was done by working in collaborative groups to design an online or blended learning activity addressed to their students that included gamified elements. The main focus was to define the competences, methodology (which must be active), the resources and the assessment process.

The design was done collaboratively using some of the tools that allow asynchronous work.

Guiding materials, resources and support were provided to accompany the design process.

The **Activity 3** was "**Implementation of a learning activity**".

Working asynchronously in collaborative groups, participants go a step further once the activity has been designed. They had to use the design in one of their own real courses, defining online teaching strategies, communication channels, assessment dynamization, etc.

The **Activity 4** was "**Learning activity evaluation**".

Each group evaluated the designed and implemented activities following the provided evaluation guides.

Using the same evaluation instruments (one for the design and one for the implementation), each group had to evaluate their own work (self-evaluation) and other group activity (peer-evaluation).

After the end of the activity 4, another **Webinar was organised at the conclusion of the pilot training**.

This webinar had the objective of evaluating the training pilot and the participant experiences. During this activity the e-facilitators invited the participants to briefly present the results of their activities.

Beside the webinar, the evaluation was done also through a **final questionnaire** aimed to capture the evolution of the participants' experience in digital competences and gamification.

At the end of all activities the participants were able to download the Attendance Certificate.

3. THE ONLINE PLATFORM

The pilot was hosted on the Unilink Virtual Learning Environment using the Moodle LMS.

LMS stands for "Learning Management System" and Moodle is a free and open-source LMS that makes it possible to create a learning platform that is highly customisable to the user's needs.

Each national pilot had its own virtual space (course) so that the communication and explanation could be carried out in national languages.

E-facilitators had teachers' privileges, and they could make changes to the course structure if needed (i.e. postponing deadlines for the assignments).

The address for the Unilink Virtual Learning environment is: https://smartlearn.unilink.it/?lang=en

Before carrying out any other learning activity, participants had to form a small group (see Figure 1 below).

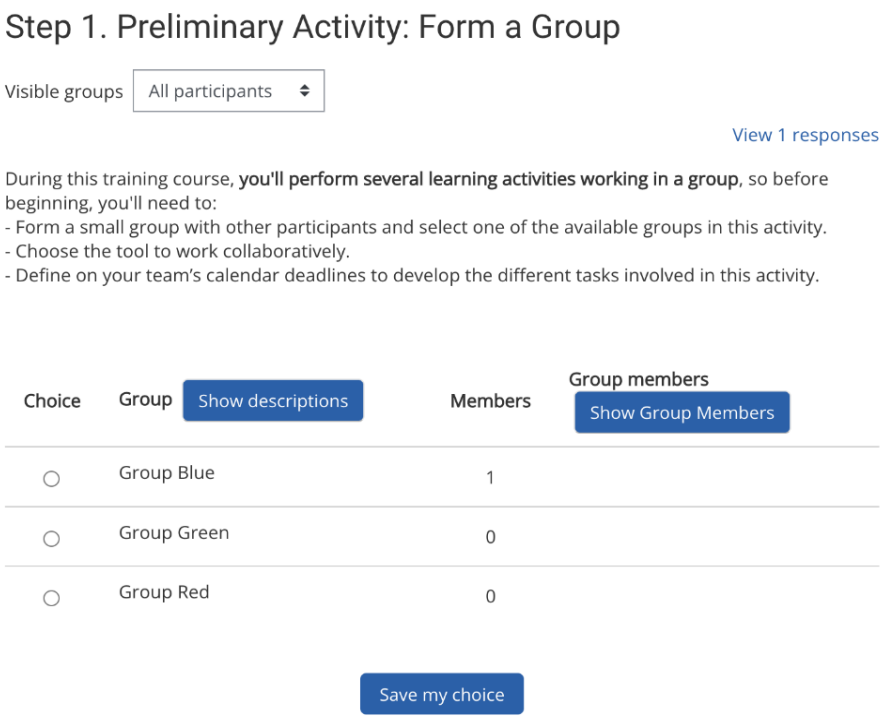

Figure 1. Group choice activity in the Moodle Platform

The formation and choice of a group was done on the Moodle platform in each partner's space. Each participant had the freedom to join a group at their liking.

After joining a group, it was possible to start the first activity.

The main page of the course presented a list of all the learning activities (see Figure 2 below). At the beginning of the training only **Introduction** and the **Activity 1** were available to students.

The other Activities were unlocked in the following weeks according to the learning plan.

The activities page was structured as follows:

- A general section with areas for support and communication;
- The introduction section;
- A section for each Activity, these sections were opened and closed according to the learning plan.

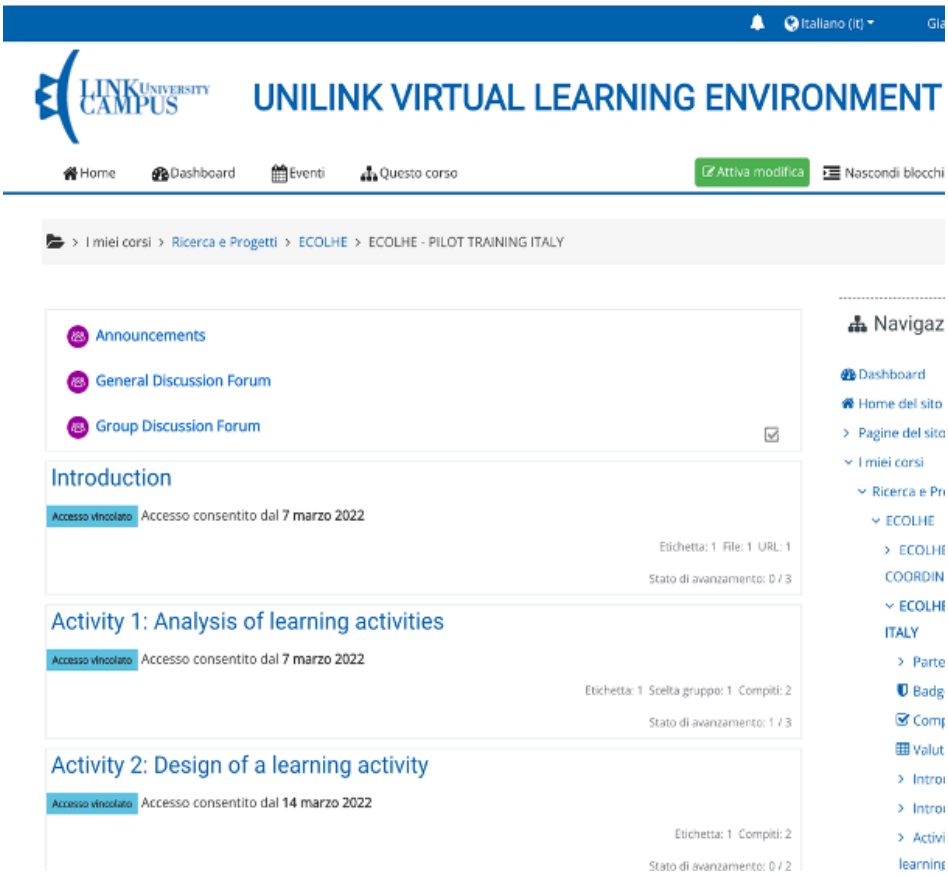

Figure 2. The main page of the course

The participants could click on the Activity that needed to be completed to enter in the activity page (see Figure 3 below)

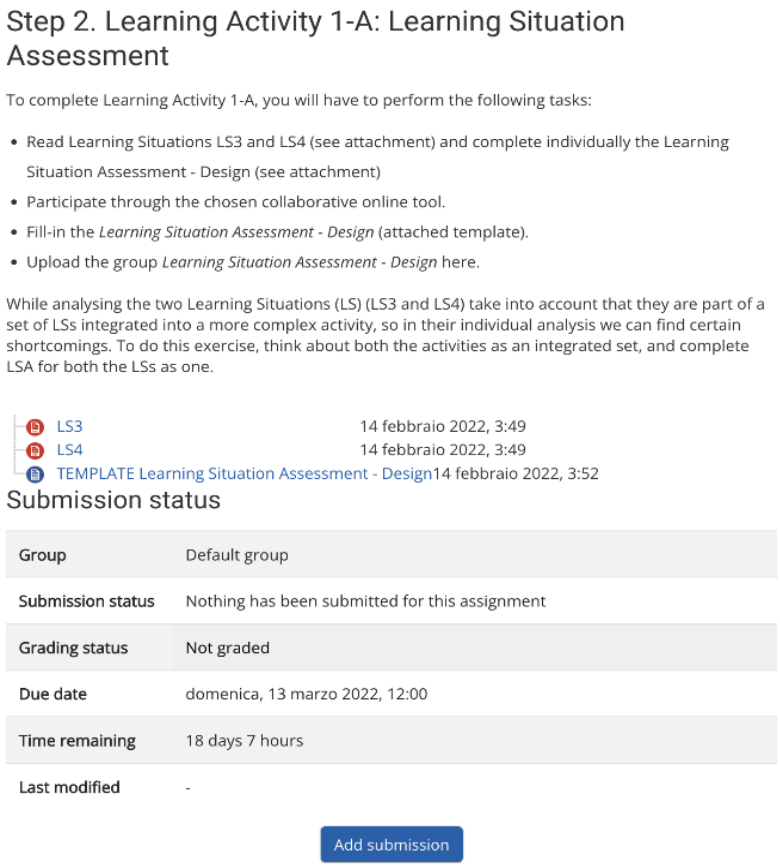

Figure 3. An example of the learning activities pages

Each learning activity has **the same structure**:

- one **brief introduction**, presenting the learning goal of the activity, the steps to follow to complete it and the deadline,
- **one link for each of the steps to be carried out** in order to complete the activity.

By clicking on the link for each step, participants have the chance to:

- **read** more detailed information about the task to complete,
- **download** additional learning resources and templates useful to perform the task,
- **submit** the completed assignment.

In the same page of the activities there is a section dedicated to communications and support. It includes:

- **Announcements**: this section can be used by the e-facilitators to post important announcements that are sent to all participants via email.
- **General discussion forum**: this forum can be used by both participants and e-facilitators to discuss different topics.
- **Group discussion forum**: this forum can be used by group members to communicate with each other.

4. PARTICIPANTS CHARACTERISTICS

The pilot training was addressed to **university teachers, tutors, doctoral and post-doctoral students, and researchers** interested in improving their teaching practices in online settings.

Participants were contacted in different faculties of all the partners' universities.

Some of them had an extensive teaching experience and enrolled to enrich their teaching abilities and to face new challenges, others (like some PHD students) didn't have the same amount of teaching experience or responsibilities but had enrolled to learn teaching procedures.

In some cases, besides professors and PHD students, the participants also included researchers, research fellows and subjects' experts.

The subjects, areas of competences and level of teaching of the participants were very different:

- In Ireland there were involved teaching staff in Adult Continuing Education (ACE) and two working in the further education sector at the UCC, some of them already using alternative methods like flipped learning and problem-based teaching methods.
- In Spain the participants were teachers from Planetary Health, Psychology and Digital Competence.
- In Finland the invitation to participate was extended to three universities of applied sciences in the Helsinki metropolitan area, besides being advertised during various workgroups, workshops and meetings. In the end, most of the participants were Senior Lecturers besides a Development Manager and a Post-Doc Researcher.

A total of 128 participants enrolled in all the partners' countries, as summarised in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3. Breakdown of participants by university

UNIVERSITY	COUNTRY	ENROLLED PARTICIPANTS
Link Campus	Italy	24
Laurea	Finland	10
Roma 3	Italy	15
UCC	Ireland	25
UOC	Spain	32
UPatras	Greece	22
Total		**128**

Of the 128 enrolled in all partners' countries, only 40 completed the pilot training course. Of them, 34 were university teachers, 1 a Doctoral/postdoctoral student, 1 researcher and 4 belonged to other categories.

The participants in the pilot training were of both genders, with a majority of women.

The number and distribution of participants completing the training are summarised in the following table (Table 4).

Table 4. Number and distribution per university of participants who completed training

UNIVERSITY	University teachers	Tutors	Doctoral and post-doctoral students	Researchers	Other
Link Campus	9			1	1
Laurea	4				
Roma 3	4		1		
UCC	5				3

UOC	12				
UPatras					
Total	**34**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**4**

5. TRAINING PARTICIPATION EVOLUTION

As already observed, from the 128 people enrolled in the pilot training, only 40 arrived at its conclusion. The decrease in the number of participants is analysed in the following table (Table 5).

Table 5. Evolution of participation from training enrolment to completion

	Participants Enrolled	Webinar Introduction	ACTIVITY 1		ACTIVITY 2		ACTIVITY 3		ACTIVITY 4	
PARTNER		People	Groups	People	Groups	People	Groups	People	Groups	People
Link Campus	24	12	3	16	2	11	2	11	2	11
Laurea	10	8	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4
Roma 3	15	12	1	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
UCC	25	9	4	9	4	8	4	8	4	8
UOC	32	18	4	14	3	12	3	12	3	12
UPatras	22	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**128**	**71**	**13**	**48**	**11**	**40**	**11**	**40**	**11**	**40**

The first observation to make is that a certain number of enrolled people did not attend the first webinar. In most cases this translated into even less participation in the following activities with only one case (**LCU**) in which there were more people participating in the first activity than the introductive webinar (16 people in activity 1 but only 12 people in the first webinar).

But this means that a good percentage of enrolled participants didn't even start the activities or listened to the objective of the training that was explained in the Introduction Webinar.

The decrease of participants was particularly true for **UPAT (Greece)** where there was not enough participation in the final evaluation questionnaire, so the evaluation was done using the discussions had during online meetings, emails or telephone calls.

A similar problem was observed from **RomaTre (Italy)** where due to the small number of respondents to the questionnaire, it was not possible to have a sufficiently defined overview. Some useful feedback was gathered in the Webinar.

LAUREA (Finland) also observed a high dropout from the training. Almost 80% (n=7) of enrolled students (n=9) dropped out during the first quarter of the course and instructors had to find alternative ways to motivate the students. The instructors managed to recruit two (2) more students with alternative study paths including case study report for existing development work and new study unit development. It seems that when the studies are tightly connected with the students' daily basis work, they are not so likely to drop out.

6. ADAPTATION OF THE TRAINING MODEL AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Many initiatives were carried out by the e-facilitators to support the participants and help them complete the training. Among the most common, there were the following:

- Organisation of virtual and/or in presence counselling sessions with the e-facilitators;
- Deadlines extension;
- Organisation of in presence group meetings to work on the assignments;
- Creation of Quick Guides in national language to explain to participants what they had to do to complete each Learning Activity;
- Use of e-facilitators personal e-mail for communication instead of the announcement forum available in the Virtual Learning Environment;
- Offering participants opportunities to more tightly integrate the learning activities with their daily based work;
- The e-facilitator joined some of the teams as a participant on the course.

On some occasions, email was used as a communication tool, when, for various reasons, communication through the planned forums in the Moodle was not sufficient.

In the case of **UPAT (Greece)** the communications done by using the "*Announcement*" section of the platform were ignored or not read by the people enrolled. Considering this, it was decided to not use the section

anymore and contact them using their personal email, especially to verify their interest after enrolment through a zoom call.

This was also due to some users having problems with the enrolment process in the platform: the email with the credentials was seen as spam or misinterpreted by them as such. The result was that some users were unable to log-in and read the announcement for the course date, missing one of the two online meetings.

During the training timeline it was observed that enrolled participants did not proceed with the activities, so the e-facilitators tried again to contact them with emails or phone calls. The participants, however, were reluctant to invest their time in carrying out the planned activities.

Afterwards, the deadline was reached so no further attempts were made to contact them.

In the **UOC (Spain)** case, some initial problems were observed concerning the first access to the Moodle platform.

This caused the delivery dates for the activities to be modified and be left open.

Each activity delivery was scheduled based on the progress of each group, always respecting the end date of the course.

One person later joined the course, so he took the course individually. The criteria related to group work were not considered for her evaluation. A previous synchronous session was held with this person to guide her more in detail.

Due to the number of odd groups in each country, one of the activities'peer assessment was done connecting one group of participants in Finland with one group in Spain.

For **RomaTre (Italy)**, at the end of each module and activity, the two facilitators offered volunteer online counselling sessions and offered other learning possibilities for students that were more tightly integrated with their daily based work.

After a discussion on the activity two participants began to organise:

1) briefing to launch each sub-activity.
2) meetings in the presence of each other.
3) shared readings of materials.
4) debriefing before the delivery of each activity.

Again, the facilitators offered their help in a few virtual counselling sessions.

As previously stated, **LAUREA (Finland)** had to recruit two additional participants during the activities, due to the high dropout rate from the training.

The training participants had a tight personal working schedule and it was obvious that the original course schedule was too demanding for them. The instructors extended the course deadlines, they opened all modules for the review, and they offered volunteer online counselling sessions.

The instructors offered other learning possibilities for the students that were more tightly integrated with their daily based work. After a discussion one dropout student was engaged again with a case study approach where the student reported the development work that the student had made during last year.

The instructors offered their expertise for the student whenever needed by reviewing the report drafts. One additional student was recruited when a need for new study unit development work occurred. Again, the development work was tightly integrated with real organisational need and the opportunity also offered clear personal growth possibilities for the student. The instructors offered their help in a few virtual counselling sessions.

Similar changes were made by UCC **(Ireland)**. Through email contact it became clear that the participants needed a more facilitated learning experience than the design of this training pilot allowed for. Even with the additional facilitator support through MS Teams meetings, the participants still struggled to engage with the course. In the end there was not merely a need for adaptation, but the facilitator joined three of the four teams as a participant on the course and this was the only way that those participants were able to complete the course. The participants who needed this much support to complete the course were all from the higher education sector highlighting that this design does not meet the needs of educators in this sector. This is in stark contrast to the experience of the two participants from the further education sector who completed the course ahead of schedule and with no need of adaptation or assistance from the facilitator.

Also for **FLCU (Italy)** tutoring sessions and quick learning guide were needed to solve the practical problems that participants had during the activities.\

7. PARTICIPANTS POINT OF VIEW

The general opinion of the participants was that the learning materials were very exhaustive and the possibility to learn from the experiences of other universities was appreciated.

For example, **UOC (Spain)** participants found the documentation shared on the platform very complete and of quality. They also very positively valued that access to the necessary information for each activity was

facilitated, as well as the infographics highlighting the most relevant information of each phase of the training.

RomaTre (Italy) didn't find the need to implement supporting materials, because they were considered very clear and exhaustive by the staff, but the number of materials could have been reduced. In particular, the additional teaching material - additional readings and informative documents - has lengthened the time and dispersed the concentration.

Also, the material provided often assumed basic knowledge that was not encountered in all participants. The group work was also carried out thanks to the previous knowledge of some participants. In this regard, it would be useful to include explanatory videos regarding the process to be followed to carry out a specific activity and about the course purpose.

For the **UPAT (Greece)** participants overall, the material was extensive and very well organised, covering a very large scale of modern teaching and learning practices. But, that was also a drawback, because some of the participants may have believed that they had to read a lot of material in order to complete the course, leading them to finally drop out. They found that the commitment (in terms of busy time) was high.

On the other hand, **UCC (Ireland)** participants found that the course design was not robust enough for self-directed online learning. For example, there were no videos to explain/introduce the topic and task. They highlighted that a variety of both video and text resources is best practice for self-directed courses, especially in light of the fact that one problem of the training common in the pilot of various partners was the lack of understanding what was asked to do in the activities.

The training pilot expected the participants to have knowledge and skills beyond the core content of the course e.g., team working theory and practice were vital to complete this course, yet no resources supported the learning of this. The facilitator generated resources yet the basics of knowing how to plan for both task and process and the distinct roles of an effective team were unknown to the higher education cohort.

An interesting observation from **UCC (Ireland)** was the difference of opinion and experiences between the teachers in higher education and the two further education teachers.

The two further education teachers had no issues with navigating the course as designed and their only feedback was that it took much longer than the allocated time. But the teachers in higher education failed to get organised and plan effectively to complete the course. This was most likely caused by the difference in formation between higher education and further education teachers.

Further education teachers in Ireland are required to complete 100 hours teaching practice with supervised visits and to generate a teaching practice portfolio of designed, implemented, and evaluated lesson plans for

those 100 hours. Their practice is rooted in the flipped classroom model and experiential and project-based teaching methods so they are very well equipped to work as an effective team on an instructional design project. Also, it is now widespread practice in further education to design integrated teaching and assessments across modules and disciplines. This creates a collaborative team working and interdisciplinary environment as normal for further education practitioners.

In contrast, a teaching qualification is not necessary to teach in the higher education sector as postgraduate qualifications, usually doctorate, are considered the standard. As these are discipline specific, they do not have to include any knowledge or skills in teaching practice. the higher education context has its background in individual practice; for example, the doctorate is a four-year project that is managed by one individual in a competitive and often isolating context. For the teaching staff their teaching content and assessments are not usually integrated, and their research is often conducted individually.

These differences in teacher training and in common work practice could go some way to explaining the vastly different experiences of the higher and further education practitioners on this training pilot. It points to the design of this training pilot as being highly effective for the further education sector but unsuitable for the higher education sector.

Some other troubles in navigating the course and organising the material were caused by minor discrepancies such as not labelling the submission documents clearly and with consistency led to major difficulties for the participants. For example, the facilitator had to download all the submission forms and rename them clearly and upload them to shared folders for the three higher education groups. She also created a table for the groups to use to assign tasks to deadlines and to monitor their progression through the course. These planning and project management resources should have been provided with clearer signposting if the course is designed to be self-directed.

UPAT (Greece) participants were a little confused at the beginning, because despite being mentioned from the beginning that this was a purely asynchronous way of conducting the seminar, many thought that the seminar would take place through teleconferences. The asynchronous nature of the pilot made them feel uncertain about their progress in case of a weak understanding of the structure and the tools, and the effort it would take to tackle any obstacles, .e.g. in emails, taking into account that the gamification concept and the asynchronous, and rather faceless, nature and is an unknown activity between the members of academic staff and the students of our university.

The role and the support provided by the e-facilitators was highly appreciated by the participants but some of them would have liked to have more information and a better chance to understand the things that were not clear.

In fact, in some cases, the participants didn’t understand what was requested to do in the activities, leading to confusion and requests for clarifications.

In **LAUREA (Finland)** it seemed that some students had difficulties figuring out what they were expected to do in the course or how to start their studies.

The confusion probably amplified the drop-out in many cases. It was also observed that if the course assignments are not tight with the students' work, they are willing to lose their motivation.

UOC (**Spain)** participants expressed the desire to include a synchronous session during the course, in addition to the scheduled start and end. In this way, the problems that have been detected can be solved quickly.

They also underlined how establishing channels of communication between participants from different countries can be very enriching. The experience of the participant who has valued the work of a Finnish group has been very positive, being able to know how the same activities are proposed from a culturally different point of view.

RomaTre (Italy) participants had problems defining an activity evaluation criterion. They complained about the lack of clarity of a guiding criterion for activity evaluation.

For the participants who joined a group and carried out the activities, teamwork was stimulating and offered them the possibility of comparison between different professional's roles in HE. Especially those from **UOC** (**Spain)** highly valued the collaborative group work aspect of the training.

They underlined that the interaction in teamwork with people from different disciplines was a challenge at the beginning, but once the common objectives and themes of the activities were established among them, working together was very enriching.

There were some problems for the first access to the Moodle platform. In some cases, the credentials were put into spam of the participants emails or not recognised by the participants.

Concerns were expressed regarding the online platform and its use in **UPAT (Greece)**.

During the online Webinar they were worried about their ability to become familiar with the platform in a short period of time. During the presentation and the demonstration which was made by e-facilitators, participants seemed to grasp the various tools of the platform, but they found the overall structure, although very detailed, quite complicated and time consuming to get familiar with. Participating in the pilot solution of the activities made by e-facilitators, they expressed interest in their design.

Regarding the access to the platform, the access codes problem could be fixed in some way, so as not to cause negative impressions in the beginning of the process.

Other doubts about the Moodle platform used for the training have been expressed by **UCC (Ireland).** They found out that the course on Moodle was difficult to navigate and could have been improved by the addition of a submissions folder so the participants could see clearly in one place the tasks that were required/completed.

Problems with learning the platform functionalities were not shared by the **RomaTre (Italy)** participants that had no problem understanding how the platform worked as they are used to it (Moodle is the official eLearning platform of Roma Tre). So, the online activities had no problem getting carried out.

Participants appreciated how the communication strategy and tools on Moodle were handled. In particular, the communication of reminders of individual activities was appreciated, in full compliance with the planned timetable (revised in function of the initial delay, due to a lack of understanding of the initial activity to be carried out, in addition to the difficulties in setting up working groups).

A mental obstacle to online training was a previous negative experience with online teaching during the two years of pandemic, especially for **UPAT (Greece)** participants. They expressed their fret concerning an exclusively online teaching course for reasons such as:

- Students are quite tired of watching a screen for many hours.
- Students are often bored while they are online and participating in lessons, surfing the internet.
- Students distance evaluation is not so objective as it is very difficult for the teacher to ascertain if any cheating was made.
- Teachers do not have the same contact with them as they have during in situ teaching.
- Teaching being difficult from a distance, the fatigue for the teachers was very high too.

As an overall conclusion, after the experience during the lockdown period, everybody noticed that their teaching performance was not as good as it was in situ teaching.

On this topic, the participants from **UOC (Spain)** expressed their thoughts on the fact that adapting activities designed or carried out in face-to-face education to an online format allows participants to take advantage of much of the previous work and experience. In some cases, this adaptation is a challenge, such as how to perform 360º feedback online. The participants realised that it is important to have a well-defined and clear schedule shared with the students, as well to have a well-defined communication strategy for the whole training, both to maintain the motivation of the students and to solve possible problems.

Regarding the gamification procedures, **UPAT (Greece)** participants expressed a previous knowledge of these modern methods but only a few used them in the class. They are not negative about it but they believe that

it could play a very minor role in teaching procedure. Teachers were not familiar with gamification platforms (such as Kahoot) but PhD students seemed to know them and used them in some way.

The overall impression for using gamification methods was not negative though. A very important factor for those feeling uncomfortable with it may be the age of some participating teachers explaining their discomfort to change their teaching methods after a long time. PhD students on the other hand believe that these methods should play a major factor in the future teaching procedures.

UOC (Spain) participants already had a large experience as online education professionals, so the proposed gamification has not been an added challenge for them. They observed that introducing Kahoot is very useful as a self-assessment tool, but it needs more integration in the global design of the training. Knowledge of new tools for online teaching or new uses of already known tools was highly valued as well.

RomaTre (Italy) participants underlined that the free online resource suggested - Kahoot - for a learning game was very limited as a subscription had to be purchased to have more functionality. For this reason, the resource could not be fully exploited for learning purposes. It would be helpful to provide free premium accounts.

For **UCC (Ireland)** participants, most of the cohort had no experience of gamification and this part of the pilot was well received. It was a challenge to use Kahoot! for social science content but this was overcome with minor facilitator support.

Most of the groups had taken on a big challenge by designing to use a new digital tool for the online teaching portion and so they were pressed for time with the gamification part of the course. There was also some confusion as they were working on using a digital tool in their teaching practice and were unclear on the relevance of designing a Kahoot! that they were unlikely to use. It would have been clearer for them if the gamification course came directly after the online teaching one and they would have then been able to give it the attention that they wanted, and it merited. All the groups challenged themselves to design a learning situation using a new digital tool e.g., Rocket book. Their designs were very practice-based and intended for use across all ACE programmes. The groups spent a lot of time working on their resources and not enough time completing the submission documents. In this regard the submissions do not accurately reflect the work that the group achieved.

In general one positive point was that participants recognised the topics of the course as relevant and expressed their need to receive more training on those subjects, even if they were part of traditional universities.

They especially appreciated the fact that the content was based on the recent research papers and it was very well presented in the course workspace; especially gamification could offer new possibilities, but at the

same time it can be challenging to figure out practical solutions if students are strongly "attached" with traditional teaching methodologies.

7.1 E-facilitators point of view and difficulties

In order to help the facilitators to have a greater background with the management and content of the course, a pre-training would be very helpful for the e-facilitators to receive more information about the structure of the training in advance, to better understand its objectives and to be able to better perform their role. They also would have appreciated a higher level of involvement in the course design and learning material preparation, to be more aware of the instructional design and the materials in order to be able to better support the participants. A brief initial training about the platform, and a window of time for the e-facilitators to familiarise themselves with it, would have been very useful as well.

It is important to remark here that the training is based on the UOC model which is based on a strong teaching presence in which the teacher accompanies the participants throughout the process. So, the training was not designed for self-training methodologies, and this point further reinforces the need to offer a pre-training to the e-facilitators.

Another difficulty was that guiding the participants during the course took much more time than expected.

In various cases a focal point was to motivate the participants and support them to conclude the course.

In **LAUREA (Finland)** at the beginning most of the students seemed interested but at the end they dropped out when they realised the amount of the study work needed. The dropouts caused a lot of extra work when the instructors tried to motivate students to continue their studies or they tried to find alternative options for the regular learning paths.

Another general problem was the Moodle platform. Some e-facilitators were not familiar with it, so they needed some time to understand the way it worked.

In some cases, the logic of the course was unclear in some parts.

In **LAUREA (Finland)** the start of the course was a bit confusing and probably both instructors and students felt disconnected from the topic being studied. It was also observed that the assessment rubrics (excel-sheets) were not fully aligned with the assignments.

This confusion increased instructors' workload when they needed to guide students and answer their questions.

In **UCC (Ireland)** the lack of participation of the students first required the e-facilitators to try a more direct support using Microsoft Teams, then after realising that there were still struggles, the facilitators were forced to join three of the four groups, and this was the only way that those participants were able to complete the course.

Added tutoring and help from the facilitators was requested in all the partners' pilot training.

8. SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

At the end of all the pilots, the e-facilitators met online to discuss some possible improvements to the training design. They tried to gather suggestions for the improvement of the training.

Due to the novelty of much of the course content, the need to handle a platform that many participants are not used to, and the added difficulty of following an online training, it is proposed increase the accompaniment of the facilitators and initially provide an outline-guide with the structure and global content of the course helping participants to situate themselves in all the steps of the process.

RomaTre (Italy) suggested that it would have been useful to have **more clearness in the instructions** of the first activity and use examples. The first activity was the one in which the greatest difficulty was encountered but, in general, it was difficult to understand what to do.

LAUREA (Finland) underlined that the training content and the assignments appeared sometimes distant, and it was a bit vague how the course planners had planned the participant's learning process. The assessment criteria and practices could have been clearer.

A suggestion given by both **UCC (Ireland)** and **RomaTre (Italy)** was to **use videos** regarding the process to be followed to carry out a specific activity and about the course purpose. Videos are seen as a good way to better explain the tasks and "humanise the online learning experience".

According to **UPAT (Greece**) proposals to improve similar projects should **consider the particularities presented by each country and each University** separately and shape the process according to the way that is most familiar to the trainees. For example, in the UPAT it would be good if the same course was held via teleconferences so that the trainees could communicate more easily with the facilitators and between themselves. The same could apply to the tasks being done in groups during the teleconference. That method approaches the usual training culture of UPAT and participants will feel more familiar with it. During online presentations the questions would be solved faster, and all the participants could hear them, making it resemble a kind of brainstorming, so the results would be much better.

Strictly linked to this was the suggestion to **include more frequent synchronous meetings** (for instance one meet at the beginning of each learning activity) to address the issues for each activity immediately.

UCC (Ireland) suggested that the synchronous session could have been focused on the specifics of completing the course, rather than the big-picture overview of the design. As this was the only facilitated session, it could have been much more learner-centred-active and focused on what they needed to know to complete the course. For example, if they had their log in details in advance and were to be logged in for the session, it would have allowed the session to troubleshoot a lot of issues that took the facilitator weeks to detect and resolve with individuals. It would have been more useful to have the participants navigate the platform themselves rather than watching someone else demonstrate it.

It would also have been useful to get the participants to join groups and post a 'Hi' message on the forum during the session so they were already up-and-running on the course by the end of it. They could have been put into breakout rooms for 20 minutes with their facilitators to meet each other, form groups and try navigating the platform together. This would have allowed them to connect with each other and the facilitator before beginning the work and might have reduced the withdrawal rate by increasing their motivation through generating a sense of belonging to a team from the beginning.

One more observation was foreseeing the possibility of **carrying out the course in groups or individually**. Working in a group can be difficult if the group is too heterogeneous (for instance if the teachers come from different disciplines, or if they have a different role and/or age).

UPAT (Greece) observed that the people who made up the groups were not from the same department, because of which it was not possible to find a common time between them to carry out the activities.

Related to this is the suggestion to **reduce the workload for the participants** (and maybe include some more asynchronous/synchronous presentations).

UPAT (Greece) emphasised that the interested parties were professors with a particularly increased amount of work during their daily academic duties, with the result that the time they could allocate was very limited.

UCC (Ireland) observed that the higher education participants have a very heavy workload and so a more structured course with more facilitated learning and stricter deadlines would have been more suited to them.

From this also the suggestions to **revise the duration of the course**. Probably, the course as it is takes longer than 30 hours to be completed (around 40-60 hours);

RomaTre (Italy) facilitators underlined the high quantity of materials provided with the risk of disorientations of the participants. In light of this, they suggested a selection of the material for the performance of the exercises to be carried out, reserving a more explanatory section for the evaluation. It remains useful to include in-depth material as an annex.

This was also observed by **UPAT (Greece)** that emphasised the existence of a large volume of literature that may have acted as a deterrent as it created the impression that one would have to read a lot of material in order to cope.

Some partners suggested **separating the order of the two courses** as it was very confusing for the participants to work on them both simultaneously.

UCC (Ireland) observed that it would have been much clearer for them if they first completed the 'A' tasks i.e. the online teaching course and then completed the 'B' tasks. Gamification was new for most of the participants and so it would have been better if it were presented to them in isolation and after completing the online teaching course.

Finally, an observation from **LAUREA (Finland)** is that the content was based on the recent research papers, and the content was presented well in the course workspace. Especially gamification could offer new possibilities but at the same time it can be challenging to figure out practical solutions if students are strongly associated with old traditional teaching methodologies. It's suggested that in future the course could be focused on gamification to make it more appealing and attractive.

A suggestion common to most partners is to have a longer **e-facilitators orientation/training** phase.

LAUREA (Finland) underlined that the orientation phase could be longer, and the logic of the course should be explained thoroughly by the course planners. This is because the applied theoretical framework should be clearer for the instructors, and they should understand how the frameworks relate to the course and assignments.

UPAT (Greece) also suggested an evaluation of the course by the facilitators themselves before the start of the course would be very useful, so that weaknesses and errors would be identified before the trainees.

Other suggestions were made regarding the single partners' experiences.

LAUREA (Finland) proposed that the course could **have additional learning paths** aligned with the traditional one. There are students that could be motivated if they had the possibility to report/publish their existing development work or who are willing to develop e.g., a new study unit. The challenge regarding alternative paths is that the instructors should be competent for guiding reporting/publishing work, or they should have enough competency for study unit development work.

UCC (Ireland) observed that one group did great research into the areas covered by the course that could be considered a draft for an essay. Their unfamiliarity with template forms used to analyse stages in the design process was an obstacle for this cohort and so they would need facilitated learning on this process in the future. They also observed that a training programme that is blended rather than self-directed would meet

the needs of those that do not necessarily have the practical vocabulary and depth of experience necessary to successfully navigate this course self-directed much more appropriately.

UCC (Ireland) stressed out also some practical suggestions regarding the documents, materials and general logistic of the course, like:

- Clear and consistent labelling of submission documents.
- Tables to manage the team working and project management aspects of the course.
- Table of assessment submissions and deadlines that must be met in a separate folder. Too much free reign with the deadlines only reduces motivation and leads to busy adult learners not prioritising the course. This then leads to a negative learning experience for the participants.
- Clear and numbered instruction/task list for each task so they can work through it easily. This would also help them to easily navigate back when they have had a break from the course for some time.

LAUREA (Finland) suggested for the assignment assessment process that now the assessment rubrics are separated from the assignments with excel-sheets, and they are very loosely aligned with the assignments. The instructors must interpret or guess how the rubrics should be used. Moodle has the possibility for creating assessment rubrics and they recommend finding out if assessment rubrics could be usable here. According to their personal experiences in Canvas-LMS, properly constructed assessment rubrics will improve assessment work efficiency significantly.

In general, the statistics regarding the suggestions proposed by the participants are summarised in the following image (Figure).

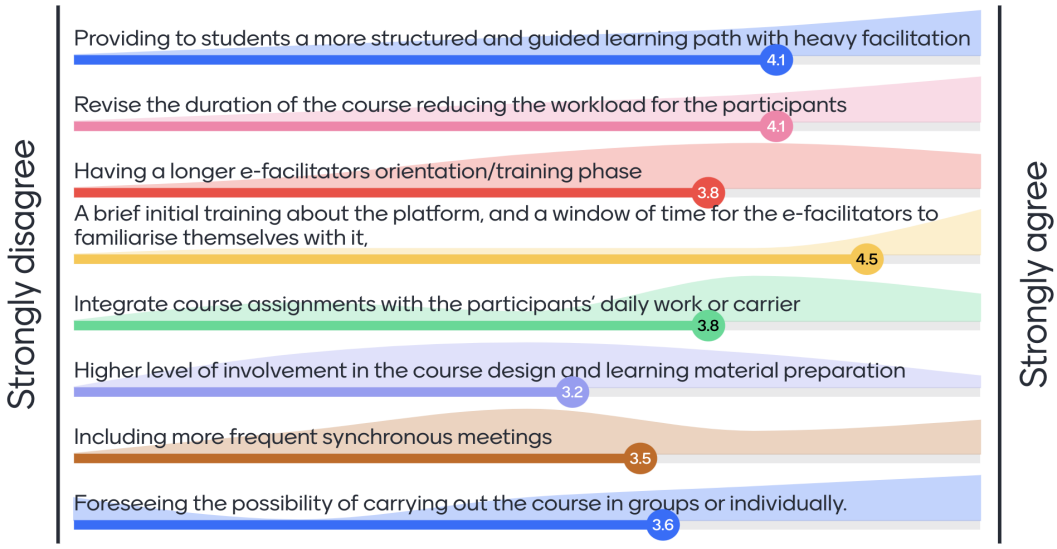

Figure 4. Level of agreement among partners about participants suggestions for improvement