

Newsletter

Work Package 2. Teaching Techniques and Student Centred Learning.

Meeting Writtle November 12th –14th.2018



Participants at Writtle University TOPAS meeting November 2018

Seventeen staff members from Partner Universities¹ met at Writtle University College (WUC) between 12th and 14th November 2018 together with 9 representatives from programme countries² including two members of the host institution and two on Erasmus mobility programmes.

The objective of the meeting was to introduce and demonstrate teaching and learning techniques, student support in the widest sense and preparation for employment, to universities still constrained by systems and methods designed in previous times. The structure of the programme enabled the delegates to hear from WUC staff members on a number of different initiatives and ideas in the mornings on Days 1 and 2 and to observe a variety of lectures, seminars and activities in the afternoons. This was followed by a plenary session on Day 3 in which each Partner University gave a commitment indicating how they would introduce some of the techniques into their teaching and learning. Project administration, self evaluation and future strategy sessions were integrated into the three days including after dinner when further meetings were held.

The morning of 12th November saw WUC staff speak on dissertation organisation, employability and the importance of economics in the curriculum. Dr Jon Amory outlined how the final year dissertation works including the on line proposal submission, ethics forms and resource need which can be approved by individual tutors through the portal. Dr Anya Perera delivered a presentation on how and why employability skills are integrated into the curriculum which was followed by Mark Yates describing how as the WUC Careers Officer his role links students and the curriculum with companies and job opportunities. Niek VanVeggel illustrated the idea of assessment for learning as compared to assessment of learning the latter of which uses summative tasks to test student's knowledge and understanding at the end of a module. The new approach as explained included a task which required students to contribute to the research, development and launch of a product which is assessed throughout the process. The morning concluded with Dr Robin Gowers demonstrating the significance and impact of recent world events in economics and why students

need to have an appreciation of the subsequent effects on all sectors and how he achieves this within his teaching.

The afternoon observations included a variety of subjects and delivery methods; including seminars, case studies, process analysis, practicals and debates. This involved WUC staff members: Dr Jon Amory, Dr Robin Gowers, Prof Peter Hobson, Renato Previdelli and Niek VanVeggel. Modules whose delivery was assessed were: Landscape Ecology, Business Management, Immunology, Product Development and Supply Chain Management.

To make the best use of the time an extra session was included after dinner on 12th to discuss the feedback from the NEO Evaluation in Armenia. This was led by Dr Garegin Hambardzumyan of the Armenian National Agrarian University who reported that although the assessors acknowledged that the project is progressing well dissemination could be improved despite the number of published articles that have been produced. The view was expressed that a greater online presence should be available and that social media and video clips could augment the visibility of the project.

The beginning of the morning session on Tuesday 13th November was concerned with two main aspects of the sustainability of the project. Professor Ralf Schlauderer led the discussion on dissemination and the meeting agreed on targets in the areas of social media, attendance at fairs and exhibitions, meeting newsletters, and website design and content. Dr Aram Aristakesyan then followed with an outline of how the website will be developed and the requirement of both the programme and partner universities to supply appropriate photographs for inclusion by the end of the month. The first part of the morning concluded with discussion of the MOOCs and the contributions required from member of the project consortium both in supplying data from their own countries and their responsibilities in contributing to the first concerning farm production economics. These were allocated later in the day along with a timetable for completion.

Building on the first day contributions from WUC lecturers, Caroline Flanagan described how new approaches to assessment design across modules encouraged more integrated learning and holistic understanding of the programmes not individual subjects. These types of assignment are more accurate reflections of what a student would encounter in the workplace. Dr Zoe Barker then discussed how she embeds e-learning into her teaching through the use of free sites such as Padlet, Socrative, Kahoot and Zotero. Tracey Coop and Claire Cross completed the morning session with an explanation of the WUC support system for students with additional needs. Increasingly students have physical, mental and emotional issues, which are not always supported, by the state and a failure to be aware or meet the needs can at worst have tragic consequences and at best mean students do not fulfil their potential.

The afternoon saw participants carry out further observations of WUC teaching staff and this included Design (Dr Steve Terry), Business (Dr Robin Gowers), Animal Nutrition (Dr Sife Chikunya) and Sports Science (Dr Greg Deacon). There was also an opportunity for Prof Schaluderer, Prof Abduvasikov and Dr Ahorov to meet to discuss future collaboration opportunities.

Proceedings began on 14th November with a meeting of The Steering Group. Key issues discussed included: dissemination and its importance, the upcoming training of staff and students at

programme institutions particularly with reference to their timing and content, the next meeting which is scheduled to be in Armenia in April 2019, the need to communicate with project associate partners and the future role of YSU within TOPAS. The latter was the result of concern from NEO in Armenia that without course in Agrarian management YSU could not fulfil the requirements of the project or contribute in a meaningful way. The view was expressed that YSU could continue as an Associate Partner and benefit where possible from project outcomes.



Participant discussions concerning student centred learning techniques

The remainder of the meeting was led by Nieký VanVeggel who asked colleagues from partner Universities to draw on their experience, observations and discussions during the three days and propose possible actions that could be introduced in their universities to put the student at the centre of the learning experience. The participants were divided into their institution groups and each were to design three innovations that are to be introduced, by when and by whom during the lifetime of the project. These will be published and evaluated during the next two years.

The meeting concluded with clear objectives set for the next phase of the project and the opportunity to discuss further collaboration both in bi-lateral agreements and further project opportunities.

For more information: <https://erasmus-topas.eu>

¹ National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Sumy National Agrarian University, Armenian National Agrarian University, Yerevan State University and Andijan Agricultural Institute, Samarkand Institute of Veterinary Medicine formerly the Samarkand Agricultural Institute.

² Weihenstephan-Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences, Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Science, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi .