Welcome to the autumn edition of the Utrecht Network newsletter. As you will see, 2016 has proved to be a busy year for the Network, with new activities and links being developed alongside existing activity. A major development has been the links with the Brazilian HE Network, REARI-RJ. Work continues between our two Networks with the aim of developing an effective student mobility partnership.

The Network continues to evaluate and develop its existing activities. This is reflected in the evolution of the Joint Programme Task Force, shifting its focus from Joint Programmes to the wider theme of Internationalisation of the Curricula. It is hoped that all members will benefit from this change of focus and sharing of expertise.

The Network has held several successful Staff Training events this year, details of which can be found here. Work continues on the planning of the Network’s 30th Anniversary celebration and Rectors Meeting to be held in Hull, UK in April 2017.

We hope to see you all there!

Francesco Girotti
President, Utrecht Network
2016 Annual General Meeting
The 2016 Annual General Meeting of the Utrecht Network was held at Queen’s University Belfast, UK on 28–29 April 2016. A special welcome was given to the representatives from the Network’s newest member, the University of València.

The Steering Committee continues to refine the format and content of the AGM as a result of the views expressed in the annual evaluation of the AGM. As a result the successful ‘New Faces’ session was offered again in Belfast to welcome both new members and new representatives, and introduce them to the work of the Network in an informal setting.

Main topics for discussion during the AGM included the changing of the name and focus of the Joint Programmes Task Force (to the Internationalisation of the Curricula Task Force), the developing links with Networks outside Europe, changes to the Network’s Statutes and Internal Regulations and involvement in European projects. Dynamic working groups were also held on issues surrounding the internationalisation of the curricula and the Mastermind Europe project.

The meeting marked the end of Sabine Pendl’s term of office as President and Steering Committee member. Sabine was thanked for her significant contribution to the work of the Network and Francesco Girotti (University of Bologna), was welcomed as the new President. Gérald Zimmermann (University of Basel) and Raimonda Markevičienė (Vilnius University) were welcomed as new members of the Steering Committee. Alina Gržibovska (University of Latvia) was elected to the position of Vice-President.

The AGM was followed by a very enjoyable excursion to the North Antrim coast. Members visited the Giant’s Causeway (in the sun!) and learnt more about whiskey distilling at the Bushmills Distillery.

The Network also expressed its appreciation to Patricia De Clopper who was retiring from the University of Antwerp. Patricia has been involved in the Network since its inception and her dedication and enthusiasm for the Network cannot be matched.

Utrecht Network Strategic Plan
At the 2017 AGM the Utrecht Network will be considering and approving its Strategic Plan for the period 2017–2020. During the autumn/winter of 2016 a process of evaluating the current Strategic Plan and developing a new Plan will take place. Members are encouraged to take an active role in this process – comments have already been invited and will be considered by the Steering Committee at their meeting on 21–22 November. Following this meeting the Plan will be circulated to all members for further comment. Any comments on the plan should be sent to Fiona Miller (info@utrecht-network.org).
Utrecht Network Workshop – Intercultural Preparation of Outgoing Students

*Last April the Student Mobility Task Force organised a training event for Utrecht Network members in conjunction with the AGM; the event was hosted by Queen’s University Belfast.*

The one and a half day workshop focused on the topic of intercultural preparation of outgoing students and aimed to raise the quality of preparation given to students and provide hands-on tools for everyday support services.

Many thanks to our hosts for all their work and for making us feel at home!

While most Utrecht Network institutions have a full range of services and welcome events for incoming students, intercultural preparation of outgoing students is not a widely established practice. This prompted the Student Mobility Task Force to initiate and organise a training event which was facilitated by experts on intercultural communication from the Universities of Bologna and Graz.

The intensive workshop focused on ways to maximize and improve the intercultural experience of outgoing students; it targeted professionals working with exchange students such as study abroad advisors and educators.

The workshop addressed topics such as notions of ‘culture’ and ‘intercultural interaction’, the dynamics of intercultural communication in the very context of student mobility, the impact of culture on one’s perception and notion of ‘otherness’ while abroad, the impact of culture on differences in academic systems and learning/teaching behaviors, and the adaptation process in new cultural environments.

Twenty four participants from twenty two Utrecht Network institutions had the opportunity to learn methods and tools to better support their students before, during, and after their mobility period.

Thanks to group activities and interactive exercises, participants reflected on some theoretical inputs and shared their ideas on how to better support students in understanding cultural diversity as an essential pre-requisite for a successful academic and personal experience abroad.

Most work sessions invited participants to reflect on ways to integrate the workshop contents and resources (which were mainly taken from the IEREST project) in their own institutions to fit their needs.

In their feedback, participants indicated their appreciation of the interactive character of the workshop, the transferable tools and stimulating ideas they could take home. Group and plenary discussions were also valued, as well as the possibility of sharing ‘the experiences and ideas of different institutions, showing how things can be done.’

Thanks are expressed to the two Workshop Leaders – Diana Afrashteh from the University of Graz and Claudia Borghetti from the University of Bologna.
Research Managers Staff Training Workshop

Research managers from across the Utrecht Network gathered at the University of Hull in June for a three day workshop to study discuss different aspects of academic research support.

Representatives from the Network’s universities in Denmark, Estonia, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Latvia, Finland, Slovenia, Lithuania and Germany joined research managers from the University of Hull to create an excellent networking event. Guests were also welcomed from Kozminski University in Poland and the University of Milan, Italy.

Delegates heard about research and enterprise at the University of Hull and several delegates presented on innovative practices taking place in their organisations. The most valuable sessions, according to the delegate feedback, were on research impact, data management and the implications of open access. The final day of the programme was held at the Wilberforce Institute for Slavery and Emancipation, which provided the opportunity for delegates to learn more about the award winning research being carried out there.

The programme also included a tour of the beautiful Hull University campus, which won the Yorkshire in Bloom gold award last year, a historic walking tour of the City of Hull and a traditionally British dinner of fish and chips!

A comprehensive set of actions were agreed as part of the ongoing learning opportunities the group would like to achieve.

These include a shared information resource within the Utrecht Network intranet and the agreement to offer free places to each other to attend ‘in house’ research staff development events.

If you require any further information about this event please contact pam.jackson@hull.ac.uk
Update on the IMPALA project

On 16–17 September 2016 the IMPALA project Steering Committee met in Liverpool to discuss the preliminary work carried out by the five thematic working groups:

1. Policy and Strategy for Internationalisation
2. Internationalisation of the Curriculum
3. Summer Schools and Short Terms Programmes
4. Writing and Managing EU projects for Education and Research
5. Mobility

In addition the dates of the training and workshop sessions in South Africa and the site visits in Europe were also discussed with our South African Partners.

The Utrecht Network is coordinating the Working Group 'Summer Schools and Short term Programmes' through the Summer School Task Force and is preparing the preliminary programme for the training session on this subject. However, the expertise of Utrecht Network members can be exploited in all five strands of the project.

Training and Workshop sessions in South Africa

The Training sessions will be held in Cape Town in the week 20–27 March 2017. The training will be offered on four of the five topics of the working groups ('Policy and Strategy' will be tackled through site visits to European universities).

The Workshop sessions will be held in (probably) Johannesburg on the last week of September 2017 and are intended to be a follow-up of the training sessions. Therefore the same topics will be covered.

Next steps and involvement of Utrecht Network members

In October 2016 the preliminary programmes of the four training sessions were promoted to our South African partners in order to identify potential trainees. Programmes will be fine-tuned afterwards and presented to Utrecht Network members in November 2016. A call for expressions of interest has been launched to all Utrecht Network members in order to recruit trainers on the topics which will need additional expertise and support.

Further info and contact

For information on how to be involved in the IMPALA project as a Utrecht Network member please contact Patricia De Clopper, University of Antwerp patricia.declopper@uantwerpen.be.

Focus on MAUI

The Utrecht Network, through its links with the MAUI Network (Mid-America Universities International), offers its students the opportunity to apply for placements in the USA.

The arrangement with the MAUI Network is a reciprocal one and in return Utrecht Network member institutions offer study placements to MAUI students.

We continue our series, focusing on the members of the MAUI Network with a look at the University of Kansas. Founded in 1864, the University of Kansas (KU) is a major comprehensive research and teaching institution as well as a centre for learning, scholarship and creative endeavor. KU has approximately 30,000 students including just over 2,000 international students. KU is famous for the natural beauty of its campus, the high quality of its academic programs, reasonable cost, and diverse cultural and recreational opportunities.

The main campus sits atop beautiful Mount Oread in Lawrence. Lawrence is a small city (90,000 population) with a large student population, a friendly atmosphere and many of the attractions of a big city. It is known for its local art and music scene, along with its wide array of local specialty shops, cafes, restaurants, and a charming downtown shopping district. Located less than one hour from the metropolitan area of Kansas City, Lawrence truly is in the heart of America.

KU is also known for its unique mascot, the Jayhawk. The Jayhawk is a mythical bird that symbolizes the struggle of those who made Kansas an anti-slavery state during the American Civil War. KU is also home to the only university basketball program founded by the inventor of basketball, James Naismith.
Call for proposals for new and innovative activity

The Utrecht Network has a commitment to the development of new and innovative activity for the benefit of the Network. In order to help realise this there are three calls made during the year which invite both Task Forces and member institutions to submit proposals for new and innovative activity. The deadlines for the proposals are 30 January, 1 April and 1 November each year.

The calls for proposals now also include proposals for Staff Training events. The Network continues its commitment to fund two Staff Training events per year.

Further information about the calls for proposals is available from Fiona Miller (info@utrecht-network.org).

Young researchers grant scheme

A call for the 2017/18 Young Researchers grant scheme will be circulated to all members in autumn 2016. The scheme actively encourages mobility at postgraduate level between the Network’s member institutions. The period covered by the call will be 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018. The application process has been refined during 2016 to assist the Student Mobility Task Force in the selection of students.

Full details will be available on the Network’s website www.utrecht-network.org/activities/young-researchers-grant.

Widening the Scope of the Task Force

During the last nine years, the Task Force Joint Programmes has successfully explored ‘International Joint Programmes’ and has experienced significant success through prestigious projects such as JOIMAN (Joint Degree Management and Administration Network) and JOI.CON (Joint Programme Management – Conferences and Training). It is now considered appropriate for the Task Force’s scope to be widened by placing it in the wider concept of internationalising the curriculum. The new name ‘Internationalisation of the Curricula Task Force’, therefore, depicts the Task Force’s elaborated theme and its aim to become a reference point in supporting the Network member institutions in their processes to internationalise their curricula. It will act as a forum for discussion among the Utrecht Network members on the management of these processes and as a possible support in the implementation and evaluation of such an endeavour.

Contact

For further information about the Utrecht Network, please contact:

Fiona Miller
Executive Secretariat
Utrecht Network
c/o The University of Hull
Hull, HU6 7RX, UK
info@utrecht-network.org
www.utrecht-network.org