

**FIRST INTERIM EVALUATION OF THE
EMIC-GEM PROJECT (FINAL DRAFT)
February 2021**

PREPARED FOR: City of Glasgow College

**First Interim Evaluation of the EMIC-GEM
Project**

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

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CONTENTS

		<u>Page No.</u>
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1.0	INTRODUCTION	9
2.0	DOCUMENTATION REVIEW	10
2.1	Documentation Overview	10
2.2	Evaluation of IO1 Report	10
3.0	CONSIDERATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROJECT OUTPUTS	12
3.1	IO1	12
3.2	IO2	14
3.3	IO3	17
4.0	CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT VALUES	19
4.1	Achieving EU Objectives and Stated Results	19
4.2	Innovation	20
4.3	Project Validity	21
4.4	Transnationality	23
4.5	Value for Money	25
5.0	CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING	26
5.1	Project Management	26
5.2	Partnership Working	27
6.0	EVALUATION OF COVID-19 RESPONSE	30
7.0	CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	32
7.1	Development of Module Content	32
7.2	Building Social Media Presence	33
7.3	Maintaining Project Partner Cohesion and Contribution	33
7.4	COVID-19 Response	34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Documentation Review

- The documentation associated with the EMIC-GEM project is comprehensive, relevant, well structured, regularly updated and frequently used by Partners, who found it to be highly useful
- All aspects of the documentation relating to the project were easily accessible and logically presented within the Smartsheet database
- The IO1 report pertaining to the competency framework for offsite and modular construction was comprehensive, well structured and noted a sound rationale for the development of the framework. By necessity, this report was a detailed, technical document which provides a wide range of valuable information to contribute to the development of the module descriptors. However, it would have benefited from some form of summation

Intellectual Outputs

IO1

- The competency framework developed for IO1 was of a high standard, was highly effective and reflected the needs of employers, manufacturers, training providers and stakeholders across the countries participating in EMIC-GEM in terms of their competency needs in relation to offsite and modular construction and, as such, can be considered to be fit for purpose
- The competency framework demonstrates a range of positive attributes and the development processes associated with it has been effective, although the slow initial take-up by employers and others in the information-gathering process and the questionnaire length were two negatives in this process

- The process of deriving information from employers and others played a critical role in the development of the competency framework and, in particular, in contributing to its effectiveness

IO2

- The eight module descriptors developed were well and consistently structured, well laid out and used appropriate language and terminology and, whilst concise, managed to convey all key elements required
- Given the industry-specific technical expertise of the Project Partners, it can be presumed that the technical knowledge contained within each of the module descriptors is appropriate and fit for purpose, and it was apparent that the module descriptors will contribute significantly and effectively to the development of module content
- Although at an early stage, the development of module content is progressing well and has particularly benefited from Project Partners working in small teams
- At this stage, it was apparent that a range of positives were associated with the development of module content, that the model for this development process is sound and fit for purpose and is likely to be successful in terms of developing the number of modules required that will incorporate the necessary amount of high-quality content
- It is evident that the progression of the development of module content has been slowed due to the impact of COVID-19, particularly in terms of restricting face-to-face contact between Partners
- The development of module content faces a range of challenges and, accordingly, it is likely that an extension to the project will be required in order that all modules are completed and contain the amount and quality of content required to meet the objectives of IO2

IO3

- The EMIC-GEM website development process is highly advanced, is characterised by a wide range of positive attributes and is likely to play a key part in driving the success of IO3
- The EMIC-GEM project has established both Twitter and LinkedIn accounts which have the potential to promote the social media presence of the project significantly and, as such, to be a highly effective tool in terms of raising awareness and uptake of the project

Project Values

Achieving EU Objectives and Stated Results

- It is evident that the project is progressing well towards the achievement of its EU objectives and stated results, although it will be better able to judge this during the second interim evaluation. This is particularly encouraging given the circumstances surrounding COVID-19

Innovation

- The EMIC-GEM project can be considered to be innovative from a wide range of perspectives, particularly in terms of its pedagogy and promoting the development of offsite and modular construction in countries where this is a relatively new or emerging construction technique

Project Validity

- EMIC-GEM is a highly valid project on the basis of a wide range of criteria, particularly on the basis that it addresses an increasing need, will accrue significant environmental benefits and will provide employers with the opportunity to have access to more appropriately skilled workers in the context of offsite and modular construction

Transnationality

- It is evident that a range of transnational benefits have accrued to date pertaining to the EMIC-GEM project, particularly in terms of the sharing of skills, knowledge and best practice between Partners and the extent to which Partners are learning from each other
- However, the transnational benefits of the project have been impacted by COVID-19 and, in particular, due to the loss of face-to-face meetings between Partners (albeit that the loss of transnational benefits at a personal level appear to be greater than the loss of transnational benefits at a project level)

Value for Money

- Although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions as to the value for money of the EMIC-GEM project, it would seem evident that, based on achievements to date, it is likely that the project will represent good value for money upon its completion

Project Management

- The project management structures and processes associated with EMIC-GEM are of high quality, are highly effective and are contributing significantly to project progression
- Project Partner opinions of the Project Co-ordinator are extremely positive
- Although Project Partners have been progressing well within their own institutions, there could be a challenge when others from their institutions are brought on board (in relation to, for example, the development of module content)

Partnership Working

- Partners involved in the EMIC-GEM project are working well together, with a wide range of positives being apparent in relation to the way in which they are doing so
- Although a small number of negative outcomes were evident in relation to partnership working, these tended to be minor in nature, with the exception of concerns that partnership working had been negatively impacted by the lack of face-to-face interaction due to COVID-19
- Although not ideal, partnership working has been enhanced and facilitated by the use of video conferences, partnership working is becoming more effective, the initial face-to-face meeting in Glasgow helped to develop effective partnership working and partners believe that themselves and their centres will accrue longer-term benefits as a result of participating in the EMIC-GEM project

COVID-19 Response

- COVID-19 has represented a significant challenge to – and threat for – the EMIC-GEM project and has had a degree of negative impact on the project to date, particularly in terms of slowing the pace of its progression and loss of face-to-face contact between Partners
- However, a number of mitigating actions have been taken to respond to these negative impacts and, although not entirely, have promoted personal contact between Project Partners through video conferences and lessened the impact of COVID-19 on project progression

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report details findings to emerge from the first interim evaluation to be undertaken of the EMIC-GEM Project (Embracing Modular Innovation in Construction – Getting Education Modernised) and is based on a review of documentation relating to the project and video conference interviews with the Project Partners.

All activities making up this first interim evaluation were undertaken between December 2020 and February 2021 and this report outlines findings in relation to:

- A review of project documentation
- Progress and outputs in relation to IO1, IO2 and IO3
- A consideration of the project values
- A consideration of project management and partnership working

A second interim evaluation is currently scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2021. However, this may be delayed if a project extension is required, which could potentially impact on the final evaluation scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2022 or first quarter of 2023.

2.0 DOCUMENTATION REVIEW

2.1 Documentation Overview

The documentation associated with the EMIC-GEM project contained within the Smartsheet database is both comprehensive and relevant.

It is also apparent that the documentation is well structured, is regularly updated and – from the interviews undertaken with Project Partners – is regularly used by Partners and found to be highly useful.

The documentation relating to each aspect of the EMIC-GEM project – Application, Budget and Evidence, IO1, IO2, IO3 and PM Documentation – is easily accessible and logically presented.

2.2 Evaluation of IO1 Report

The IO1 report produced pertaining to the competency framework for offsite and modular construction is comprehensive and well structured, and noted a sound rationale for the development of the competency framework.

The report provides clear details of the aims and objectives of the research (together with the methodological approach adopted).

It also details the roles that the desk research had played in contributing to the derivation of information from employers, manufacturers, training providers and stakeholders in each Partner country and details the information that the primary research had derived from each of these audiences.

The report then goes on to provide key elements of information pertaining to the seven personas.

The IO1 report is consistent in terms of the information provided in relation to each persona based on the derivation of information from the audiences noted earlier, including, for example, functions, skills and knowledge needs, training and qualification needs, job roles and career pathways and key issues for consideration, in relation to which details were provided based on the research undertaken.

The IO1 report is, by necessity, a detailed technical document which, although providing a wide range of valuable information, would benefit from some form of summation at the end of the document.

In almost every way, the report is clear. However, it does not make it sufficiently clear what the Partnership Working element of the research methodology was and what it achieved.

3.0 CONSIDERATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROJECT OUTPUTS

3.1 IO1

By the end of the first interim evaluation of the EMIC-GEM project, IO1 had been completed and, in particular, the competency framework for the project had been completed.

“The competency framework is of a really high standard. We were lucky that we had the Offsite Ready one to start with, but there was a tremendous amount of work went into collecting evidence from employers and others which allowed the framework to be developed to reflect what EMIC-GEM needed.”

“The framework that was developed had a key role to play in putting together the module descriptors and will also be important for the development of module content.”

“The meeting in Glasgow was really important. We made a lot of good progress, including in terms of how the competency framework would be put together. Given what’s happened with COVID, I don’t think we realised at the time just how important that meeting was.”

“We found it hard to get employers and others to complete the survey. Partly this was due to the questionnaire being too long, so went in a different direction and collected more in-depth information which, at the end of the day, was just as valuable.”

There is strong evidence that the competency framework developed for IO1 was of a high standard, highly effective and reflected the requirements of employers, manufacturers, training providers and stakeholders in terms of their competency needs in relation to offsite and modular construction (as noted during research undertaken whilst

developing the framework). Accordingly, it is apparent that the competency framework is fit for purpose.

In particular, the competency framework demonstrates a range of positive attributes, including:

- That it provided a sound basis for the development of the module descriptors (and, indeed, provides a sound basis for the development of further materials)
- That it provides a sound basis for the progression of IO2
- That the framework is applicable and valuable to all Project Partners in the sense that it incorporates sufficient flexibility to reflect different techniques, materials and processes in different countries and is applicable to different types of learners

There is also strong evidence that the development process for IO1 had been effective and, in particular, that this had been facilitated by the initial face-to-face meeting in Glasgow which had provided a highly useful starting point for the development of the competency framework.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the development of the competency framework had benefited from it drawing upon a number of resources – particularly the offsite ready competency framework – a number of key elements of which were incorporated into the EMIC-GEM competency framework.

Although it is evident that the development process for IO1 was largely effective, one negative is apparent. This relates to the primary research that was undertaken amongst employers and others in terms of their skills and competency needs. In particular, two negative outcomes were apparent here, namely:

- The poor and slow initial take-up by employers and others in the information-gathering process (albeit that this was not the case for all Partners)
- That the questionnaire administered had been too long (which resulted in a number of the Partners shortening the questionnaire and, in particular, adopting a more qualitative approach to deriving information from employers, manufacturers, training providers and stakeholders)

Despite the negatives noted above, it should be stressed that, ultimately, the process of deriving information from employers and others played a critical role in the development of the competency framework and, in particular, in contributing to its effectiveness.

3.2 IO2

3.2.1 Module Descriptors

“I think the module descriptors are great. They are exactly what we need to put together the module content. It is clear that a lot of hard work went in to putting them together.”

“I don’t think the module descriptors could have been any better. They look very professional and contain the right amount and type of information.”

The eight module descriptors developed achieve three key outcomes, namely that they:

- Are well structured and laid out
- Are consistently structured
- Use appropriate language and terminology

The module descriptors are also concise but manage to convey all key elements required.

Given the industry-specific technical expertise of the Project Partners, it can be presumed that the technical knowledge contained within each of the module descriptors is appropriate and fit for purpose and, indeed, the process of cross-checking during the development of the module descriptors should have ensured that this was the case.

It should also be noted that the interviews with Project Partners indicated their high level of satisfaction with the module descriptors and the extent to which they believed they would contribute significantly and effectively to the development of module content.

3.2.2 Module Content Development

“I think it is correct that we are starting with three modules. That will help us to learn more about how to build good-quality content which we can then take on to the remaining modules.”

“Working in small groups is useful because people from different institutions can bring different things to the table and bring their own ideas that can be shared with others in their team.”

“Despite COVID, we are making good progress on the modules. It would have been easier if we had had more face-to-face contact, but we will still get there.”

“There is a lot of work to be done and COVID isn’t going to make that any easier. I’m slightly worried that, if COVID doesn’t get better quickly, I may get dragged away to do other things that my centre needs which would make it more difficult for me to spend time on module development.”

“We need to make the modules look like a team effort and not something that looks like different people or different teams have developed them. So we need to be constantly aware that we are all developing and learn from each other.”

The development of modules was at an early stage during the first interim evaluation, with much of the activity at that time focusing around developing teaching content to reflect the module descriptors.

At the time of the first interim evaluation, Project Partners were involved in the development of three modules – Digital Delivery, Estimating and Offsite Manufacturing – with Project Partners working in small teams.

Despite the early stage of the development of the IO2 outputs, a number of positives were apparent, including:

- The outcomes achieved to date being viewed positively by Project Partners
- That good progress was being made in the development of the module content despite COVID-19 related issues and restrictions
- Working on a collaborative basis in small teams is bringing added value to the process of module content development (on the basis that this allows different views to be brought to this process by different Partners)

It should also be noted that it is apparent that the model for module development is sound and fit for purpose and is likely to be successful in terms of delivering the number of modules required which will incorporate a sufficient amount of high-quality content

Again, despite the early stage of module content development, a key negative was apparent from the first interim evaluation, namely that the progression of developing the modules had been slowed.

This had been due, in part, to the impact of COVID-19, particularly in terms of restricting the amount of face-to-face contact between Partners and, more specifically, the likelihood that face-to-face discussions would have facilitated the process of module development better than short virtual interactions.

The process of module development faces a number of challenges (the extent, range and nature of which are detailed in Section 7.1). Accordingly, it would seem likely that an extension will be required for the project. In this regard, it should be noted that many Partners were supportive of an extension, on the basis that this would ensure that project outputs are developed and delivered in the ways and to the standard required.

3.3 IO3

3.3.1 Website Development

At the time of the first interim evaluation, the development of the website was highly advanced and, in particular, the basic framework for its structure and content was in place.

The website is visually appealing and easy to navigate and has a style which is appropriate for the promotion and facilitation of a learning tool.

There is clearly ongoing work to be done (in terms of, for example, populating the *Learning Material* and *Case Studies* elements of the website) and there is a current debate as to whether the modules should be hosted on the website or elsewhere.

The website is also a work in progress in terms of ensuring that the *News Elements* contained within it are updated as appropriate and on a regular basis, if possible.

There are a number of other positive elements of evidence relating to the EMIC-GEM website, namely:

- The way in which the website had been developed
- The content of the website
- That the website was viewed positively by Project Partners

3.3.2 Social Media Presence

The EMIC-GEM project has established both Twitter and LinkedIn accounts which, it is hoped, will raise awareness of the project and promote its uptake. Accordingly, there is a desire to ensure that Partners regularly post information in relation to, for example, updates, activities they have been undertaking and relevant developments within their country in order to build momentum for the project going forward.

It would seem evident that the coordinating activity associated with the development of the social media presence of EMIC-GEM has been undertaken effectively.

This type of approach to promoting social media presence has been used successfully in other projects and – given the nature of EMIC-GEM – it is anticipated that it could be a highly effective tool for the project.

4.0 CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT VALUES

4.1 Achieving EU Objectives and Stated Results

“Based on what’s been achieved so far, I think that we are moving towards achieving the objectives of EMIC-GEM and should achieve these objectives by the end of the project.”

“We are moving forward for a number of reasons. Firstly, we are all contributing. Secondly, we work together as Partners. Thirdly, Linus is making sure that progress is made.”

On the basis of the first interim evaluation, it is evident that the project is progressing well in terms of achieving its EU objectives and stated results. This is a function of three factors:

- The Project Partners contributing well on an individual basis
- The Project Partners working well collectively (including in subgroups)
- The project being managed well by the Project Co-ordinator

The second interim evaluation will be better able to comment as to the progress of the project in terms of meeting its EU objectives and stated results.

The extent and pace of progress of the project in terms of meeting its EU objectives and stated results is encouraging given the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, albeit that it was apparent that the extent and pace of progress had been impacted to some extent by the pandemic.

Finally, it is encouraging that there is evidence to suggest that the EMIC-GEM project is progressing better than others on which Partners are working or are aware of.

Accordingly, the progress of the project to date in terms of meeting its EU objectives and stated results is encouraging, both from absolute and relative perspectives.

4.2 Innovation

“The blended learning approach which includes digital learning is innovative, and it’s also innovative that we are dealing with a sector where teaching has traditionally been on a very much face-to-face basis.”

“Offsite and modular construction isn’t at all well established in our country, so it’s innovative given the fact that it’s going to do something which will help to establish it here.”

It is apparent that the EMIC-GEM project can be considered to be innovative from a wide range of perspectives, but principally in terms of:

- Its pedagogy (including its use of digital/blended learning, its incorporation of technology-enhanced learning and the fact that it makes use of online learning in a sector which has very largely been focused on teaching on a face-to-face basis)
- Promoting the development of offsite and modular construction in countries where this is relatively new or an emerging construction technique

In addition, there were a wide range of other ways in which it is evident that the EMIC-GEM is innovative, including:

- The ways in which Partners were learning from each other (including from the research undertaken amongst employers and others in the development of the competency framework and from working in subgroups in the development of module content)
- Using virtual reality and augmented reality

- How materials will be presented
- Partners having the opportunity to observe techniques in other countries and learning about the use of materials which are not commonly used in their own country
- The outputs being calibrated at a European level in terms of competencies
- That there is no existing online learning platform for offsite and modular construction at the levels being targeted by EMIC-GEM
- Partners becoming aware of how their personas influence the workstreams of other Partner personas
- The international sharing of skills and knowledge
- The multilingual approach of EMIC-GEM (in terms of translating materials into different languages)

Accordingly, although not unique in most of its innovative elements, the EMIC-GEM project can clearly be considered to be innovative.

4.3 Project Validity

“Offsite and modular construction has been getting more attention recently, so there is an opportunity to put something together that will help it expand across Europe.”

“There are big environmental benefits with this type of construction, including using local resources, which we should be encouraging.”

“Employers are going to increasingly need workers who have the types of skills that EMIC-GEM will give them. Even in countries where offsite and modular construction is well established, qualifications are a long way behind.”

It is apparent that the project is highly valid in a number of ways.

In particular, the validity of the project is evidenced by the following:

- That it is addressing an increasing need (on the basis that offsite and modular construction is an emerging trend in the construction industry in many countries)
- That it will accrue significant environmental benefits (and, as part of this, help countries to meet their environmental targets)
- That it provides employers with the opportunity to have access to more appropriately skilled workers (particularly in the context that – even in countries where offsite and modular construction is well developed – qualifications and skills lag significantly behind the needs of the construction industry)

Thereafter, a range of other elements of validity were also apparent in relation to EMIC-GEM, including:

- That it responds to a need in education to deliver construction qualifications in a different way
- That it allows different countries to learn from one another
- As it will have a positive impact on beneficiaries
- As it will have a positive impact on centres across Europe (not only those participating in the project)
- The potential that the project brings for job creation
- That it will encourage employers to use local resources
- That there is no online learning platform for offsite and modular construction targeted by EMIC-GEM (which is also cited as an innovative aspect of the project)
- As it will help promote offsite and modular construction in countries where it is a minimal or limited aspect of the sector
- That the outputs of EMIC-GEM have a lifespan beyond that of the project itself
- That the skills developed by beneficiaries through participating in EMIC-GEM will attract young people into the construction sector
- As the project allows traditional trades to develop digital skills which will be required in future in the construction industry

4.4 Transnationality

“As Partners, we are constantly sharing our skills and our knowledge and learning from each other in terms of the best way to do things. Having the opportunity to do that with people in a number of other countries is really great.”

“I believe that the transnational benefits that we are seeing were helped by the first meeting we had in Glasgow. It was good to get to meet people and to start building a relationship with them. That helped a lot when we had to switch to video conferencing.”

“There have definitely been transnational benefits, but COVID has made it harder to develop these because, although VCs are good, they are not nearly as good as getting to spend time with people. Even having a coffee or going out for a meal is a great way of developing the softer transnational benefits that are really important to a project like this.”

“The worst thing has been not being able to go to other countries and see how things are done, not just how modular and offsite construction works in other countries, but also the type of materials and techniques that are used. We are also missing the chance to see how other institutions work and learn lessons that we can bring back to our own centre.”

It was evident that a range of transnational benefits have accrued to date pertaining to the EMIC-GEM project.

In particular, there have been transnational benefits associated with the sharing of skills, knowledge and best practice between Partners, with reference being made to Partners *learning a lot from each other* (including seeing how other teaching institutions work, learning about online/digital delivery methods and learning how construction works in

other countries in terms of, for example, different techniques and materials).

Further transnational benefits are also evident, including:

- Partners interacting through a range of mechanisms (including monthly meetings, ad hoc meetings and whilst working in groups in IO2 module development) which has helped to maintain project progress
- The single face-to-face meeting in Glasgow which was very productive (particularly in terms of establishing some degree of relationship between Partners). More specifically, it was believed that the project would not have progressed as well – and partners would not have worked together as well – had this meeting not taken place
- The issuing of materials in advance of meetings allowing Partners to prepare for them (and, therefore, accrue a degree of transnational benefit)

Despite these obvious transnational benefits, their extent has been impacted by COVID-19, particularly in terms of the loss of face-to-face meetings (which has impacted on the development of relationships and prevented Partners from visiting other institutions and construction facilities during overseas visits).

There were also a number of other negative issues pertaining to the accrual of transnational benefits, including:

- Difficulties in establishing relationships that can be taken into future projects
- Language issues being apparent in video conferences (including difficulties in being fully able to see the body language of individuals participating in these meetings)

- The one-and-a-half day Zoom session that was organised being relatively unsuccessful

Finally, with respect to transnationality, three observations are worthy of note from the first interim evaluation:

- That it is relatively early to fully judge the extent and nature of transnational benefits associated with the EMIC-GEM project
- That the transnational nature of the project is evidenced by the number of nations participating in it
- That the loss of transnational benefits at a personal level appear to be greater than the loss of transnational benefits at a project level

4.5 Value for Money

“It’s very early to be talking about value for money but, based on progress to date, the outputs that have been developed and the way that Linus is managing the project, I’m confident that it will represent value for money when it’s completed.”

It is too early to comment as to the value for money of the EMIC-GEM project. However, there was a broad consensus amongst the Project Partners that, based on achievements to date, it was likely that the EMIC-GEM project would demonstrate financial efficacy and, in particular, it would seem apparent that the outputs produced to date – in relation to IO1, IO2 and IO3 – are beginning to suggest that the project will represent good value for money on its completion.

In this regard, it should be noted that the Project Co-ordinator is closely monitoring expenditure on an ongoing basis against the staged release of funds, and it is highly likely that he would become aware of any issues pertaining to value for money at an early stage should they arise.

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING

5.1 Project Management

“In terms of project management? Everything is there. The systems. The processes. The lot. I’ve certainly not seen anything better and I have certainly seen a lot worse.”

“Linus is brilliant. He is well organised, efficient and communicates really well. He is also building a good team spirit and I think that shows in terms of progress we’ve made in difficult circumstances.”

“I found it pretty easy to manage the project within my institution but I am going to have to bring a lot more people on board now that we are developing the module content. So, that could make the project more difficult for me to manage internally which could then make Linus’s job more difficult as well.”

It is apparent that the project management structures and processes associated with EMIC-GEM are of high quality, are highly effective and are contributing significantly to project progression.

It was also apparent that Project Partner opinions of the Project Co-ordinator are extremely positive, with him being described as being *well organised, efficient, a good communicator and helping to foster mutual trust between Partners.*

In addition, it is clear that – whilst being flexible in working with Partners – the Project Co-ordinator:

- Manages meetings well
- Can also be firm in dealing with them, when required

- Gives all Partners the opportunity to contribute to meetings and to the project in general
- Has the benefit of being multilingual (which has aided in communication with some Project Partners)

It would also seem evident that internal project management structures and processes – i.e. within each Project Partner's organisation – are sound and fit for purpose.

In this regard, however, it was evident that Project Partners have so far tended to work in relative isolation in their institutions and, therefore, it may be more of a challenge when others from their institutions are brought on board (in relation to, for example, the development of module content), particularly when other individuals from their institutions have competing priorities.

5.2 Partnership Working

"We work really well together as Partners, but it would be better if we could actually get together personally."

"The monthly meetings have been pretty good and, when we have specific sessions, they also work well. We did have a Zoom conference over a day or so. It was far too lengthy and didn't really work and is something I wouldn't want to repeat."

"The small group work has been great. Everybody contributes, probably more than they would in the bigger meetings, where they might not be so confident to suggest ideas."

"I think we are actually getting better at working together. The monthly meetings are getting better and more people are contributing, even people who are concerned about how well they could speak English."

There is strong evidence that the Partners involved in the EMIC-GEM project are working together well and, indeed, there were a wide range of positives identified in this regard, namely:

- Partners communicating effectively with each other (including within and outwith sub-teams)
- Partners being generally good at meeting deadlines (albeit occasionally requiring to be reminded of them by the Project Co-ordinator), and any delays encountered being primarily due to COVID-19 and being understandable
- Partners often being willing to *bring ideas to the table* (and, indeed, some Partners being able to contribute outwith their own area of expertise)
- The monthly meetings appearing to be becoming more effective – based on observation of a number of these meetings – particularly in terms of contributions by Project Partners (perhaps due to their increased confidence) and their increasing length (due to more areas being covered during these meetings)
- Partners fulfilling their designated roles and tasks

Despite the overwhelmingly positive profile in relation to the effectiveness of partnership working, a number of specific negative outcomes are worthy of note, namely:

- Some Partners appearing to have ongoing concerns about their English language abilities and, as such, feeling unable to contribute fully to meetings and perhaps not fully understanding what is being discussed (although there would seem to be evidence that this issue is becoming less significant for these Partners through time)
- That partnership working (including in terms of informal discussions and the *softer benefits* of face-to-face interaction, both of which are considered as being highly valuable) has been negatively impacted by lack of face-to-face interaction due to COVID-19

- That there is a degree of concern amongst some Partners about the ability of all Partners to contribute effectively to the development of IO2 module content

There are also four observations which are worthy of note in relation to partnership working pertaining to the EMIC-GEM project:

- Although not ideal, partnership working has been enhanced and facilitated by the use of video conferences
- There is evidence that partnership working is becoming more effective
- There is little doubt that the initial face-to-face meeting had helped the development of effective partnership working (as noted earlier in this report)
- That, whilst financial considerations are of some importance to most partners, it is not an overriding reason for their participating in the project. In particular, most Partners place greater importance on the longer-term benefits for themselves and their institutions of participating in the EMIC-GEM project

6.0 EVALUATION OF COVID-19 RESPONSE

The emergence and expansion of COVID-19 represented a significant challenge to – and threat for – the EMIC-GEM project, particularly in terms of the potential for impacts on project progression and the achievement of short-, medium- and long-term project objectives.

As previously noted, COVID-19 has had a degree of negative impact on the project, particularly in terms of:

- Slowing the pace of its progression (resulting in the likely need for an extension to be sought to the project timescale)
- Loss of face-to-face contact between Project Partners

The likely need for an extension to the project schedule is entirely understandable and to be expected. Indeed, an extension of the EMIC-GEM project would not be uncommon, on the basis that there is evidence that many ERASMUS+ projects are or will require a degree of extension.

The loss of face-to-face contacts between Project Partners was inevitable and unavoidable, and it would seem apparent that appropriate and effective mitigating actions have been taken by the Project Co-ordinator.

In particular, regular and effective use has been made of video conferencing to ensure that Project Partners maintain personal contact. This has included both the scheduled monthly meetings and ad hoc meetings.

Although the mitigating actions introduced have not entirely overcome the impact of the loss of face-to-face interaction between Project Partners, they have nonetheless lessened this impact and ensured that the project has been able to progress – albeit at a slower pace than had

originally been anticipated – and have ensured that the required project outputs have and are been achieved (although, in some cases, later than originally anticipated).

It is also apparent that individual Project Partners have faced challenges within their own institution that relate to COVID-19 and, in particular, competing priorities have emerged within their institution which they have required to address. Nonetheless, there has been an admirable commitment by Project Partners to continue to contribute to the EMIC-GEM project despite competing priorities, and it is evident that Project Partners have made significant efforts at an individual level to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the EMIC-GEM project.

7.0 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the positive nature of the outcomes of the first interim evaluation of the EMIC-GEM project, there are no notable recommendations to be made on the basis of the evidence gathered and reviewed.

However, despite the many positives associated with the project, it does nonetheless face a range of challenges.

7.1 Development of Module Content

Despite the early stage of the module development process, it is apparent that a number of challenges face the process of successfully developing module content in line with the objectives of IO2, including:

- Ensuring that the project teams work together effectively in developing modules (which will be a challenge to be faced by the Project Co-ordinator, particularly in terms of adapting and adopting working practices in order to ensure the effective development of the remaining modules)
- Ensuring that modules incorporate sufficient flexibility to allow their application in different ways in different countries (and, in particular, ensuring that the development of the modules does not take on a *one size fits all* approach). Again, this is a key challenge for the Project Co-ordinator
- Producing enough good-quality content for the number of hours required in each module
- Translating module content to reflect technical terms and language used commonly in different countries
- Ensuring that there is harmonisation of intellectual outputs in relation to module content development (in order to ensure that the modules – as with all other intellectual outputs – are presented in a consistent, collective manner rather than in a style suggesting individual outputs being developed by different individuals and Partners)

7.2 Building Social Media Presence

It will be a challenge to ensure that the social media presence of EMIC-GEM develops and builds momentum in order that it plays a notable role in driving awareness and uptake of the project.

There is also a challenge to ensure that the content of posts on Twitter/LinkedIn and the news items on the website contain content which is relevant, valuable and contribute to the project's aims and objectives.

In this sense, there is a challenge to ensure that there is a degree of vetting undertaken (and, if required, a degree of editorial control, particularly in terms of website news content) which, potentially, should be signed off by the Project Co-ordinator. However, it is recognised that, as a flexible and rapid response tool, it is important that any vetting and sign-off procedures put in place do not impact upon the currency of information which is being posted on Twitter and LinkedIn and added to the news elements of the website.

7.3 Maintaining Project Partner Cohesion and Contribution

It could potentially be a significant challenge for the Project Co-ordinator to maintain the cohesiveness and contribution of Project Partners.

Given circumstances over the coming months, it is likely that video conferencing will have to continue to be a feature of project progression. This will be key in terms of ensuring that Project Partners remain committed to EMIC-GEM in the context of ongoing competing priorities within their institution and, on this basis, it is important that virtual contacts are maintained and attendance at scheduled and ad hoc meetings remains high (particularly in the context of the extensive amount of work which is required to develop the content of the eight modules over the coming months).

Furthermore, it is recommended that, although the first Zoom session wasn't particularly successful, this may not be the case should follow-up Zoom sessions be undertaken. This is due to the fact that, at the first Zoom session, many of the Project Partners were just becoming familiar with video conferencing technologies and, as such, it would be hoped that, by now, Project Partners would be far more comfortable with these technologies and, consequently, there is the potential for further Zoom sessions to work more effectively.

It is also recommended that, when it is safe and permitted to do so, a face-to-face meeting with Partners should be arranged as soon as possible.

7.4 COVID-19 Response

It is clear that COVID-19 will continue to have an impact, in the broadest sense, across Europe for some time to come and, accordingly, has the potential to continue to impact upon the progression of the EMIC-GEM project. This will require to be monitored closely by the Project Co-ordinator in order that any ongoing impacts are avoided if possible or at least minimised.