



European
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Centre



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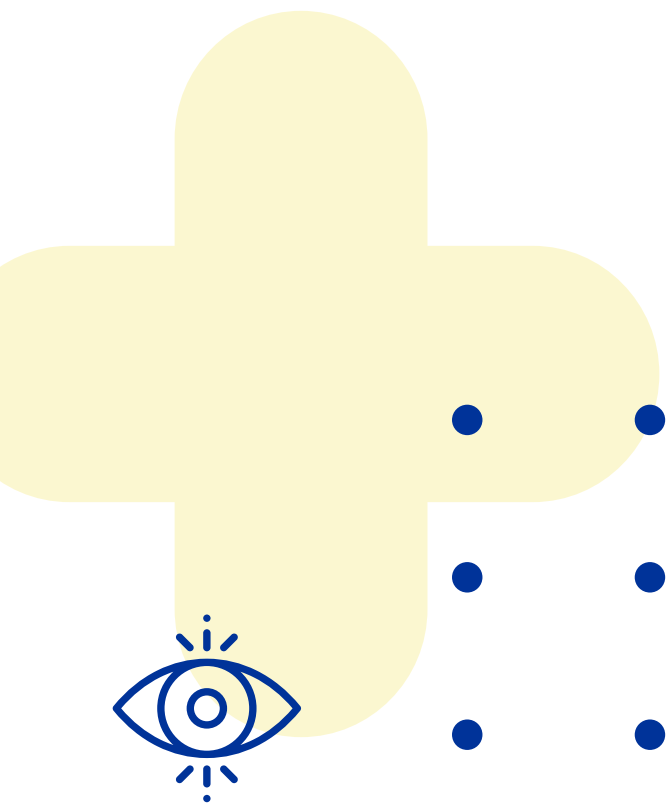
European Documentation Centres'
Training Seminar

Report from the workshops



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Introduction

Background

From 16 to 17 November 2022, a European Documentation Centres' Training Seminar took place in Brussels, Belgium. The European Documentation Centres (EDC) are a network of around 300 centres embedded in universities and libraries across the Union, which serve the reference and information needs of students, researchers, and the wider public on the EU affairs and policy. The European Commission (Commission) provides the centres with publications, training opportunities, visits to Brussels, and direct insight into key EU priorities and initiatives. The network aims in particular to engage students and members of the academic community in debates about the future EU, to promote research in the field of European integration, and disseminate accurate and factual information about the Union. It is managed by the Commission's Representations at national level and by the Directorate-General for Communication (unit C4) at European level. European Documentation Centres are officially recognised partners of the European Commission as part of the wider EUROPE DIRECT network.

Aim of the report

This report **focuses only on the interactive workshops** of the training seminar, leaving the plenary sessions out of its scope. The best practices, challenges and recommendations from each of the breakout sessions are reported here as **directly expressed by the centres** on the basis of:

- Post-its used by participants to note their ideas
- Takeaways from rapporteurs in every session
- Notes taken by members of the organizing team.

Such a bottom-up approach ensures the breadth and range of conversations which took place during the workshops is reflected, and **can be used as a basis to improve the work of the European Documentation Centres network**. Unit COMM C4 – Networks in the Member States - in the European Commission will ensure a follow-up on the recommendations given in the workshops. Part of this follow-up will be to point out to existing initiatives that address the recommendations.



WORKSHOP I:

The implementation of the Partnership Agreement between the European Commission and the EDCs' host structures



EDC Partnership Agreement

Implementation of the Partnership Agreement
Break out session 1

EDCs' Training Seminar, Brussels
16-17 November, 2022

*Niklas Noaksson, Local Networks in
Member States, Directorate General for
Communication, European Commission*

Workshop I identified challenges and opportunities for implementing the 2018 Partnership Agreement between the European Commission and the EDCs's host structures.

After a short introduction to the topic by Commission representatives, participants split into groups that discussed common difficulties, shared best practices, and outlined key recommendations for the EDC network and the European Commission.

How the new Partnership Agreement took shape – from inception to finalization

Short summary

The European Commission laid the groundwork for the new Partnership Agreement between 2014 and 2018 in a consultation with nearly 400 EDCs, identifying shared aims and challenges to the networks' implementation of their activities and building on common ground in the pursuit of common goals. The results of this process revealed that a majority of EDCs wish to engage more closely with other Commission networks in their region and find it important to take an active role in promoting discussion on European affairs, yet often face uncertainty and limited resources in executing outreach activities. To assist EDCs in reaching the level of ambition set out in the Partnership Agreement, participants were encouraged to **identify and reach out to university departments working in fields associated with Commission activities**, and to **engage in dialogue with the academic community for the promotion of research on European integration**. They were also exhorted to take a **proactive stand in organising citizens' dialogues with members of the public**, and invited to **set up priority visits to EU institutions for key targets groups such as researchers and journalists with the help of the Commission visitors' centre**. To facilitate the shift towards a more outreach-oriented role, the Commission stressed the importance of **close cooperation with other local EU networks, and especially the EUROPE DIRECT Centres**, as a key support measure in the organization of joint activities and smooth integration into a wider European network of regional networks. The Commission also proposed to produce an **official letter of support for EDCs** to assist them with reminding and further encouraging host structures to support actively the expanded range of outreach tasks expected of signatories to the new Partnership Agreement. The speakers for the session were Niklas Noaksson and Alessandro Giordani from the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission.

Challenges

- **A lack of human and financial resources** that prevents the active organisation of events and sustained outreach campaigns.
- **Limited interest and motivation** amongst both students and academic staff to participate in EDC events and to engage with the network.
- **A lack of interest or awareness** by some host structures, leading to limited official recognition and difficulties in influencing decision-making.
- **Unfamiliarity and inexperience with social media usage**, which makes it challenging to reach out especially to young people and to promote events effectively.
- **Poor communication between EU networks in a region**, making it hard to hear about activities in the planning stage and to get involved in what others actors are doing.
- **Political reluctance and resistance from regional authorities**, which may make host structures unwilling to support the organization of EU-oriented events.

Best practices

- **A close and supportive relationship with the Commission's Representations in the Member States** to provide guidance and coordination on topics such as social media campaigning and the organisation of joint events.
- **Active and regular engagement with other EU networks**, and especially the local EUROPE DIRECT Centres to pool resources and promote key topics together in a unified fashion.
- **Common tools and resources for managing an EDC**, including setting up a shared national Facebook page or a common database for sharing documents on European topics, and producing a national guide for best practices such as the one assembled by Italian EDCs.
- **Setting up engaging events that attract the interest of young people**, such as a Career Day with EUROPE DIRECT, an essay contest for students on a topic such as the importance of the EU in their life, or an annual project seminar tackling a current topic (e.g. the Green Transition, the European Year of Youth).
- **Regular meetings with academics and university staff**, facilitated by a dedicated academic coordinator for the EDC.
- **Attending webinars and trainings organized by the Commission** to keep up with best practices and exchange ideas.

Recommendations

This part reflects the recommendations as expressed by participants and does not include a reaction from EU institutions. As part of the follow-up, the organising team will point European Documentation centres to existing initiatives that are already responding to some of the points raised.

- **Provide more support and training for the planning of outreach campaigns**, especially in regards to making effective use of social media for marketing events.
- **Increase communication between the Commission and host structures** to outline the role, tasks, and privileges of EDCs more clearly to decision-makers, especially in regards to changes introduced in the new 2018 Partnership Agreement.
- **Encourage greater coordination between EDCs and other EU outreach networks on all levels** through measures such as regular network meetings on the regional level and the creation of a common database for EDCs.
- **Establish closer and more regular contacts with the Commission, and provide support especially on the national level** with topics such as networking with other EU entities, communication concrete and up-to-date facts on EU initiatives to students, and arranging study visits to EU institutions.
- **Use social media to explain and inform the public on EU decision-making**, for example by following steps of the Legislative Process.
- **Make it easier to communicate with different points of the EU network of networks**, for example by creating a common point of access.
- **Increase financial support for the EDC network by widening access to funding opportunities**, such as by allowing EDCs to apply for the Jean Monnet programme.

WORKSHOP II:

Attracting students to participate in civic and democratic life at European level



Workshop II focused on identifying opportunities for the mobilisation and empowerment of young people to participate politically and engage with civic life on the European level.

After an introduction to the topic by a representative from EDC Krems, participants debated the challenges faced by EDCs, discussed best practices for encouraging student participation, and set out recommendations for the EDC network and the European Commission.

Opportunities and challenges for the political participation of young people

Short summary

Students have a generally positive attitude towards the European Union, and the level of active civic engagement amongst young people has increased steadily in recent years. However, while the EU offers many ways for them to participate in democratic life and European politics, the role that the EDC network can play in facilitating this participation remains underappreciated. To understand how EDCs can best interest and involve students in political activities, it is necessary to understand the digital participation formats favored by young people in context to the current policy framework. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 sets out three cornerstones for improving youth participation – **engage, connect, and empower** – and sets out multiple activities for young European to participate in such as biannual EU Youth dialogues and the European Youth Event organised every two years by the Parliament. The EDCs are in a strong position to champion these flagship initiatives and other possibilities for political participation due both to their **access to students and close connections to EU information channels**. Thanks to their expertise on EU communications and ability to convey complex policy issues in accessible terms, the EDC network can serve as a **powerful force multiplier for messaging on youth initiatives** through intensified outreach activities and online campaigning, and mobilise young people to express their opinions and wishes towards the Union. There are, however, risks and challenges associated with effective messaging such as the creation of information overload by too much communication, and participants were invited to consider how to best deploy resources in an effective and targeted manner. The speaker for the session was Susanne Fraczek from EDC Krems.

Challenges

- **A lack of financial and human resources** that prevents carrying out sustained and effective messaging.
- **Difficulties with promoting visibility for EDC events**, especially on social media and other channels favored by young people.
- **Different expectations between the Commission and host structures in regards to the duties of an EDC**, hindering the organisation of clear outreach or educational activities.
- **Varying degrees of interest in the EU amongst young people**: those who care intensely about European affairs can find information and participate actively by themselves, whereas those who do are difficult to reach and motivate.
- **A risk of enthusiastic outreach activities causing information overload in students**, with the technical character of much EU-related information especially having the potential to make young people feel overwhelmed and seek to disengage.

Best practices

- **Getting involved in the selection of the EU Youth delegation**, especially with a view to inviting young delegates to participate in events organised by EDCs after their election.
- **Close cooperation with the Erasmus Student Network**, an important communication channel that allows reaching not just local but also international students.
- **Attracting students with something more than just a debate**, for example by combining dialogues on European politics with sports events.
- **Collaborating with faculty members and student associations in organising events**, allowing for a broader range of viewpoints and ideas to be expressed, and with the involvement of the latter also lowering the overall threshold for student participation.
- **A proactive approach to social media**, messaging vigorously and in a targeted manner to reach key segments of the student body, engaging young people to voice their opinions online.
- **Cooperation with the Commission's Representations in the Member states and other regional networks**, and especially with the EUROPE DIRECT Centres, to organise joint events and help spread out costs.
- **A step-by-step approach to student engagement**: educate, motivate, empower.

Recommendations

This part reflects the recommendations as expressed by participants and does not include a reaction from EU institutions. As part of the follow-up, the organising team will point European Documentation centres to existing initiatives that are already responding to some of the points raised.

- **Involve students associations directly in events from the planning stage**, giving young people a direct stake in EDC outreach activities.
- **Get involved in the Commission's Back to University initiative** to link students directly with representatives from the EU institutions.
- **Invest in better communication with local communities and institutions** to have your finger on the pulse of young people's thinking. Build a presence on social media.
- **Invite local influencers to reflect on and engage with current EU affairs** to attract attention and attain greater publicity.
- **Create one shared platform for EDCs to find relevant information on youth policy initiatives**, in addition to more direct information from the Commission on the new generation of citizens' engagements coming up.
- **Link the topics of EDC events to themes related directly to the everyday lives of students and professors** to encourage greater participation and a sense of involvement by both groups.
- **Nurture a close relationship with national and local EU networks**, and organise regular meetings between EDCs to encourage networking and the sharing of best practices.
- **Make sure students feel that they are being heard**: invite national policy-makers, businesses and other stakeholders to joint dialogues with students. Give students credits or certificates of participation as additional incentive for participation.

WORKSHOP III:

The role/s of EDCs in informing students and researchers about exchange programmes and EU co-funded opportunities, including supporting Back to University



Workshop III honed in on the role of EDCs in informing students and researchers about EU co-funded exchange programmes and staff mobility opportunities, outlining challenges and pinpointing best practices.

After an introduction to the topic by representatives from the European Commission, participants engaged in discussions on how best to carry out informative outreach activities and arrived at key recommendations for the EDC network and the Commission.

Erasmus+ students, staff mobility, and Back to University

Short summary

The Erasmus+ programme has recently incorporated a range of new priorities and mobility features aimed at reinforcing the breadth, versatility, and sustainability of mobility opportunities available to EU students and staff, **notably including EDC staff as part of the university staff**. These include a greater emphasis on its international and digital dimensions, with participants no longer restricted by the geographical limits of the EU and able to benefit from blended mobility formats that combine physical and virtual collaboration. This improved flexibility has allowed for enhanced inclusivity and diversity amongst participants through actions such as **new short-term** mobilities for students with obstacles or doctoral candidates with specific research goals. The European institutions assist in promoting knowledge of this renewed programme and other EU co-funded opportunities through the inter-institutional **Back to University initiative**, which encourages EU staff to visit their home universities and host interactive discussions with students. With its unique position in the intersection of EU communication channels and the academic community, the EDC network can also play a central role in informing students and researchers about the latest developments in EU exchange programmes and mobility opportunities through targeted outreach activities. In order to explore the ways in which EDCs may best take on this task, participants were invited to **consider the challenges faced in carrying out information campaigns and share examples of successful actions and initiatives**. The speakers for the session were Johannes Gehringer from the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and Sandra Cavallo from the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Commission.

Challenges

- **A lack of human and financial resources**, hindering effective communication of mobility opportunities.
- **Low interest from students and staff in participating in mobility programmes**, particularly in universities in Eastern Europe. The insecure global situation also often contributes to a reluctance to travel abroad.
- **Confusion about the role of EDCs in comparison to national Erasmus+ agencies**, leading to limited cooperation and a lack of transparency in information sharing. Some universities also have separate offices for Erasmus matters, which means students do not come to EDCs for information and EDCs lack up-to-date knowledge of EU mobility programmes.
- **No clear procedures for short-term studies**, making it difficult to give students accurate information on new mobility opportunities especially when it comes to issues such as the transfer of credits. The guidelines provided by national agencies are also frequently written in EU jargon which makes them hard to decipher.

- **Limited host structure support for staff mobility**, with a lack of pre-existing agreements between universities meaning that staff have to find and organise opportunities by themselves. Participation is also hindered by a lack of transparency concerning the publications of calls and negative perception of staff mobility amongst the university hierarchy.
- **The limited amount of Erasmus+ grants**, which imposes financial constraints on many participants.

Best practices

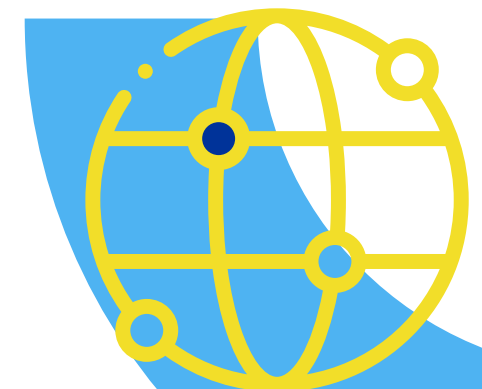
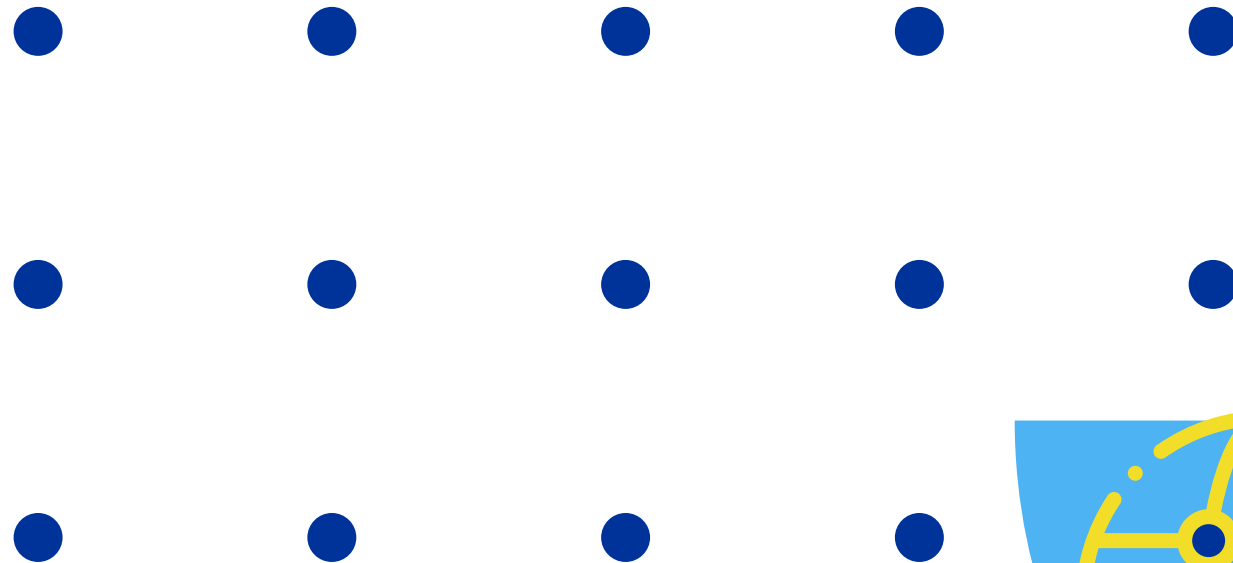
- **Regular meetings between EDCs**, national agencies and Erasmus offices in universities as a means to promote synergy and greater coordination through the sharing of information and best practices.
- **Organising joint events and campaigns with Erasmus offices**, such as organising an Erasmus day or week and creating a common Erasmus+ information point for students and staff.
- **Engaging with students on an active, regular basis** and inviting former participants to events where they can share their experiences and give advice to prospective applicants.
- **Distributing a newsletter or leaflet with information mobility opportunities**, such as testimonials from Erasmus+ participants, information on volunteering for the European Solidarity Corps, and more details on how EDCs can assist applicants.
- **English language courses for staff** to encourage active participation in mobility opportunities.
- **Active social media information campaigns**, especially to reach young people and students.
- **Sharing information on open and upcoming calls for application** with a double warning system (i.e. 'save the date' followed up by 'the call is open').
- **Combining the allocation of reimbursements for staff mobility for housing**, transportation and other categories instead of putting a limit on each in order to lower financial threshold for participation.



Recommendations

This part reflects the recommendations as expressed by participants and does not include a reaction from EU institutions. As part of the follow-up, the organising team will point European Documentation centres to existing initiatives that are already responding to some of the points raised.

- **Create a combined EDC – Erasmus+ information point** to promote greater synergy and avoid creating confusion about who to contact for information.
- **Reinforce the transparency and regularity of direct communications between EDCs and Representations** to ensure a regular flow of up-to-date information on mobility programmes.
- **Reach out to national agencies and Erasmus offices in universities to organise joint events**, and involve previous participants in promotion activities.
- **Simplify the application procedure for Erasmus+**, for example by reinforcing the use of all EU languages in documents and official communications and enforcing uniform deadlines for the whole EU. Ensure that the information provided to applicants is practical and directly applicable.
- **Increase the amount of the Erasmus+ grant** to improve inclusivity and allow a more diverse range of applicants to participate. Adjust grants more precisely to the regions of a specific country or area.
- **Prioritise training staff for the application process** to encourage greater participation in mobility programmes. Create a participant's guide that can be shared with applicants.



WORKSHOP IV:

Knowledge management – how to guide students to EU databases?



Workshop IV concentrated on information about EU databases and empowering students to access European information services. After an introduction to the topic by representatives from the European Commission, participants debated the difficulties faced in guiding students to the right source of information and shared their experiences of successful facilitation efforts, followed by a discussion on key recommendations from enhancing future outreach activities.

Aims, opportunities, and challenges for student access to EU databases and information services

Short summary

The EU offers students a wealth of useful databases and information services, yet both can be daunting for young people to access. It can be difficult for users to distinguish databases such as the EU Open Data Portal and EUR-LEX from each, and there is a general tendency towards viewing information services and portals maintained by the institutions as part of the same vague, generalized **EU umbrella under which it is difficult to orient oneself**. In a similar fashion, complex user interfaces reliant on effective use of metadata and a familiarity with technical jargon can make it difficult to target queries and parse through search results, especially for first time users and those with little experience with using electronic databases. This can lead to a lot of useful information going unnoticed or simply ignored by students. While services like as the Publications Office are engaged in efforts to improve accessibility such as by ensuring documents are available in all EU languages, the EDC network is also poised to assist greatly in empowering young researchers to discover and take advantage of EU data. With their expertise as EU information specialists and close knowledge of students' information needs, **EDCs can take a leading role in guiding students to EU databases and promoting usage of EU data** not only in the field of European integration but across a variety of research. Participants in the workshop were therefore invited to **discuss their experiences with EU information services and to recommend measures for improving accessibility and salience for students**. The speakers for the session were Valentina Fratto and Astrid Brey from the Publications Office of the European Union.

Challenges

- **Students do not see specialised EU databases as an attractive information source**, and lack the interest to explore beyond obligatory research assignments. Even the best-known information services face fierce competition from all-purpose search engines such as Google.
- **Difficult institutional relations between teachers and librarians** make it challenging to funnel students towards relevant information services, and faculty members often lack the interest or simply the knowledge to contribute.
- **The user interfaces of many EU databases are often perceived as user-unfriendly**, which makes students hesitant to engage with them.
- **A lack of time and resources** that makes it difficult for EDCs to keep abreast of updates to databases and to develop a familiarity with the breadth of available services and materials.
- **Universities often do not include use of EU databases in information literacy courses**, and database training is in general difficult to make interesting for students.



- **Homepage URLs and links to individual documents often change across EU data portals**, which frustrates for teachers' attempts to give students concrete examples of useful materials. Students are also sometimes denied access to linked databases, and it can be difficult even for EDC staff to know which services they have access to.
- **Many databases and documents are not available in the native language of students**, which limits their accessibility.
- **Students and researchers lack general information on the character and features of EU databases**, and often ignore the existence of useful services. On the other hand, some users find the number of databases available disconcerting and feel that it makes it more difficult to locate interesting material.

Best practices

- **Organising regular database training sessions for students and teachers**, and inviting participants with further questions to set up individual appointments with EDCs.
- **Bringing EDCs into the classroom to present information services tied to specific fields and topics**, such as teaching law students how to use EUR-LEX.
- **Cooperating closely with academic staff and taking an active part in general information literacy courses**, such as EDCs have done in Greece.
- **Creating shared national guidelines for EU database use**, for example in the form of an E-book that can be shared easily between EDCs and with target audiences.
- **Building a user-friendly online list of all available EU information services on the host structure website**, and integrating databases into the central database system of universities.
- **Creating short Youtube tutorials for database use**, which can be easily shared through social media and accessed by students whenever required.
- **Involving the EDC network in initiatives organised by host libraries to promote different topics relating to general information literacy**, such as open science and open data.
- **Giving out credits or a certificate of participation to students who attend events** to promote EU database literacy as a recognised skill and generate increased interest.

Recommendations

This part reflects the recommendations as expressed by participants and does not include a reaction from EU institutions. As part of the follow-up, the organising team will point European Documentation centres to existing initiatives that are already responding to some of the points raised.

- **Organise more trainings on EUR-LEX and other EU databases** for both librarians and teachers to improve their knowledge of search options and available materials. Provide EDCs with up-to-date information and links to databases following structural changes.
- **Create a single contact point for all questions pertaining to EU databases**, either on EU or on national level. Establish an institutional role for EU database leader within host structures.
- **Make EU databases more user-friendly and accessible in all EU languages**, especially in terms of a uniform layout across portals and more developed categorisation options by member state. Involve librarians in the construction and upgrading of databases.
- **Create a centralised homepage that guides users to specific databases by topic**, and include an option for conducting cross-searches across multiple databases at once. Simplify and standardise materials and key functions as much as possible.
- **Collaborate actively and regularly with other EDCs and the Commission in sharing best practices**, and encourage exchanges of information and experiences within the network.
- **Engage more closely with faculty members and set up joint events**, such as small-scale workshops with students on databases that touch on topic of specific interest to them.
- **Create short video tutorials explaining how to use key databases**, and share them actively on social media. Consider also producing a general library guide to EU information services, and give students concrete examples of interesting search results to fuel interest.
- **Create an 'ask a librarian' chat service** through which students can ask and receive answers to more specific questions.
- **Provide more publications in all EU languages** to render information more accessible to students and staff alike.



