

ContinueUP

Collaboration and co-creation guidelines for (inter-)national projects in initial teacher education



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Authors:	Visnja Rajic, Maja Homen, Neuza Sofia Guerreiro Pedro, João Manuel Nunes Piedade, Ana Pedro, Aránzazu Hervás Escobar and Jesús Paz-Albo
Editing:	Benjamin Hertz & Nikolaos Mouratoglou
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Executive summary

This document presents guidelines for fostering effective national and international collaboration in initial teacher education (ITE). It is grounded in research, policy frameworks, and the practical experiences of the ContinueUP project, aiming to provide actionable strategies for sustainable, inclusive, and impactful partnerships. Collaboration in ITE is not merely about task completion but about building trust, co-creating knowledge, and fostering innovation. While international partnerships present unique opportunities for systemic change, they are also shaped by challenges such as cultural differences, diverse institutional frameworks, and logistical barriers.

The guidelines highlight five core principles essential for successful collaboration:

- ▶ Shared goals and alignment – establishing a collective sense of purpose.
- ▶ Mutual respect across cultures – valuing diverse perspectives.
- ▶ Equity and inclusion – ensuring all voices are genuinely heard.
- ▶ Transparency and accountability – promoting shared responsibility.
- ▶ Flexibility and adaptability – remaining responsive to feedback and evolving.

Building on these principles, the document outlines practices for effective partnership formation, governance, and communication, including role clarity, inclusive decision-making, and careful time-zone management. It also identifies critical processes for co-creation: co-design, co-development, co-implementation, and co-evaluation, all emphasising shared ownership and continuous reflection. Common challenges - such as cultural navigation, legal and administrative differences, and conflict resolution - are addressed through strategies that foreground intercultural competence, clear agreements, and adaptability.

The guidelines further underscore the importance of monitoring, evaluation, and continuous learning as integral to maintaining alignment, trust, and improvement. For long-term impact, the document stresses sustainability and scaling through embedding outcomes into institutional practices, fostering ownership among end-users, investing in capacity building, and designing adaptable models for broader replication. Finally, recommendations emphasise starting with shared values, investing in relationships, designing for inclusion, practicing transparency, and treating collaboration as a learning journey. Taken together, these practices highlight that effective co-construction in ITE goes beyond project deliverables: it is about cultivating equitable, adaptable, and resilient partnerships that drive meaningful changes across education systems.

1. Introduction

Background and rationale

Collaboration in initial teacher education (ITE) is about more than completing tasks - it is about building relationships, fostering trust, and creating shared opportunities for learning. Co-constructing ITE programs, courses, and initiatives across institutions or countries offers significant potential for innovation, enhanced quality, and systemic change in teacher education. At the same time, such partnerships are complex: differences in language, policies, institutional practices, and cultural expectations can create barriers that require careful navigation.

These guidelines are specifically designed to support the co-construction of ITE initiatives, drawing directly on the experiences and lessons learned from the [ContinueUP project](#). In the project three ITE institutions co-designed, co-developed, co-delivered, and co-evaluated a short course about teacher digital competence that was embedded in each institution's annual ITE programme. The guidelines were developed on the basis of this experience, where we observed first-hand the opportunities and challenges inherent in collaborative design and delivery. By capturing these insights, the guidelines aim to provide actionable strategies to enhance both the process and outcomes of co-created ITE programmes.

The principles underlying these guidelines are informed by both research and practice. Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice emphasises that learning is most effective when participants engage collectively in knowledge creation. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation reminds us that meaningful collaboration requires genuine involvement, not just symbolic inclusion. More recent scholarship in education highlights the importance of designing co-creation processes that are inclusive, empowering, and responsive to all stakeholders (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2016; Vespone, 2023).

Concurrently, policy frameworks reinforce this perspective. The European Commission, through Horizon Europe (2021) and Erasmus+ (2020), emphasises that strong partnerships are built on openness, shared values, and long-term commitment. The Erasmus+ Teacher Academies foster European partnerships in teacher education and seek to promote a European and international outlook, supporting multilingualism, cultural diversity, and alignment with EU policy priorities. OECD work (Reznikova, Labanino, & McKee Mathews, 2023) similarly underscores the importance of transparency, inclusion, and adaptability to ensure effective collaboration.

Taken together, these research insights, policy priorities, and practical experiences illustrate that co-constructing ITE initiatives is not simply about managing projects or completing deliverables. It is a process of joint knowledge creation, shared responsibility, and trust-building. Approached intentionally, co-construction leads to partnerships that are more sustainable, impactful, and rewarding - for educators, institutions, and the broader communities they serve (ContinueUP, 2025).

Scope

The current guidelines are designed to be practical, adaptable, and specifically tailored for initial teacher education (ITE) providers. They can support both national and international teams at any

stage of co-constructing ITE initiatives - from the first conversations about collaboration, to planning and implementing joint activities, and ultimately reflecting on outcomes to ensure lasting impact.

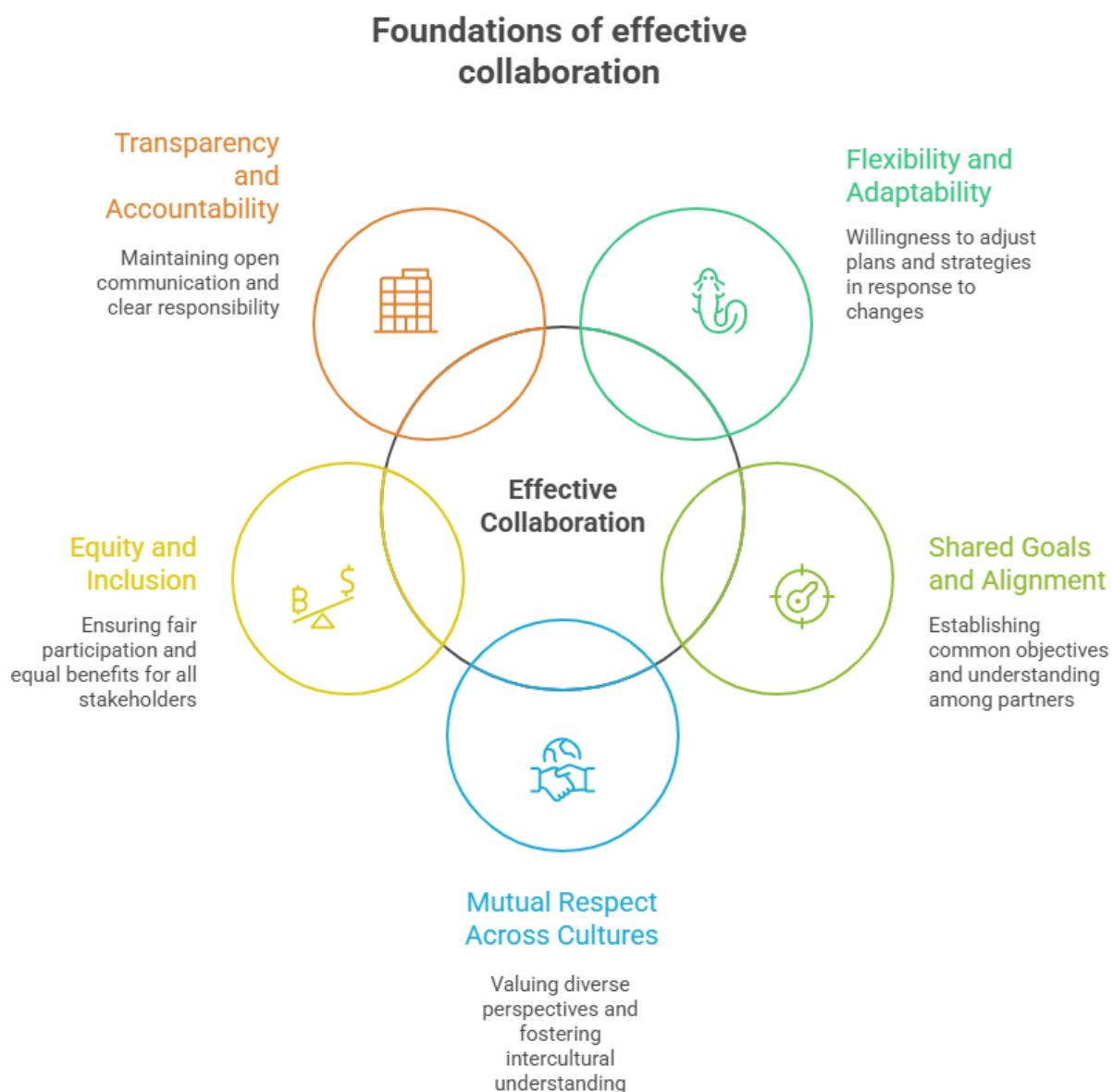
While rooted in teacher education, the principles outlined here are relevant to diverse collaborative contexts within ITE, including partnerships between universities, other types of teacher education institutions, schools, and educational networks. They offer a framework for building strong, inclusive, and sustainable relationships, whether working with a small group of local partners or coordinating a large international consortium of ITE providers.

By following these guidelines, ITE teams can enhance the quality of shared programmes, foster meaningful participation among all stakeholders, and ensure that collaborative efforts contribute to lasting improvements in teacher education practice.



2. Guiding principles for (inter-)national collaboration

Effective co-construction in initial teacher education relies on clear, shared principles that guide collaboration, foster trust, and ensure inclusive, sustainable outcomes. The following core principles provide a foundation for building strong (inter-)national partnerships among ITE providers.



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These core principles serve as practical touchpoints that ITE providers can use to manage the complexities of international partnerships and co-constructed initiatives. Specifically:

- ▶ **Shared goals and alignment:** Successful collaboration begins with establishing a common understanding among all partners regarding the project's objectives and expected outcomes. This alignment ensures that efforts are coherent and focused, fostering a sense of collective purpose that drives progress and facilitates shared success.
- ▶ **Mutual respect across cultures:** Recognising and valuing diverse cultural perspectives, knowledge systems, and work practices is essential. Respecting these differences fosters a positive collaborative environment, encouraging open exchange of ideas and promoting intercultural understanding, which enhances innovation and problem-solving.

- ▶ **Equity and inclusion:** Effective partnerships prioritize equitable participation by designing processes that actively include underrepresented or marginalised voices. Ensuring a fair distribution of roles, responsibilities, and resources helps to build trust and ensures that all stakeholders benefit equally from the collaboration.
- ▶ **Transparency and accountability:** Maintaining open communication channels and sharing information openly are fundamental to cultivating trust among partners. Clear accountability for decisions and outcomes helps to align expectations, monitor progress, and address challenges promptly, ensuring that all parties are responsible for the project's success.
- ▶ **Flexibility and adaptability:** Collaboration should be dynamic, with partners willing to revise plans and strategies in response to feedback, new insights, or unforeseen challenges. Flexibility enables the group to remain resilient, innovate effectively, and achieve sustainable results despite changing circumstances.

In the context of implementing co-construction in initial teacher education it is also very relevant to create a comprehensive vision about the organisation and the processes that structure initial teacher education in the different countries or regions involved. Accordingly, the following main topics and key information should be shared at the start of the co-construction process.

National and regional frameworks governing initial teacher education

It is essential that all participants have a clear understanding of how ITE is structured across different countries or regions, including the key pathways, programmes, and levels of qualification required to become a licensed teacher. This overview should highlight both similarities and differences between national/regional contexts. In particular, participants should be familiar with the national/regional regulatory and policy frameworks that govern ITE, including legal standards, strategic initiatives, and policies designed to ensure programme quality. These frameworks define the roles and responsibilities of educational authorities, institutions, and other stakeholders involved in teacher education, and they establish the criteria for programme accreditation, teacher certification, and ongoing professional development. Additionally, specific national or regional policies that directly influence ITE should be presented, showing how they shape the design, delivery, and recognition of teacher education programmes. Finally, the accreditation and quality assurance processes related to ITE should be outlined, including the roles of accrediting bodies, assessment practices, and mechanisms for continuous monitoring and improvement.

Understanding these frameworks and processes is not only important for contextual awareness, but also critical for successful co-construction. When partners have a clear picture of each other's systems, they can better align programme design, identify potential areas for adaptation, and anticipate regulatory or institutional constraints. In our project, for example, shared knowledge of differences in accreditation processes helped ITE partners to better plan the modules of the ITE short course "Empowering teachers as digital lifelong learners" and avoid misalignment, duplicated efforts, or even non-compliance with local regulations. Therefore, by establishing a common understanding of structural and regulatory conditions, ITE partners can co-create initiatives that are feasible, coherent, and impactful across diverse educational contexts, providing a solid foundation for sustainable international collaboration.

Organisation of the initial teacher education programmes in each institution

It is highly recommended that all participants have a clear understanding of how ITE programmes are organised within each partner institution. This includes the overall structure (total ECTS, number of years, semester distribution, balance between theoretical and practical courses, length of school-based internships, etc.), the general goals and learning outcomes, and the content covered in both mandatory and elective courses (e.g., pedagogical theories, subject-specific knowledge, classroom management, special needs, digital competences). Selection criteria for candidates, including minimal standards and specific competencies, should also be considered.

Understanding the processes related to programme design, assessment, quality assurance, and accreditation is essential, as is knowledge of the institutional processes for curriculum design and implementation. Sharing this information helps create a common vision of the core components of ITE curricula and clarifies the procedures behind course approval, including their flexibility for adaptation.

To facilitate comparison and co-construction, it is recommended that all partners present their ITE programme information using a standardised template or comparative table. Such a tool allows for systematic cross-country analysis, highlights similarities and differences, and makes it easier to identify areas for alignment, adaptation, or joint development. This structured approach supports more informed discussion, reduces misunderstandings, and provides a practical foundation for designing collaborative ITE initiatives.

Sharing examples on teaching practices

Sharing examples of teaching practices, including both innovative approaches and challenges encountered in different contexts, can help create a comprehensive vision of what is being implemented in ITE programmes across institutions and countries. Case studies that highlight successes as well as lessons learned provide valuable models for co-construction participants, illustrating how context-specific adaptations can lead to positive outcomes while also acknowledging potential pitfalls. Recent innovations in teaching, such as the integration of technology, project-based learning, and inclusive pedagogies, demonstrate the evolving nature of educational practices; at the same time, reflecting on the difficulties and obstacles encountered in implementing these approaches fosters a deeper understanding and more realistic, collaborative planning among ITE partners.

Identification of relevant partnerships and stakeholders

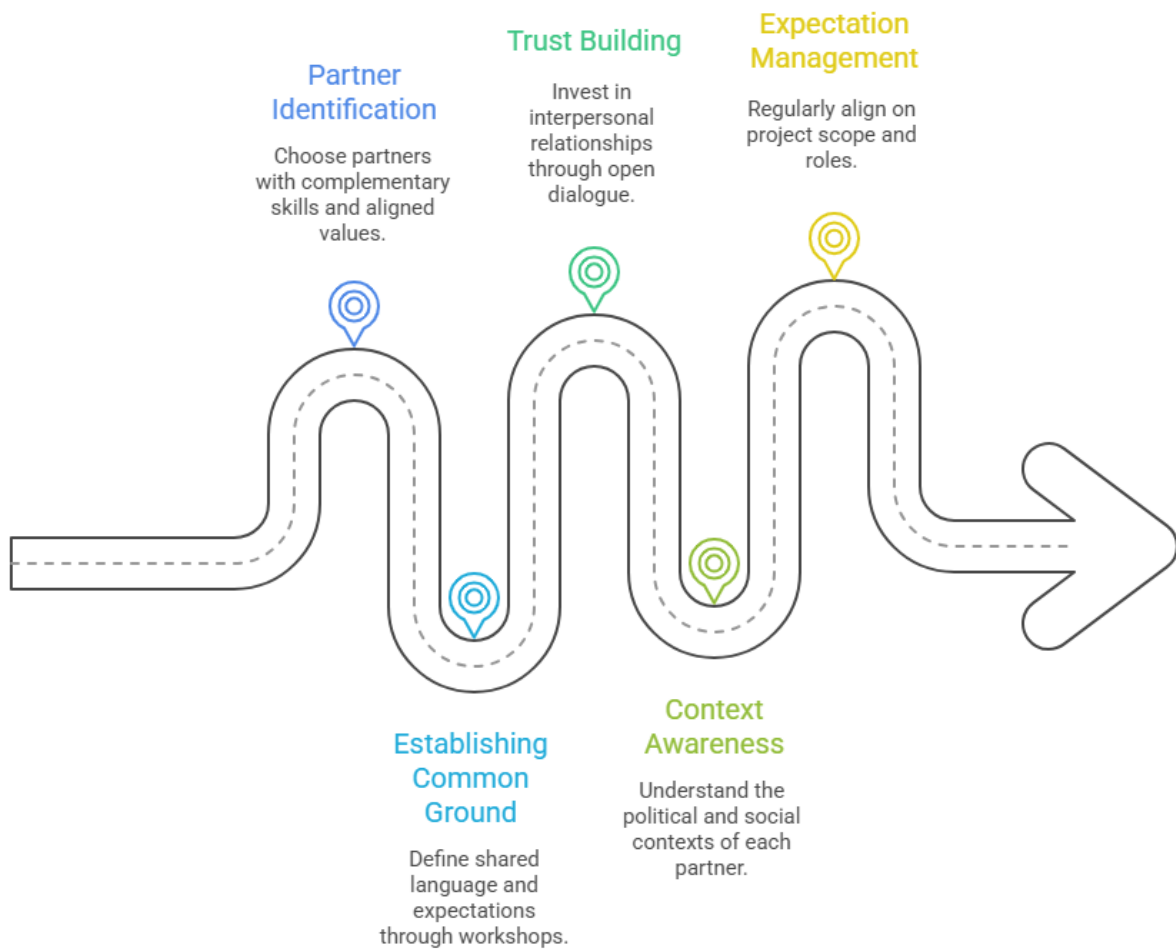
The different partnerships involved in the implementation of ITE programmes should be clearly identified and shared among partners. These can include schools, local authorities, and other organisations that play key roles in teacher education, often collaborating through bilateral, multilateral, or consortium-based models. Such partnerships foster shared responsibilities, resource exchange, and practical support for teacher preparation. Engagement of practitioners, mentors, and other community-based partners is vital for providing hands-on experience, ongoing guidance, and real-world insights to ITE participants.

Equally important is ensuring that these partnerships are sustainable beyond the duration of the project. Long-term collaboration strategies - such as formal agreements, joint professional

development initiatives, continuous communication channels, and mechanisms for co-creating and sharing resources - can help ITE partners maintain strong, productive relationships over time. Sustained partnerships are crucial for successful co-construction, as they allow partners to continuously contribute expertise, refine practices based on feedback, and jointly develop innovative approaches to teacher education over time. By planning for continuity from the outset, institutions can ensure that collaborations continue to benefit teacher education programmes, provide ongoing support to practitioners and students, and contribute to systemic improvements in initial teacher education.

3. Building effective (inter-)national partnerships

Establishing strong and sustainable international collaborations requires intentional planning, mutual respect, and ongoing communication. Below are five foundational practices to guide this process.



Partner identification

Identifying the right partners is essential for building effective and sustainable collaboration. Partners should be selected based on complementary expertise - such as curriculum design, digital pedagogy, or inclusive education - and a shared commitment to innovation and teacher development. It's equally important to ensure alignment in values, including equity, lifelong learning, and responsiveness to local educational needs. A mutual interest in long-term collaboration helps foster trust and continuity, allowing the partnership to evolve beyond the initial project scope. By strategically choosing partners who bring diverse strengths and a unified vision, international and national ITE projects can co-create impactful, scalable solutions that address the complexities of teacher education across varied contexts.

Establishing common ground

It is crucial to establish common ground from the outset and to plan for early-stage workshops or retreats, which serve as valuable spaces for partners to co-create a shared language, clarify expectations, and define collaborative working norms that respect cultural and institutional diversity. These initial engagements foster mutual trust, promote intercultural understanding, and lay the foundation for sustainable and impactful cooperation. By aligning goals, values, and operational practices, international teams can ensure that joint initiatives are inclusive, innovative, and responsive to the evolving needs of their respective contexts.

Trust building

Building trust is a cornerstone of successful international collaboration. Investing time in interpersonal relationships through informal exchanges and open dialogue helps partners manage cultural differences, foster empathy, and strengthen professional connections. Whether through casual conversations, shared reflections, or collaborative problem-solving, these relational efforts create a safe and inclusive environment where all participants feel respected and heard. Trust-building practices not only enhance communication and cooperation but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and impact of joint initiatives across diverse contexts.

Context awareness

Context awareness is vital to fostering respectful and effective collaboration. Understanding the political, institutional, and social environments in which each partner operates enables teams to make informed decisions, avoid misinterpretations, and adapt strategies to local realities. This awareness helps build empathy, supports equitable participation, and ensures that project goals are relevant and achievable across diverse settings. By integrating these contextual insights into planning and implementation, international initiatives can become more inclusive, resilient, and impactful.

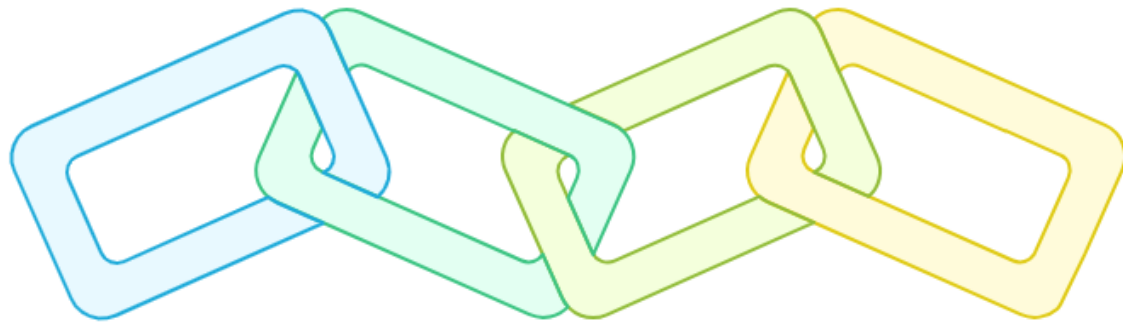
Expectations management

Effective expectation management is essential for the success of co-construction projects. Regularly revisiting and aligning on the project's scope, deliverables, and roles helps maintain clarity, accountability, and shared commitment among partners. This ongoing process ensures that all stakeholders remain informed and engaged, while also allowing for adjustments in response to evolving needs or unforeseen challenges. By fostering transparency and open communication, expectation management strengthens collaboration and supports the achievement of meaningful and sustainable outcomes across diverse contexts.

4. Co-creation processes in (inter-)national settings

Vespone (2023) identifies key processes in the co-construction and co-creation of knowledge. It starts with a collaborative environment built on trust and respect, followed by joint goal setting to define shared objectives. Active participation in discussions and peer practices supports negotiation and meaning making, where ideas are clarified and revised. Through feedback and reflection, participants engage in continuous improvement, leading to collective knowledge construction and problem-solving. Finally, sustainability is ensured through the alignment of teaching and assessment of the jointly defined goals. All of these elements need to be considered to enable co-creation and co-construction within (inter)national ITE settings.

The co-creation process can be understood as a sequence of four interdependent phases: co-design, co-development, co-implementation/co-delivery, and co-evaluation.



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Co-design

During co-design, partners engage in the joint framing of problems and objectives. Collaborative sessions are organised to identify challenges, priorities, and goals, making use of tools such as conceptual mapping or structured tasks that capture diverse perspectives. The main outcome of this stage is the agreement on clear and shared objectives that are collectively endorsed.

Our co-design experience in ContinueUp

- ▶ Joint workshops and vision-building sessions where all partners articulated their institutional priorities, expectations, and constraints.
- ▶ A common vision statement and shared objectives were co-developed, ensuring coherence
- ▶ Alignment was maintained through regular progress meetings, where goals were revisited and adapted

- ▶ Creation of spaces for intercultural dialogue (both formal – e.g., MS Teams channel and informal – e.g., during onsite meetings), allowing partners to share national, institutional, and personal perspectives.
- ▶ Use of shared digital platforms (e.g., Teams, Google Workspace, Moodle) for open access to documents, agendas, and minutes.
- ▶ Clear reporting structures, timelines, and responsibilities were defined through work package leads and shared deliverables.
- ▶ Documentation of decisions and making meeting recordings available for those unable to attend.
- ▶ Project plans included buffer time and contingency strategies to account for differences in academic calendars.
- ▶ Feedback loops were embedded (e.g., reflection sessions, surveys) so activities could be adjusted in response to evolving needs.

Co-development

The co-development stage focuses on the creation of solutions through participatory methodologies. Approaches such as design thinking or world cafe are employed to stimulate joint innovation. Teams are composed of members from different countries and professional backgrounds, ensuring diversity of inputs. Ideas are collectively developed, planned, and tested, while documentation and dissemination of results are key elements of this phase.

Our co-development experience in ContinueUp

- ▶ We applied collaborative methods such as ‘World Café’ discussions and structured brainstorming sessions.
- ▶ Working groups were deliberately composed of members from different countries, institutional roles, and professional backgrounds.
- ▶ Ideas were not developed in isolation but collectively refined through iterative cycles of discussion, testing, and feedback.
- ▶ All processes and outcomes were systematically documented in shared repositories.
- ▶ Summaries, templates, and guidelines were disseminated across the consortium to facilitate uptake.
- ▶ Early outputs were reviewed collaboratively, with adjustments made based on partner feedback and contextual realities.

Co-implementation/Co-delivery

In co-implementation/co-delivery, partners collaboratively carry out the activities previously defined. Developing a shared timeline that respects the school calendars and working rhythms of each

country or region is crucial. Task allocation should be based on the specific capacity of each partner to ensure fairness in the process. To maintain efficiency and transparency, regular communication routines are recommended, such as weekly meetings scheduled at fixed times that account for different time zones and teaching timetables. Recording meetings and providing written summaries further enable asynchronous access to information.

Our co-implementation/co-delivery experience in ContinueUp

- ▶ A joint calendar was established, taking into account national academic schedules.
- ▶ Responsibilities were distributed according to each partner's expertise and capacity.
- ▶ Weekly and/or biweekly online meetings were scheduled.
- ▶ Written summaries of meetings were circulated, enabling partners unable to attend live sessions to remain engaged and informed.
- ▶ Activities such as co-taught modules were implemented jointly, with partners sharing teaching and facilitation.
- ▶ Progress was reviewed continuously, with partners offering real-time feedback and local insights to adapt delivery in response to emerging needs.

Co-evaluation

Finally, co-evaluation emphasises collective reflection and learning. Regular participatory evaluation sessions are conducted, using tools such as feedback loops and impact mapping to monitor progress and outcomes. Adjustments to the plan should emerge from this shared learning process, ensuring that all contributions are acknowledged and that responsibilities are clearly monitored. Continuous evaluation allows the project to remain adaptive, while strengthening both individual and collective accountability.

Our co-evaluation experience in ContinueUp

- ▶ Regular online and face-to-face meetings included structured reflection activities, where all partners could voice successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- ▶ Tools such as surveys, polls, and brief interviews were used to capture perspectives from different stakeholders, including teacher educators and student teachers.
- ▶ Partners analysed outcomes against the project's shared goals, identifying both intended and unexpected effects at institutional levels.
- ▶ Insights from co-evaluation informed real-time adjustments to deliverables and methods, ensuring activities remained relevant and feasible across contexts.
- ▶ Evaluation was not treated as a final step but as an ongoing practice, embedded in our regular work.

5. Governance and communication

Strong governance and clear, inclusive communication are the backbone of any successful international project, especially in the context of ITE. When partners come from different institutional cultures, countries, and time zones, it is essential to create structures and practices that support transparency, trust, and shared responsibility. This chapter offers practical guidance on governance and communication to help teams work effectively, regardless of their institutional or cultural context.



Inclusive governance structures

Governance should reflect the diversity of the project partnership. This means going beyond formal representation and making sure all voices are genuinely included and heard. Within the context of an (inter)national project for ITE providers, shared responsibility and governance can be ensured through shared responsibility for a specific work package (WP). Another option is to rotate leadership roles across partners, which can help ensure shared ownership and responsibility. It's also a good idea to create regular opportunities for feedback and consultation so the project can stay responsive and inclusive throughout its duration.

Role clarity

Clear roles and responsibilities help avoid confusion and ensure everyone knows what's expected. At the start of the project, it's helpful to map out who is responsible for what, how decisions will be made, and where people can go with questions or concerns. As projects evolve, roles may need to shift, so it's worth revisiting these definitions from time to time to make sure they still reflect the work being done.

Decision-making

Making decisions in project teams takes intention and openness. This is even more relevant in international teams. Whenever possible, aim for collaborative decision-making approaches that bring people together and build consensus. Whether through facilitated discussions, voting, or other inclusive techniques, it is important that decisions are transparent and well-documented. This helps everyone stay aligned and creates a record that can be referred to later. It's also important to be aware of how cultural differences might affect communication and decision-making styles, and that spaces are created to ensure respectful dialogue about these dynamics.

Communication tools

Using the right tools can make a big difference in how smoothly a project runs. It is important to choose platforms and tools that are accessible, GDPR compliant, and easy to use for all team members; for instance, we used videoconferencing, collaborative, productivity, and brainstorming tools. Usually, institutions for ITE use a specific LMS, but project members can be given administrative or participant roles for a specific learning space. Just as important is making sure everyone is comfortable using these platforms. A short onboarding session or guide at the beginning can go a long way in helping everyone participate equally. Establishing a few simple communication norms, e.g. where to store shared files, can also help keep things running smoothly.

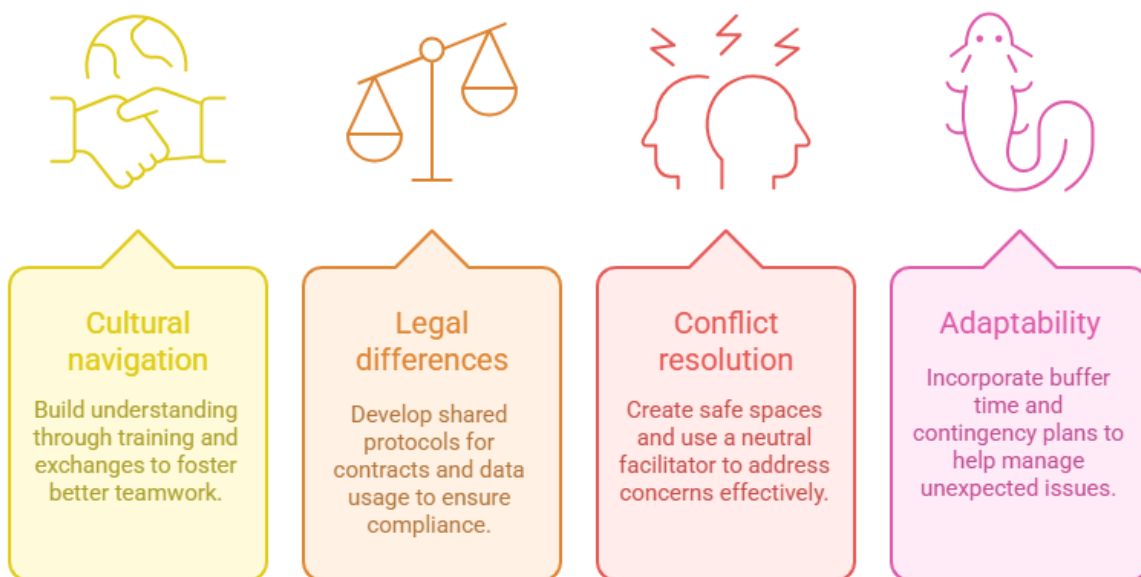
Time zone management

When working in international teams, time zones can be one of the biggest logistical challenges. If there is no possibility of a fixed time set for meetings, a good practice is to rotate meeting times so that no one group is always inconvenienced. Sharing recordings and written summaries of meetings helps ensure that people who couldn't attend the meeting can still stay up to date. Tools like online shared calendars can make scheduling easier. If the time difference is a relevant

challenge and even an obstacle, consider whether asynchronous collaboration, such as adding comments to a shared document, might actually work better than scheduling yet another online meeting.

6. Managing challenges

Even the most well-planned international partnerships will face challenges. Proactively addressing potential issues can help maintain momentum and trust. Below are four practices to guide the process.



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Cultural navigation

Cultural navigation is a key management challenge in international ITE projects, where partners often represent diverse educational systems, institutional cultures, and communication styles. To build mutual understanding and foster effective collaboration, projects should incorporate intercultural training and peer exchange opportunities into their design. These can include mobility programmes, virtual dialogues, or reflective workshops that allow teacher educators to engage with different pedagogical traditions and institutional norms. Promoting intercultural competence early and consistently throughout our project, we managed to reduce misunderstandings, strengthen relationships, and co-create the ITE short course based on principles of inclusivity, which is context-sensitive and responsive to the needs of diverse learning environments.

Legal and administrative differences

Managing legal and administrative differences is essential to ensure smooth collaboration across borders. Partners often operate under distinct national regulations regarding contracts, data protection, and reporting requirements, which can lead to delays or misunderstandings if not addressed early. To mitigate these challenges, project coordinators should begin by identifying relevant legal frameworks in each participating country and establishing shared protocols that respect local compliance standards. This includes agreeing on templates for partnership agreements, data-sharing policies aligned with GDPR regulations, and standardised reporting formats.

A practical way to support this process is to create a shared legal and administrative handbook at the start of the project. Such a resource can compile templates, GDPR guidelines, and reporting standards in one easily accessible place, ensuring that all partners have a common reference point. Proactively developing and maintaining such a handbook could have helped reduce the administrative friction that we experienced in the ContinueUP co-construction exercise. Moreover, it would have fostered a stronger sense of transparency and freed up energy to focus more on the pedagogical and developmental goals of our collaboration.

Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution is a vital management practice to maintain trust and collaboration across diverse partners. Given the range of institutional cultures, expectations, and working styles involved, it's important to create safe spaces - such as regular check-ins, facilitated discussions, or anonymous feedback channels - where concerns can be raised openly and constructively. In our project, we embedded conflict resolution mechanisms into the project's structure from the outset, with the aim of addressing issues early, preventing escalation, and fostering a culture of transparency and mutual respect that supports a successful co-creation process.

Adaptability

Adaptability is essential for managing the complexities of cross-border collaboration. To manage potential delays, shifting priorities, or unforeseen challenges - such as differences in academic calendars, administrative procedures, or policy changes - project teams should build buffer time into their timelines and develop contingency plans for key deliverables. This includes setting flexible milestones, identifying alternative workflows, and maintaining open communication channels to quickly respond to evolving circumstances. Equally important is fostering a culture where partners feel comfortable voicing struggles or delays without fear of blame, supported by mutual understanding and collective problem-solving. By embedding adaptability and mutual respect into our project's planning and management processes, we maintained momentum, safeguarded quality, and ensured that collaborative efforts remained resilient and responsive throughout the lifecycle of the project.

7. Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous learning

When working across different projects, institutions, and even countries and time zones, it's easy to get caught up in daily tasks and deadlines. But to truly collaborate and not just coordinate it is important to step back now and then and ask: *How are we doing?* That's where monitoring, evaluation, and learning come in. Not as a box-ticking exercise, but as a way to stay connected to each other, reflect on what's working (and what's not), and keep improving as the project evolves.

Defining what success looks like

Early on, it helps to have a shared understanding of what a “successful collaboration” actually means for your team. Of course, hitting project milestones is important, but so is how we work together. Are all voices being heard? Is the workload balanced? Are the outputs truly co-created? Or is one partner doing all the heavy lifting? Simple indicators can make a difference here. These might include:

- ▶ Whether all partners are actively contributing and participating;
- ▶ How satisfied people are with the process;
- ▶ Or whether the outputs reflect diverse perspectives.

These don't have to be overly formal, just clear enough to keep the team on the same page.

Making feedback part of the culture

Feedback doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, the more regular and informal it becomes, the more valuable it often is. You can use feedback methods such as:

- ▶ Sandwich method: Feedback is “sandwiched” between two positives: starting with praise, followed by constructive criticism, and ending with encouragement, to soften the impact of critical points.
- ▶ DESC model: A structured approach where the person describes the situation, expresses feelings, specifies the desired change, and outlines the consequences of taking or not taking action.
- ▶ What/Why technique: Feedback highlights what was done well and why it was effective, helping the recipient understand strengths in a concrete, transferable way.

- ▶ Team of two: Both parties reflect on how they can support each other better, making feedback reciprocal and fostering mutual growth.
- ▶ 5 R's feedback model: A cyclical process where one requests feedback, receives it openly, reflects on it, responds thoughtfully, and takes steps to resolve issues or integrate improvements.
- ▶ Feedforward: Focus less on past mistakes and more on future improvements, offering constructive suggestions for how performance or collaboration can be enhanced.
- ▶ 4C model: Feedback is structured around context (the situation), challenge (what needs to change), choices (options available), and consequences (outcomes of each choice).

Use opportunities in regular meetings to acquire feedback from your project members. That could mean even short activities such as: a quick temperature check at the end of meetings (What went well today? What was unclear?), or even just asking one-on-one: *How's this going for you?*

The most important thing is that people feel safe giving honest input and that it's actually used. Let the team know what feedback has been received, and what's going to change (or not) as a result. That kind of transparency builds trust and keeps everyone engaged. Ensure time and space for reflection on common work.

Creating space to reflect and learn

We're often so focused on getting things done that we forget to pause and reflect. But learning together is one of the richest parts of these kinds of projects. Set aside time for reflection. Hold reflection sessions after major deliverables are completed. This can be done in an online environment or face-to-face meetings. Invite team members to share lessons learned from their own contexts. Take time during a meeting to ask: *What's surprised us so far? What would we do differently next time?*

These moments don't just help manage the project; they help people grow in their roles, too.

Capturing and sharing insights

Documenting lessons and insights as the project unfolds is important. If we don't write it down, we often lose it. Try keeping it simple and useful. Use easily accessible tools such as online surveys (e.g., Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Lime Survey, etc.) or even tools such as Mentimeter, Padlet, or similar to collect reflections and share insights with project members.

- ▶ Create short summaries or bullet-point reflections after workshops or meetings.
- ▶ Use a shared folder or online space to store tools, templates, and examples others can reuse.
- ▶ Think about what could help the next team or project—what advice would you give someone starting where you did?

When learning is shared in real, practical ways, it becomes part of a bigger impact than just one project. Also, when we ensure time to stop and think about past experiences, we create growth opportunities.

8. Sustainability and scaling

Sustainability and scaling are essential in ITE projects to ensure a lasting impact beyond the initial co-construction project. By embedding outcomes into institutional practices and designing scalable models, ITE initiatives can foster long-term change and extend benefits across diverse educational contexts. Below are practices that were recognised during our project:

1. Blended Intensive Programs (BIP) within Erasmus+

The integration of BIPs, created around the project outputs relevant for prospective teacher competence development, into initial teacher education creates lasting opportunities for international mobility and collaborative learning. By embedding these short, intensive, and digitally supported mobility schemes into institutional strategies, teacher education providers can ensure that students and staff continue to benefit from cross-cultural exchange and joint problem-solving even after a project formally ends. This contributes to building a sustainable European dimension in teacher education.

2. Curriculum innovation

Project outputs gain longevity when they are translated into formal curriculum innovations rather than remaining as stand-alone pilot activities. Embedding newly developed teaching methods, digital tools, or thematic modules into accredited study programmes ensures that successive cohorts of student teachers are exposed to them. This institutional anchoring also allows continuous refinement and adaptation in line with evolving educational needs. In our project we managed to integrate the ITE short-course that was developed in the project, as part of the curricula at ITE institutions in the form of an elective course. This way, the main project output can be repeated successively in subsequent years.

3. Enhanced cooperation with educational agencies for CPD

Sustainability is reinforced through collaboration with educational agencies responsible for continuous professional development (CPD). By creating a mutual understanding of ITE education practices and the level of acquired competence, CPD institutions can plan their activities to progressively develop teacher competence or create compensational programmes for in-service teachers aiming at the recognised areas of insufficient competence. Such partnerships provide a pathway for scaling project outputs from initial teacher education into the broader professional learning system. Agencies can facilitate broad-scale teacher access to project-developed resources, integrate them into CPD programmes, and provide a supportive policy framework that sustains their use at national and regional levels.

4. Enhanced cooperation with schools as practitioner-led experts

Strong collaboration with schools ensures that project outcomes remain practice-oriented and relevant. Involving schools as practitioner-led expert communities allows innovations to be tested, adapted, and validated in authentic classroom settings. It helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, creating outputs that are not only academically sound but also pedagogically effective. Taking into account the know-how of in-service teachers brings invaluable classroom-based expertise that ensures project outputs are both relevant and applicable in real teaching contexts. This co-creation process not only grounds project outputs in everyday teaching realities but also builds ownership among practitioners, increasing the likelihood of sustained use and further dissemination.

5. Cooperation with NGOs

Collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offers an important avenue for sustaining project outputs in initial teacher education. NGOs often bring expertise in areas such as inclusive education, digital literacy, sustainability, and human rights, complementing academic and institutional approaches. By partnering with NGOs, teacher education programmes can ensure that project outputs are disseminated beyond higher education institutions and embedded in broader community and policy initiatives. NGOs also play a key role in advocacy and capacity building, helping to maintain the visibility and relevance of project results.

9. Recommendations

Successful national and international collaboration and co-creation require more than well-structured plans; they depend on shared values, strong relationships, inclusive practices, transparent communication, and a commitment to continuous learning. The following recommendations draw on the experiences, principles, and good practices outlined in this document, and are designed to help project teams build partnerships that are equitable, resilient, and impactful.

Start with shared values

- ▶ Align early on purpose, principles, and working norms.
- ▶ Organise an initial workshop where all partners articulate their institutional priorities, expectations, and values.
- ▶ Develop a common vision statement and a set of guiding principles to serve as a reference throughout the project.
- ▶ Ensure these shared values are revisited regularly to maintain alignment as contexts evolve.

Invest in relationships

- ▶ Build trust through openness, consistency, and mutual support.
- ▶ Dedicate time for informal exchanges (e.g. virtual coffee breaks, social events at meetings) to strengthen interpersonal connections.
- ▶ Encourage open communication channels where trust is built through honesty and consistency.
- ▶ Establish mentoring or “buddy” systems across institutions to foster collaboration and mutual support.
- ▶ Recognise and celebrate milestones collectively to reinforce commitment and cohesion.

Design for inclusion

- ▶ Involve stakeholders meaningfully and equitably.
- ▶ Ensure all relevant stakeholders, including underrepresented groups, are actively involved in decision-making.
- ▶ Adapt engagement strategies to accommodate linguistic, cultural, and institutional differences.

- ▶ Use accessible communication formats (plain language, multilingual resources, multiple modalities such as video, audio, and text).
- ▶ Implement participatory tools (e.g., co-design workshops, surveys, collaborative platforms) to guarantee meaningful and equitable contributions.

Be transparent

- ▶ Share challenges, decisions, and lessons in real time.
- ▶ Share meeting minutes, decisions, and progress updates openly with all partners through accessible platforms.
- ▶ Establish clear protocols for decision-making, conflict resolution, and reporting.
- ▶ Communicate challenges and risks early, inviting collective input on solutions.
- ▶ Maintain an open repository of resources, tools, and outputs so all partners have equal access to project knowledge.

Learn and adapt

- ▶ Treat the project as a learning journey and stay open to change.
- ▶ Build structured reflection points into the project timeline (after milestones, events, or pilot phases).
- ▶ Use diverse feedback methods (surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews) to capture perspectives from all partners.
- ▶ Encourage a culture where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, not failures.
- ▶ Revise plans dynamically in response to new insights, contextual shifts, or stakeholder feedback, ensuring flexibility and resilience.

Together, these recommendations emphasize that successful collaboration and co-creation is not only about achieving deliverables but also about cultivating equitable, transparent, and adaptive partnerships that can generate lasting value across diverse contexts.

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