

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15221

STSM title: “Forms and methods of centralized support for four key higher education activities at Masaryk University”

STSM start and end date: 16/04/2018 to 20/04/2018

Grantee name: Yulia Stukalina

PURPOSE OF THE STSM/

(max.500 words)

Providing high quality, relevant and widely accessible higher education is a fundamental goal of the European Higher Education Area. New and emerging approaches to learning, teaching and research made possible by new technologies, can complement, consolidate, support and further advance these efforts. Cost Action CA15221 addresses the challenge of creating synergy among the increasingly more specialised and centralised supports for the above activities, offering the most advantageous models and practices for supporting research, writing, teaching and learning. As there is a lack of professional conversations around the shared territory of support for the above areas, corresponding research across higher education institutions would illuminate intersections and contribute to institutional transformation based on complementary, coherent and integrated provision.

Masaryk University is recognized as one of the most important teaching and research institutions in the Czech Republic. Masaryk University is currently one of the fastest-growing higher education institutions in Europe. Placing a great deal of emphasis on international cooperation with prestigious foreign universities and research institutions, Masaryk University supports the continuous exchange of knowledge, ideas and information as well as researchers, instructors and students on a worldwide scale. Masaryk University has a staff of over 5,000 (more than 2,000 of them academics); the total student body, scattered across over 200 different departments, institutes and clinics, is more than 31,000, over 6,000 of them from overseas. The university offers over 200 bachelor, 290 masters and 130 doctoral full-time study programs. One of Masaryk University’s top priorities is scientific research. Masaryk University together with other institutions of higher education participate in CEITEC – a research centre for both basic and applied research in the field of life sciences. The University owns and operates Mendel Polar Station in Antarctica; the station facilitates basic biological, geological and climatological research. As the above facts make clear, Masaryk University should have an excellent experience in providing institutional support for the key higher education activities – research, writing, teaching and learning.

In line with the Cost Action CA 15221 objectives the following objectives were set by the grantee:

1) Studying the forms and methods of centralized support for research, writing, teaching and learning, which are used at Masaryk University.

2) Examining what educational services, designed to facilitate effective teaching, learning, and research, are offered to students, academic and attending staff.

3) Defining basic processes and knowledge transfer schemes involved in the centralized model of support for research, writing, teaching and learning at Masaryk University.

4) Analysing how modern technologies and communication platforms (including the University's centralized learning management system) allow for greater collaboration between all study process participants in the agenda of creating the common ground in terms of shared purposes, processes, knowledge, values and skills among centralized institutional supports for the four key activities in order to capitalise on their synergies.

The purpose of the STSM was also to provide the grantee with an opportunity to continue her research in the area of educational management, enhance her knowledge on the topic, improve her professional skills and enhance her research expertise.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

(max.500 words)

The following research methods were used by the grantee:

1) Analysis of technologies and communication platforms used for supporting TLWR: the centralized Learning Management System employed for the administration, documentation, tracking and delivery of educational courses; University intranet providing internal communication, collaboration and access to internal/external resources necessary for supporting TLWR activities.

2) Analysis of the University's documents regulating centralized support for TLWR: Masaryk University Strategic Plan 2016–2020; Faculty of Arts Strategic Plan 2016–2020; documents related to Quality Assurance at Masaryk University; *Studia Paedagogica* (published by the University), other relevant publications; study courses descriptions.

3) Conducting interviews with representatives of the University management, research and academic staff.

Investigation of the forms and methods of centralized support for TLWR used at Masaryk University) included addressing and discussing the following issues (the questions were developed by the grantee):

1) Issues discussed in relation to Objective 1:

How is centralized support for TLWR performed (at what level – University/faculties/departments, etc.)? What kind of staff is involved in the process? What kind of documentation regulates the process – strategic plans, guidelines, quality manuals, standards, etc.? What kind of training and development programmes is offered for the academic staff in the context of TLWR support? How are training needs identified? What is the role of study programme and its director in the process? How are synergies between specific areas of support created?

2) Issues discussed in relation to Objective 2:

Is there a special unit supporting TLWR? What areas are covered? (e.g. international education and grants; guidance and information on the University's study programmes and courses; University's strategy and policies; engagement in research activities; staff issues; University-wide communication; career guidance and counselling services, etc.)? How synergy is created through the established communication models in relation to TLWR? How are students with any type of physical, sensorial, psychological disabilities supported?

3) Issues discussed in relation to Objective 3:

What communication models and knowledge transfer schemes are used at Masaryk University at different levels – University/faculty/departments/individuals? What kind of structured (planned) and spontaneous knowledge transfer schemes (e.g. staff and faculty meetings, newspapers, newsletters, social spaces, mentoring, social media, etc.) are employed for supporting TLWR? How is feedback from students/staff obtained? How is collaboration between faculties/departments/project teams/individuals ensured to create synergies in relation to TLWR? How are decisions made at the University? Is this process evidence-based? How is necessary information collected and stored? Are TLWR strategies and policies in line with institutional policies and strategies? Is there a balance between central provision and accountability, and departmental autonomy? What is the role of the Quality Management System in supporting research, writing, teaching and learning?

4) Issues discussed in relation to Objective 4:

What is the role of the University's Learning Management System (LMS) in supporting interdisciplinary learning/transdisciplinary collaboration, and in supporting TLWR activities? What is the role of the University intranet in managing communication within the University and inspiring social negotiation as an important part of these activities? Does technology play an essential role in supporting TLWR at different levels?

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

(max. 500 words)

The research conducted within this STSM has allowed the grantee to identify and describe some basic elements of centralized support for TLWR.

Support for TLWR is integrated in the Masaryk University Strategic Plan 2016–2020, Strategic Plans of every Faculty, as well as in the documents related to Quality Assurance. The activities associated with TLWR are among strategic priorities of Masaryk University.

Support for TLWR is implemented in an evidence-based manner in the agenda of Quality Assurance, the completion of an internal quality assurance system being a key challenge for the University administration and academic staff. The support is based on the empirical data collected from students and staff on a regular basis (including staff self-evaluation reports). The obtained information is stored in the University intranet, and is available to staff and administration.

Support for TLWR encompasses students and academics engaged in the relevant activities throughout the whole University. There is a balance between central provision and accountability, and departmental autonomy, which is very important for creating the so-called “systemic synergy”. Sufficient cross-departmental linkages are established to support university-wide communication, collaboration and knowledge exchange in the agenda of supporting TLWR. These linkages are established at different levels (University/faculty/department) through formal structures that span departmental boundaries. In addition to these formal structures, informal means of communication and collaboration facilitate cross-departmental linkages. Structured and spontaneous knowledge transfer models supporting TLWR activities include University/faculty/department/Senate meetings, social spaces, social media, etc. Tight cross-departmental linkages allow creating synergetic effects throughout the University. Synergetic overlaps between the different functional units and areas of support are supposed to be beneficial for all stakeholders of the University.

In the University, there are centralized offices, where specialized staff with expertise in TLWR is working. Such structures provide support for academics in the TLWR related fields, as well as guidance and

counselling to students: Centre of Academic Staff Development, Quality Assurance Centre, Research and Development Centre, Centre for Information Technologies, Central Library, Experimental Humanities Laboratory, Centre for the Advancement of Research in the Liberal Arts, Office for Doctoral Studies and Advanced Master's State Examinations, Career Centre, Support Centre for Students with Special Needs, Office for Studies, etc.

Academics assigned with both teaching and research, are provided with the possibility of individual development and growth regarding their competencies. To ensure sufficient proficiency of the academic staff regular staff training is organized at the University level in cooperation with every faculty; it includes an 80-hour qualification improvement course. So qualifications of faculty members are supposed to be developed continuously "throughout their careers", publishing in internationally recognized scientific journals and presenting at international scientific conferences being supported by the faculties' budgets.

Support for TLWR is also implemented through incorporating modern technologies in the educational process. The role of the University's Learning Management System and intranet (developed by the University's IT specialists) in supporting communication, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary collaboration and related TLWR activities can not be underestimated. Modern technologies and solutions enable accessible, blended and collaborative learning and research environments for both students and academics.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

(max.500 words)

Transport and Telecommunication Institute is open for further collaboration with Masaryk University in the frame of the ERASMUS+ projects, as well as through joint publications and events.