



## FABLE IO - The Knowledge Bank

### D1.2 An Insight Report from Interviews with Suggestions

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**As a reminder, the specific objective of FABLE IO1: The interview report is:**

To create a knowledge bank, to better identify the needs and expectations of students on the one hand, professors, educators, and administrative staff on the other hand, regarding online learning and trainings, reaching to the opinions towards blended learning.

#### Document purpose

This document has the purpose of summarising the results of the interview done with the, faculty and administrative staff) in order to understand their needs and what they expect regarding online and blended learning.



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# Table of Contents

Document purpose \_\_\_\_\_ 1

Introduction \_\_\_\_\_ 3

Structure of IO1 \_\_\_\_\_ 3

    INTERVIEW process \_\_\_\_\_ 3

Interview findings \_\_\_\_\_ 4

Conclusion \_\_\_\_\_ 6

## Introduction

In the last decades, digital learning was on the rise, however with a sceptical view from all sides from higher education teaching staff to administrative staff to students.

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, online learning became the only way of teachers and students coming together. We will never be back at the pre-Covid situation; therefore, we should reflect on online learning methods to make it an innovative, beneficial, and sustainable way of teaching and learning. In this context, blended learning has emerged, using the best of both worlds, online and offline by creating courses with face-to-face teaching, live video conferencing, or online self-training, for instance. The combination of online synchronous and asynchronous sessions with the use of physical classrooms is an attractive learning environment. Hence, it is crucial to consider advantages and disadvantages to create a well-suited experience.

The aim of this project is to help higher education teachers to implement blended learning, fully exploiting the benefits offered by this approach.

Spanning over two years, four packages were created. This report deals with the second part of package IO1 and the objective is to create a knowledge bank, to better identify the needs and expectations of students on the one hand, professors, educators, and administrative staff on the other hand, regarding online learning and trainings, reaching to the opinions towards blended learning.

## Structure of IO1

IO1 is structured into two complementing parts. First, an online survey is created by the German FH Münster (FHM) team and then spread from all partners in order to get European representative results. Students, faculty, and administrative staff are the targets in this survey to examine their needs and expectations regarding online and blended learning. Furthermore, the survey is complemented with semi-structured interviews with faculty and administrative staff to deepen the knowledge and additionally to investigate experiences and best practices, which will be the content of this second report.

## INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interviews were aimed to gather more in-depth knowledge of the experience faculty and administrative staff had. Thus, the questions were created based on the survey results to deepen the information with practical examples. As the overall perception and the predominant challenges, as well as benefits could be identified with the help of the survey and different needs arose, semi-structured interviews were planned to have a closer look into the issues and to gather information about expectations and best practices. With ethical consideration, FHM prepared an introductory text which should be read by every interviewer and created questions to either faculty staff or administrative staff. These were reviewed and added by the other partners. Afterwards, in every country of the project,

there were interviews of at least five people each, totalling to an overall of 30 interviews, of which 19 were faculty members and 11 administrative staff, conducted between July 2021 to October 2021 in an online setting.

## Interview findings

Detailed presentations of the data from the interviews are available as a power point presentation and as individual reports and were shared with all partners.

All interviewees are experienced in the online format, particularly due to the Covid-19 situation. Some also have experiences already in the blended learning approach.

First of all, issues from the perspective of the lecturers were discussed. Beginning with time management, which is a controversial topic, as the opinions are diverse. Findings show that creating a flipped classroom and more interactive tasks is time consuming but it depends on the subject and the creation of the lecture because it is stated that if it is prepared well once, it does not take that long time in the upcoming ones.

Furthermore, faculty staff agrees that it is crucial to be open-minded and to be open to learning new technologies and practice, however it is not the biggest issue when it comes to online teaching. Sometimes, lecturers are confused because technology does not always allow them to complete their learning curve and there is a difference between migrants and digital natives. However, still an issue when it comes to technological problems is the adequate equipment and connection. Not all students or teachers have access to that, and in their opinion, the universities have the responsibility to make sure that it is possible for everyone to participate online, and this is imposing some issues still.

Expectations are that universities should help with trainings and tools and keep platforms up to date. A support person who helps lecturers with technical issues was suggested in cases where the technology is not easy for a person without IT skills to use. In Finland this system is already applied and works well. Teaching assistants learn there from each other and the others grow from it as well. Investing in online teaching infrastructure is important and this should be provided along with a strategy behind it. More exchange opportunities are also wished by most of the interviewees. In general, more opportunities to discuss and exchange ideas is needed and pedagogical assistance should be the basis for lecturers from the administrative staff.

Moreover, the purpose is emphasized, connecting to the survey results. Pedagogically, it seems to be important to clarify that there is a certain goal to achieve within the course. Nevertheless, creating pedagogical materials is not that easy, takes time, effort, and creativity.

It was also pointed out that lecturers get frustrated sometimes due to the lack of feedback and interaction, however, it is also mentioned that faculty themselves are responsible for the motivation transfer, as the teacher transfers motivation to the students. Therefore, lecturers should try to be motivative themselves first.

Important to find out is, where resistance comes from. For resistant lecturers, internal transfer is more effective, and it is crucial to offer personal solutions. In general, it is crucial for the

pedagogical approach to embrace the online environment and see it as part of the new work.

Regarding the lack of interaction and engagement in the online setting, several ideas were highlighted regarding the creation of student engagement. The most common point is the group work. All agree that it is an effective solution to bring students together in groups and let them work together. Icebreakers in the beginning, videos, cameras on, breaks, varying activities every 25 minutes, VR/AR, quizzes, Mentimeter were some more ideas to create relationships, connections, and interaction.

Besides the perspective of the lecturers, some issues regarding students were discussed as well.

Beginning with procrastination which was an identified problem in the survey. It has been said that it is connected to the social component and the motivation, and there were some advices on how to overcome this issue. Homework, time schedules, more consistency, weekly assignments, quizzes, giving structure, making rules, being friendly, motivated, and happy to share experience and knowledge, making good study materials and providing it beforehand are all approaches interviewees suggested.

The interviewees identified that the barrier to miss a class is low and apparently, social contacts are part of the motivation in the universities. This is why the social challenges are most important to consider. According to the faculty and administrative staff, building relationships is the biggest challenge. Informal aspects get lost and therefore, some tools were discussed. For instance, talking about emotions or informal things, groupwork was mentioned by most of the interviewees. An example in Germany was the mentoring principle and buddy programs. Hungary brought up 2D and 3D VR Technology as a help for a more “real” feeling. In Finland, there is a platform on which students can interact and they emphasize that the responsibility is in the hands of the lecturers and the administrative staff. Adding some face-to-face interaction is highlighted by the interviewees from France. They underline that 100% online courses cannot solve the problem, which is further explored later on with blended learning.

Faculty points out response time as being an important factor and for instance cameras and large screens achieve some kind of social presence, as well as online learning should be more rewarding. Motivation seems to rise as well when there are competitions according to some interviewees.

Besides, interesting insights could be gained in the best practices, which the interviewees shared. Germany underlined Microsoft Teams, the concept board, online international projects, and asynchronous lectures. In Spain, consultancies carrying out in final master’s projects were mentioned because they allow working face to face with the students to develop an idea for research. Additionally, small groups were highlighted. Hungary emphasized the support on how to use different kind of online platforms and the experience which can be shared. In Finland, a success story was a summer rerun approach, using YouTube, Miro and a software being like an interactive book. In France, short videos were very successful.

The last topic discussed in the interviews was the university infrastructure.

Pedagogical assistance was provided, nevertheless, it could have been more and especially faculty desire more discussions and exchange possibilities. Lecturers believe that professionals with pedagogical profiles do not coincide with the reality of the classroom, although they reinforce knowledge. In Hungary, older professors got help from the university with guidelines

and an E-Learning system was established.

Particularly administrative staff could contribute to these topics because when it comes to the acquisition of tools, these are the people who know the processes behind it. Data policy and comfort, as well as usability are critical aspects in this context. User-friendly tools and more licenses were aimed for. Some improvements like reporting changes in the interface, class chat and the “passive” role granted to the student on the platform were suggested even though it fulfils the objective for which it is designed. With the acquisition come also costs which have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the budgets of the universities play a role here as well.

Lecturers think that there must be a balance between allowing academic freedom and limiting divergences and losing control of these tools. A standard approach with a pool of tools is required.

All of the universities provided trainings and workshops but still there were some trainings missing in the opinion of the interviewees. Such as: how to use tools, how to lead international virtual teams and more soft skill training. Also, the trainer seems to be important and the efficiency and the quality of the education from the lecturers depends on training.

In general, benefits of online learning could be identified in the interviews, such as internationality, breaking geographical barriers, convenience, flexibility, easiness of communication and even the climate protection was a topic. Overall, it could be seen also as a success in developing technologically and getting more familiar with the online and digital environment.

All in all, blended learning was actually seen as a potential for the future, but also as a challenge. Issues occurring in online teaching could be solved in a hybrid solution according to the interviewees and a mix of methodologies could improve the effectiveness of education. However, it is important to think about the added value and how to create good working blended learning courses. Consistency seems to be the key and a good coordination. Clarity in the methodology and development of strategies is required. An example could be to start with face-to-face sessions, continue online and meet for discussions and interaction to get the best of both worlds, rising the advantages of both to get a fit. The interviewees were supporter of the blended learning format with some requirements and thoughts that must be considered.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the objective of IO1 was to create a knowledge bank, to better identify needs and expectations of students, faculty, and administrative staff regarding online and blended learning.

Therefore, a survey and interviews were conducted. The needs identified in the survey could be further emphasized with the help of the interviews. The expectations of the different interviewees were clearer, and examples could be driven. About faculty, the time management and technology were discussed and there was consensus that universities should help with trainings and tools, support and some wishes were exposed. The transfer of the purpose turns out to be important and ideas came to how engage students in an online environment. About

the students, motivation and procrastination issues were discussed and ideas on how to overcome the issues. The shared best practices can help the learning environment to improve and expectations regarding the university infrastructure were highlighted as well. Benefits and the potential of blended learning were also topics talked through.

All in all, relevant insights could be gained and needs, as well as expectations could be identified, helping to create a valuable blended learning experience in the future.