1. General Questions relevant to both SSA and KA

Please note that these explanations are only valid for the Alliances projects and not applicable to the other actions of the Erasmus+ programme such as the Strategic Partnerships.

A. The "unit costs" system is a simplified form of determining the amount of a grant. By its nature, such simplified forms of grants are contributions to the main costs of a project which are not an exact reimbursement of the real expenditures linked to specific activities in the project.

In the case of the Alliances projects, the unit costs established are applied to the staff component of a project. A grid of four staff categories and four country groups establishes the unit cost to be applied to a working day of a person in the respective category.

The unit costs are predefined contributions and multiplied by the "number of days of eligible staff" invested in the project activities to result in the maximum EU global contribution to the project. This amount is intended to cover any activity directly linked to the implementation of the project including: project management, project meetings, intellectual outputs (such as curricula, pedagogical materials, open educational resources (OER), IT tools, analyses, studies, etc.), dissemination, participation in events, conferences, travel, etc.

In exceptional cases, when the Alliances foresee learning mobility activities, an additional component shall be added to the grant; an embedded mobility support (which covers the travel costs and subsistence costs of this activity only).

Q. How have these unit costs been established?

A. After analysing the historical data on similar projects, it has turned out that the main category of costs in such projects are "staff costs", generally up to 80 % of the total costs. Therefore, in the case of the Alliances, the system has been designed to link the predefined contribution (unit costs) to the "Number of days of eligible staff" devoted to the implementation of the projects.

The levels of the unit costs have been established on the basis of the real costs of past projects, ensuring that the final grant calculated with the unit costs system results in average to the same level than the final grant calculated on a real cost basis.
As the unit cost system has to cover all costs linked to a project, this has been taken into account in the simulations and for determining the level of the unit costs.

**Q. Could you please explain what could be considered as "number of days of eligible staff"?**

**A.** The "number of days" are those needed for the project implementation in all its aspects. The "eligible staff" for the calculation relates to permanent, temporary and/or interim staff employed by partner organisations and listed in the detailed project description:

(i) Permanent staff with an employment contract with one of the partner organisations,

(ii) Temporary staff with an employment contract with one of the partner organisations,

(iii) Interim staff recruited through a specialised external Agency, Personnel working on the basis of a contract of employment recognised by the respective national legislation).

Working days of learners, trainees, volunteers and persons working through subcontracting (e.g. freelancers, self-employed people, sole traders) are not accepted in the calculation of the contribution. One of the main reasons for this rule is to ensure a strong systemic impact and clear commitment of the participating organisations which is to be achieved by dedicating own staff to the project.

On the other hand, in opposition to what is the rule in real-costs-based projects, you have all the flexibility in the budgets representing your own contribution. You can for example let volunteers contribute to a project but their working days cannot be used for the calculation of the grant.

**Q. Should the coordinator keep a detailed estimation/accountancy based on real costs?**

**A.** An accurate estimation and a detailed accountancy based on real costs, are always highly recommended.

Please keep in mind that the unit cost system is only a way of calculating the grant you will get from the EU. However, for your own planning and implementation it remains important to keep a real cost follow-up.

The accurate estimation of real costs enables the calculation of the real resources needed to implement the project and gives a clear picture of the amounts forecast. Compared to the grant amount you get by applying the unit costs, you can see how much your real own contribution would need to be.

In addition, in case your project is selected for funding, this approach ensures a close follow-up of the project in terms of commitments taken within the partnership, easier respect of the approved budget and also helps to administrate the resources allocated within the estimated budget.

At reporting stage you will have to demonstrate to the Agency that the activities have been implemented as planned; in other terms, the proof of the implementation of the planned activities will trigger the payment of the grant (calculated as described above) and not the real costs spent by you. However, a detailed accountancy during the implementation, will make it easier to prove the existence of the activities and that related costs have been incurred, supporting the triggering events from the activity plan you will be reporting.
Also, in case of audits or additional requests of supporting documents by the Agency, the documents will be more easily traceable. Furthermore, a pre-existing or well established accountancy system could be an additional element to evaluate a solid financial structure, essential for a good implementation of the project.

Q. Following the guidelines of the Erasmus+ Guide on p. 235 it is requested for each organization to upload in the Participant Portal a Financial Capacity Form which unfortunately we cannot find.

A. The financial capacity form will be requested only from applicants selected for funding at a later stage. Therefore no applications will be considered ineligible if this document is missing in the participant Portal. Selected applicants will be contacted at a later stage to complete this form.

Q. Do we have to attach Mandate Letters from all partners when submitting our application?

A. Mandate letters are not required at the stage of the application submission. The Declaration on honour signed by the applicant organisation includes the following statement: I also declare that all the partners participating in this project have agreed with the content of the application and have confirmed their intention to carry out the tasks described accordingly. Mandate letters signed by the partners are a contractual requirement and will therefore be requested after the selection of proposals prior to the signature of the Grant Agreement.

Q. I am looking for a partner for my application. Is there some database to search for relevant organization?

A. You can search in our Partner search tool http://infodaykassatool.teamwork.fr/ and register your organization there as well. The tool will be working until the deadline, 26 February 2015.

Q. Are you organizing some information seminar about your actions?

A. Knowledge and Sector Skills Alliance Infoday took place 12 November 2014. You can find the power point presentations and videos of the main sessions on http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/events/erasmus-plus-knowledge-alliances-and-sector-skills-alliances-infoday_en

Q. Can organisations from Partner Countries participate?

A. Yes they can, provided that they bring an essential added value to the project. In other words, the participation of organizations from Partner Countries must provide genuine added value to the project because of the specific skills, experiences or expertise that these organizations will bring to the project and that prove to be essential for the achievement of the project's objectives and/or to ensure a significantly higher quality of the project outputs.

Q. Where can I find guidance on Participant Identification Codes (PIC)s?

A. You can find information on PICs in the Participant Portal directly. You can notably consult the portal's frequently asked questions available at:

2. Sector Skills Alliance specific questions:

Q. Is it possible to submit a Sector Skills Alliance application for a sub-sector?

A. Yes, you may address subsectors respectively occupational profiles in one of the seven economic sectors eligible in the 2015 Call for Proposals for Sector Skills Alliances:

- Manufacturing & Engineering
- Commerce
- Information and communication technology
- Environmental technologies (Eco-innovation)
- Cultural and creative sectors
- Health care
- Tourism

Q. If we are partner in a Sector Skills Alliance, can we participate in another Alliance project as applicant, partner or associated partner?

A. No, an organization can only be involved as applicant/coordinator or full partner in one Sector Skills Alliance application at the same time with the exception of associated partners (which do not receive any grant). They may be involved in several SSA applications for the Call 2015. An exception applies to cases where only one entity has the regulatory function for VET in a country. Provided the proposal includes proof of such a “monopoly” situation such an organization can participate in several Sector Skills Alliance applications.

Q: How do EU umbrella organisations fit into the partnership profile? Are they treated as add-ons or can they be allocated to a country?

A. European umbrella organisations are considered as add-ons. In such a case the minimum partnership requirements have to be maintained, i.e. the partnership must contain a minimum of 9 organisations in a minimum of 3 Programme countries. Then the partnership has two options to add a European umbrella organisation: (1) a European umbrella organisation based in one of the three countries of the partnership or (2) a European umbrella organisation based in a fourth country. In that fourth country where the European umbrella organisation is based, there is no need to add partners from the two other categories (VET-provider, regulatory body).

Q: Can a company be considered an entity representing a given sector?

A. No, an entity representing a sector is a specific trade union or an employer's association or a chamber, representing the sector in question. But companies with more than 250 employees and an own training department or enterprises providing shared training (collaborative training) can be considered as VET providers.

Q: Can a university be considered a regulatory body?

A. No, an entity with regulatory function is normally an educational authority or body at national or regional level establishing minimum standards for qualifications and recognition of diplomas and learning outcomes. Not only Ministries may be bodies with regulatory function but also organisations
to which such function has been transferred to by the Ministry. In such a case, please provide a document showing the transfer of the regulatory function.

**What is the difference between a Sector Skills Alliance and a Strategic Partnership in VET?**

From the first glance the field-specific priorities and funded activities for both actions have some overlapping areas. While the composition of a Strategic Partnership can vary in size and type of participating organisation, a mix of complementary organisations able to successfully deliver all aspects of the project is encouraged.

On the other hand the requirements for a Sector Skills Alliance consortium are more explicitly defined: it must include a minimum of 9 partners from 3 Programme Countries, and in each country covering 3 different categories of entities (*VET provider, sectoral organisation and regulatory body*). In addition, the partners have to be representative in the sector at least at the national level. Strategic Partnerships can develop, transfer and /or implement innovative practices when the Sector Skills Alliances must deliver innovative results and solutions with high impact on VET systems.

The Sector Skills Alliances are very focused on skills gaps thus providing learners with the skills required by the labour market. This action is open only to sectors identified as the ones with skills imbalances. The list is revised each year.
3. Knowledge Alliance specific questions

Q. Could you please define what an "enterprise" is?
A. An enterprise is defined in the E+ Programming Guide (See Glossary of key terms) as "any undertaking engaged in an economic activity regardless of its size, legal form or of the economic sector in which it operates."

Q. What is the difference between a Knowledge Alliance and a Strategic Partnership?
A. In certain cases Knowledge Alliances and Strategic Partnerships could have a similar set-up, i.e. involving HEIs and companies as core partners in the project. However, whereas this is a main requirement for the Knowledge Alliances (i.e. eligibility criteria), it is encouraged for Strategic Partnerships (i.e. award criteria).

The focus of the Knowledge Alliances is the cooperation between higher education institutions and companies which implies joint comprehensive activities aimed at promoting innovation within and through higher education institutions.

The focus of Strategic Partnerships is to make education and training systems more relevant to the labour market, by equipping young people with the skills and competences that are needed now and in the future by employers. Cooperation between higher education institutions and other education and training fields and youth organisations is encouraged, as well as between universities and companies, regional authorities etc.

Q: Can a partnership involve 6 organisations out of which 3 from 3 different Programme countries and 3 from Partner countries?
A. No, the minimum partnership requirement is based on a cumulative condition. As a result Knowledge Alliances must involve minimum 6 independent organisations and those min.6 organisations should be located in at least 3 different Programme countries. Amongst these organisations, at least 2 should be higher education institutions and at least 2 should be enterprises.

Q: Can a higher education institution from a Programme country participate even if it does not have a valid Erasmus Charter?
A. No. Any institution that is a recognised higher education institution must have a valid Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) awarded before the submission deadline of the current call. The lists of all valid ECHE holders are published under the following link:


Q: Can a higher education institution from a Partner country participate even if it does not have an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)?
A. Yes.