

SPAN WP9: the Pan-European Prevention Science ECTS framework

Extended Executive Summary

Information about the SPAN initiative

The Science for Prevention Academic Network (SPAN), consisting of partners from 32 European institutions across 25 countries, was awarded a large grant (€595,000) by the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). This 36-month grant enabled the establishment of a network of prevention scientists and educators across Europe, who aimed to:

- improve the integration of prevention science in the higher education sector and to improve skill mobility across Europe;
- develop and share best practice and benchmarking in prevention science education training and workforce and;
- support the development of innovative ICT based content for prevention science.

For the purpose of this project, Prevention Science was understood as being that science which aims to improve public health by identifying malleable risk and protective factors, assessing the efficacy and effectiveness of preventive interventions and identifying optimal means for dissemination and diffusion.¹

Objectives of WP9: the pan-European Prevention Science ECTS framework

The main aim of WP9 in SPAN was the creation of a pan-European Prevention Science European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Framework. As agreed by Education Ministers of the countries involved in the Bologna Process, which established the foundations of tertiary student mobility, the primary responsibility for quality assurance lies with each institution.^{2,3} Thus this WP was the culmination of a process that based itself on the recommendations of previous work packages in SPAN, in particular the Quality Plan (WP6).

The main objectives of WP9, which was co-ordinated by the University of Malta, were to encourage partner institutions in SPAN to develop internal quality assurance procedures for the development of prevention science courses, create credit allocations for these courses which are ECTS based and monitor the credit allocations to establish whether the estimated workload is realistic.

¹ SPAN Kick Off meeting (2013) Key Points from the SPAN Kick Off Meeting. Internal Correspondence

² European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (2014) European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/5_2015/151153.pdf

³ Berlin Communiqué (2003). Realising the European Higher Education Area. Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003.

www.ehea.info/Uploads/about/Berlin_Communique1.pdf.

The specific tasks in this work package were listed as thus⁴:

Task 9.1 Partners implement individual action plans to implement ECTS in their own institution

Task 9.2 External Peer Review of ECTS proposals

Task 9.3 Development of a pan-European Prevention Science ECTS framework

The WP deliverables were listed as thus:

9.1 20 ECTS Information Packages (month 30)

9.2 Pan European Prevention Science ECTS framework (month 32)

Methodology

Key to the development of this WP was the drawing up of an ECTS Action Plan template (Task 9.1) which would ensure that the data collected would fit in with the Bologna Process. This template was designed such as to allow the development of an institutional self-evaluation tool. The data requested in this action plan included various sub criteria such as Course and year; Description and aims; Learning outcomes; Knowledge and understanding; Student skills at end of study unit; Teaching and learning methods; Method of assessment together with main texts and readings for the study unit. This data was selected following advice by a responsible person for mobility programmes, specifically the Registrar's Office of the University of Malta, which is Malta's official representative on the Bologna Process.⁵

Task 9.1 in the project description called for the preparation of 20 ECTS Information Packages. Following discussion with the other SPAN partners at the Management Committee meeting held in month 20 in Czech Republic, it was decided to focus on the drawing up of ECTS information packages by five SPAN partners. It was decided that this would ensure the allocation of more time and assistance to each participating partner, enabling in-depth, individual evaluation of the different ECTS systems adopted by each institution and the generation of more detailed and accurate ECTS information packages.

Consequently, five SPAN consortium partners were identified and invited to participate in this exercise: Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom, Vilnius University in Lithuania, University of Zagreb in Croatia, Karolinska Institute in Sweden and University of Bremen in Germany.

It was decided that the most feasible way to populate the information packages was with taught courses which could be offered as part of a second cycle Master's degree i.e. one with 90 ECTS. For the purpose of the SPAN project, it was agreed that this

⁴ Lifelong Learning Programme Application Form (2012 Call for proposals). Detailed description of the project: Science for Prevention Academic Network (SPAN). <http://www.span-europe.eu/about/workpackages/ects-recognition-and-award>.

⁵ Ms. Jo-Anne Attard Assistant Registrar at the University of Malta

Masters would be one which included 30 ECTS of formal lectures, while 60 ECTS would be allocated to a dissertation or research.

Participating institutions were instructed to include courses/modules that they considered essential in a prevention science program. The courses/modules selected did not necessarily need to bear an equal number of ECTS credits. However, partners were encouraged to aim for a total of 30 ECTS credits. Courses not currently delivered in English could still be included, as long as the required details were translated into English.

On receipt by the co-ordinating WP partner, each information package for the participating institutions was peer reviewed. The data was organized in Excel® and a spreadsheet was created. The summarised ECTS information packages were presented to the participating partners during a Face to Face (F2F) Management Board meeting held in Győr, Hungary, April 2015.

The next step in the process was the use of *the Moderation Method* during F2F meeting of the participating institutions which was used to facilitate the Peer Review. This allowed the participating partners to set aside the data they had sent and identify knowledge and skills deemed to be necessary learning outcomes of an ideal prevention science course. Subsequently *a SWOT Analysis* was carried out at the end of the meeting on the development of a Pan-European Prevention Science Framework (Task 9.3).

The evaluation carried out during the F2F Management Board Meeting was subsequently used to draw up a summary table of the 'Knowledge and Skills essential for a prevention scientist'. This table was sent out to the five participating partners. The partners were once again asked to look at the information packages drawn up for their institutions and to identify the essential knowledge and skill/s, if any, imparted by each course described in the information package. Once received, the feedback was evaluated and used to draw up the final recommendations for the implementation of a Pan-European Prevention Science Framework (Deliverable 9.2).

Results

A total of 25 courses were presented in the ECTS information packages compiled; 80% of the courses form part of graduate or Masters programs. Out of the 25 courses, 8 courses are taught in English (all five courses presented in the Karolinska Institute information package and all three courses presented in the Oxford Brookes University information package). Two out of the nine courses presented in the University of Zagreb's information package can be partly taught in English, in order to accommodate foreign students. The remaining 15 courses (60% of the courses) are taught in languages other than English (7 in Croatian, 4 in German and 4 in Lithuanian).

Eleven of the courses included in the information packages are offered as 'full time taught' courses and another 11 were described as 'full time taught and research' courses. Only the three courses presented in the Oxford Brookes University information package offer flexibility: one is offered as 'full time taught' or 'part time

(day, taught)' while the other two are distance learning courses that can be pursued full time or part time.

The table of knowledge and skills essential for a prevention scientist consists of five main categories: generic skills such as critical thinking and publishing skills, specific skills such as epidemiology and biostatistics, and knowledge of prevention theory, interventions (development, design and evaluation) and implementation and monitoring. This data was found to compare well with the domains and core competencies listed in Standards of knowledge for the science of prevention as defined by the Society for Prevention Research (2011).⁶

Discussion

One of the principal aims of the SPAN project was to promote integration of prevention science education across Europe. For true integration and mobility, it is essential for the courses to be delivered in a language that can be understood by students hailing from all European countries. As discussed in the Quality Plan, this language must be English, which is naturally considered 'the mother tongue of science'. Out of the twenty five courses included in the information packages compiled, only eight are taught in English. This is evidently one of the main barriers to the free movement of the remaining seventeen courses from their mother institution to other institutions across Europe. The situation may be rectified through the translation of the content of selected courses to the English language.

Another essential element in the path towards integration of prevention science education is modifying course structures so that courses can be taught flexibly. Only two out of the twenty five courses included in the information packages are offered as distance learning courses. More courses need to be adapted to a blending learning format; this combines face-to-face instruction with online learning and offers a great deal of flexibility without completely doing away with the conventional way of teaching. Blended learning courses may be taught virtually over long periods while incorporating in-person intensive taught components at regular intervals, say once or twice a year over a week or two, during which time the students and academics involved convene at a particular institution or other suitable location.

All of the knowledge and skills identified as essential for a prevention scientist were found to be covered by five courses, except for biostatistics, which is not covered by any of the courses listed in the ECTS information packages. All of the five courses are taught in a language other than English and all are offered exclusively on a full time basis. This reinforces the need for translation of course content to English and for re-design of courses to make them more flexible, in part by including a virtual learning element.

⁶ Society for Prevention Research (2011). Standards of knowledge for the science of prevention
<http://www.preventionresearch.org/Society%20for%20Prevention%20Research%20Standards%20of%20Knowledge.pdf>

Recommendations for Future Work

- The setting up of a future pan-European prevention science course needs to link programme activities with theoretical and research insights on the basis of a comprehensive needs assessment in order to develop transferable European qualifications.
- The course should include fundamental aspects such as development and implementation of prevention programs; prevention campaigns; ethics in prevention research; research in prevention evidence base in health promotion and prevention and biostatistics
- In the shorter term mobility can be facilitated through the translation of course content to English and development of digital infrastructure.
- Transdisciplinary teams with an array of expertise are required to address the complexity of the issues addressed by prevention science.
- Better identification of the various drivers and barriers to the inward and outward mobility of researchers and students to such programmes and a greater degree of openness and transparency associated with recruitment and mobility is needed.
- More programme evaluations need to be planned and conducted with monitoring and feedback from students, staff and where appropriate, stakeholders for checking and revising credit allocation.
- Mobility requires further the development of ECTS supporting documents and possible work placements within the development of EUROPASS Mobility.
- SPAN partners and prevention scientists across Europe should investigate the possibility of further funding to implement these recommendations.

Conclusion

Initially, one of the aims of SPAN was to create a standardized set of prevention science courses to be delivered in different institutions across Europe as the taught moiety of a Master's level degree. Throughout this exercise, it became increasingly clear that this objective would be difficult to implement due to the great administrative burden involved and the varied procedures adopted by different institutions.

While this is still a valid long-term goal, a great deal can be achieved in the shorter term through two main actions:

- translation of course content to English
- development of digital infrastructure.

Both involve significant expense, including recruitment of professionals such as translators and learning technologists; therefore, sourcing of funding is essential. SPAN partners and prevention scientists across Europe should thus investigate the possibility of further funding for this project. 'ERASMUS for All' would be very relevant

to a Pan European Science Framework since it seeks to integrate international mobility (between EU and third countries) and transnational (intra-EU) mobility, a distinction that has hitherto been held in place by the dispersed management of the programmes in different Commission units and departments.⁷

⁷ EU(2015), Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport.
http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm