



EUA

European University Association

EUA MEMBER CONSULTATION

ERASMUS+
MID-TERM REVIEW:
EUA'S RECOMMENDATIONS

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ERASMUS+
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ERASMUS+ MID-TERM REVIEW: EUA'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2020 PROGRAMME

The Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020) is currently undergoing a mid-term review, and the European University Association (EUA) calls upon European higher education institutions and organisations to participate in the ongoing consultations, notably in the European Commission's (EC) public consultation to be opened in March 2017. As a contribution to the discussion, EUA has drawn up a detailed report on how Erasmus+ is received at the institutions ("EUA member consultation: A contribution to the Erasmus+ mid-term review"). In addition, it proposes the following recommendations, formulated in close collaboration with its members and partners, on how to improve the programme beyond 2020.

EUA is the umbrella organisation of 33 national rectors' conferences and 800 individual universities in 47 European countries. EUA is active in European policy making, both in the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. It is also engaged in international dialogue and cooperation with partner organisations around the globe.

Indispensable for Europe

The Erasmus+ Programme is of high importance for the European higher education community, as it contributes to enhancing its quality and international recognition: It enables exchange and cooperation within Europe and beyond with partners from outside Europe. By doing so, it contributes in a very practical, efficient and effective way to enhancing the internationalisation and quality of higher education on a wide range of issues including credit transfer, new learning methods, quality assurance, cooperation with industry and communities, student participation in institutional governance and green sustainable campuses.

Supported by Erasmus+, institutions jointly develop and disseminate good practices, share their responses to European higher education reforms under the EU 2020 and ET 2020 strategies and the Bologna Process, but also feed into ongoing reform development processes and inspire new ones. Much of the progress in higher education that Europe has experienced over the past decade has derived from EC-funded projects. These actions generate immediate benefits for students and staff, and enable Europe's higher education institutions and systems to keep abreast of developments in the sector and to demonstrate their leadership in international cooperation.

While Erasmus+ is indispensable for European higher education, the links and relations it helps build are of great benefit for society and the economy: Erasmus+ is a long-term investment into the integration and innovative power of Europe. It educates European citizens, builds an internationally educated workforce, and paves new ways of collaboration with industry and society, within Europe and beyond.

Achievement and an urgent need for enhancement

Erasmus+ has been a success: The EUA member consultation report found that it has brought a number of improvements compared to its predecessors, such as better integration of programmes, a more transparent structure, more streamlined rules and procedures, including the shift towards e- and online processes, and improved cooperation and exchange opportunities with international and non-higher education partners.

But the report also highlights areas for improvement. The success of the programme is not matched by funding: Under some of the actions, due to a limited number of grants, success rates are under 20%. As most European higher education institutions are publicly funded, the latter implies a quite substantial waste of taxpayers' money. In addition, the goal of simplification has not always been reached, and, even on the contrary, for some actions the level of bureaucracy has increased – resulting in a higher workload and additional costs for all parties, including the EC's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and the National Agencies. The combination of bureaucratic burden and low success rates increases the risk that despite the relatively high participation numbers, parts of the sector may disengage and orientate themselves elsewhere.

In this regard, EUA and its members and partners welcome the mid-term review as an opportunity for thorough and systematic enhancement. The following recommendations take into consideration the lessons learnt from the first years of implementation and the concrete needs of the stakeholders. They focus on enhancing the quality of outcomes, but also on ensuring the engagement and the satisfaction of all stakeholders, within and outside of higher education. In addition, they aim at enhancing the programme's ability to function in and respond to a changing European and global framework, which will be of utmost importance for its relevance.

10 recommendations for enhancing Erasmus+

1. Continue to simplify rules, requirements and processes for application, management and reporting, in order to decrease the administrative burden

This would benefit not only the higher education community, but also the EACEA and the National Agencies. It concerns all three Key Actions (KA), though most urgently KA1 mobility actions, where the administrative burden has increased significantly.

2. Enhance paper-free and online processes and tools, data compatibility and user-friendliness

The use of scanned copies in place of paper has been an improvement under Erasmus+, but this should be further enhanced. Online tools such as the mobility tool, and the language learning facility are a step in the right direction, but should be developed in close collaboration with and thoroughly tested by stakeholders. Data compatibility between the tools and with the database systems used by institutions has to be ensured, and access improved for all users, including mobile individuals.

Such changes would significantly ease the administrative burden, in particular but not only for the KA1 mobility actions, which are work intensive due to the large number of grants and beneficiaries and the complex documentation and communication processes they entail.

3. Improve funding and funding efficiency

More flexibility in managing project budgets for mobility and collaboration could help to decrease the administrative burden, avoid conflicts with beneficiaries' national and institutional rules and regulations, improve quality and save money. As most European higher education institutions are publicly funded, their costs are taxpayers' money spent.

Cost coverage has to be improved, in particular for staff and travel costs. The present unit cost approach of some actions should be reconsidered, as it effectively results in higher co-funding contributions and in uncertainties for budget planning.

The EC should also reassess the current practice of the obligatory external audit of every KA2 project. It creates an extra layer of work and cost. The previous audit practice seems to be much more appropriate, also as a majority of European higher education institutions are already subject to internal and external audits and accountancy.

4. Increase the number of grants under some of the actions in order to achieve reasonable success rates

In order to ensure the success of Erasmus+, its total funding has to be increased as there are evidently not enough grants. This is the case in particular for the KA1 Erasmus Mundus Joint Degrees (EMJD) and the KA2 – Cooperation Projects, where the low number of grants has resulted in low success rates. In one of its actions, the Knowledge Alliances, only 4% of applications were awarded in 2014. In the same year, only 12% of the grants under the Strategic Partnerships went to higher education.

Under KA1 International Credit Mobility (ICM), the focus on the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood should be maintained and promoted as it helps to build links between people and institutions with a long-term positive impact. However, more grants for Latin America and industrialised countries should be made available in response to strong demand.

5. Maintain and further enhance the European dimension of all actions, as this is the key added value of the programme

All KA2 actions – including the KA2 Strategic Partnerships - should be selected and administered centrally at the European level, as was the case for collaboration programmes prior to Erasmus+. This would ensure their visibility and accessibility at the European level. Selection should be subject to quality, but also consider geographical balance.

In addition, the EC should reassess the current separation between KA2 and KA3 projects, as under KA2 there are also projects that contribute to policy reform.

With regard to eligibility rules, EUA proposes to grant “European status” to representative organisations and networks that have a pan-European identity and mission and are based in an EU member state (e.g. to allow for joint projects among organisations based in the same country).

6. Improve attractiveness and accessibility of the programme for institutions from all over Europe

The combination of complicated and work-intensive application and management processes, unattractive funding conditions (high co-funding margin, low and uncertain cost coverage), and low success rates impacts the attractiveness of the programme. Institutions may either be unable to afford participation, due to the financial or human resource implications, or simply decide not to participate, due to the cost-benefit ratio, and as they find more attractive funding opportunities elsewhere. This could result in lower quality participation, but also distort the geographical balance of Erasmus+ participation as it affects some countries more than others.

7. Foster more equity in Key Action 1 - Student Mobility

The EC should further encourage the member states to co-fund and top up the Erasmus+ student mobility grants to widen access to disadvantaged learners, among others, through regional and social funds. The availability of such funding could be included in the semester reports as one of the indicators for equity and social inclusion, which might also motivate other countries to follow suit.

8. Increase flexibility to respond to emerging challenges, such as support for refugee students and staff

Erasmus+ should be able to respond flexibly to emerging challenges at European and international levels. Under the new programme, EUA suggests the creation of a mechanism for repurposing, reallocating or setting some funding aside for calls for proposals and projects for such purposes.

In addition, EUA proposes to establish a specific support action for refugee students and academics, not only in third countries, but also in the programme countries. So far, refugees, while explicitly mentioned as a priority group in the Erasmus+ Programme guide as of 2015, are only indirectly supported by KA2 and KA3 projects, whereas measures under the Madad Fund benefit only refugees in third countries. Taking part in Erasmus+ mobility would turn refugees into international students and academics, giving them better prospects for integration and careers in their country of origin, as well as in Europe. It would also allow better dissemination

among different member states and universities and enhance their international cooperation and networking, as well as create long-term social and economic benefits. In addition, these measures would set an example and raise awareness for the situation of refugees, both in Europe and internationally.

9. Better support dissemination and sharing of outcomes

Erasmus+ should allocate some funding to facilitate networking and synergies among projects and other initiatives. This could be done through “structural” projects (projects awarded for coordinating activities, e.g. thematic networking events), which could be established on certain topics and regions.

The Repository of Erasmus+ Project Results is a major improvement. It should be maintained and enhanced, e.g. by linking in all projects of predecessor programmes and by improving user-friendliness, in particular the ability to search topics across all actions. This would enable follow-up and networking, as well as enhance impact and sustainability. It should include a contact database of all active stakeholders, administered in collaboration with the National Agencies. This would also help to further strengthen the support of the higher education community to Erasmus+, which is crucial for its enhancement and sustainability.

10. Increase collaboration with the higher education community and the National Agencies on these improvements

University staff and students are not only beneficiaries, but key stakeholders of Erasmus+. Many of them are highly committed, hold vast knowledge on and long-standing experience with the EC programmes, and engage in various ways for their improvement.

This community should be systematically and consistently consulted on the improvement of specific aspects and tools of the programme, rather than only asked to participate in a public consultation on the entire Erasmus+ Programme every other year. EUA therefore recommends that the EC organise focus groups on specific administrative matters and/or features of the Erasmus+ Programme.

This should especially be the case when new programme actions, features or tools are being launched, updated or adapted. These should be developed in collaboration and sufficiently tested with the end users – preferably in a time frame that allows for review throughout a full cycle of implementation, e.g. a semester covering a full cycle of mobility.

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides a unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, website and publications.



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