

# **Feedback and Suggestions concerning Higher Education in the Proposal of the European Commission for the Erasmus Programme (2021 – 2027)**

**National Agency for EU-Higher Education Cooperation  
(NA DAAD)**

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The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has a long tradition of uniting people and academia. Founded in Heidelberg in 1925, the DAAD has since become the largest funding organisations in the world for the international exchange of students and researchers ([www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de)).

Since the start of the Erasmus Programme in 1987, the DAAD implements the Higher Education component of the Erasmus Programme on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. It can therefore look back at more than 30 years of programme experience ([www.eu.daad.de](http://www.eu.daad.de)).

## **GENERAL REMARKS**

The National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation (NA DAAD) welcomes the proposal of the European Commission for the Erasmus programme 2021-2027. The proposal provides an excellent basis for discussion as it responds to the expectations of stakeholders to provide as much stability as possible in the programme architecture, while adapting to evolving needs and developments. The NA DAAD would, however, like to see a few amendments to the current proposal to better respond to the needs of the Higher Education sector in Europe and to strengthen predictability and clarity of programme implementation:

### **Financial basis:**

- The NA DAAD welcomes the increased budget allocation of 30 billion Euros to the programme (2021-2027). This is the minimum amount required to tackle the current rate of oversubscription, while at the same time catering for new actions (e.g. the new funding line for European Universities), and reaching the programme objective of strengthened inclusion.
- We would like to draw attention to the fact that a budgetary increase of minimum 40% for the current funding lines (disregarding any new actions) is required to maintain the level of support of the year 2020. In view of public expectations about the programme, any decrease in support from the year 2020 to 2021 should be avoided.
- We opt for steady rise of the funding during the seven-year period instead of an exponential rise during the last years of programme implementation. While the announcement of a doubling of the budget has led to widespread expectations that the current underfunding can be alleviated starting in 2021, the very slow increase of funding in the first few years will lead to disappointment on the side of the beneficiaries. At the same time, the steep increase during the last 2 years might possibly not be manageable.
- The proposed regulation requires more clarity and predictability in terms of finances allocated to different sectors and key actions. The regulation should include the allocation of funds to different sectors for the centralised actions.
- The criteria for allocation of decentralized funds to different countries should be maintained.
- Based on the demand from HEIs and due to limited funding available under the EU's external financing instrument for certain countries and regions, we support that finances from the internal budget (budget heading 2.7.) are used to strengthen cooperation with industrialised and emerging countries.

## Objectives and Focus of the Programme:

- Looking at the current political situation, we pledge for strong support for actions that can reach out to the general public to help improve people's attitude towards Europe. Without HEIs putting a strong emphasis on their third mission (impact on society), opening the minds of more people to the European idea will be difficult to achieve.
- The regulation should clearly state which actions are implemented at decentralised and at centralised level. Furthermore, in the regulation we would welcome a clearer description of the role of NAs to both implement the decentralised actions of the programme, as well as to assist the Commission in counselling, dissemination and promotion of centralised actions. For the latter it is essential to continue and expand the good cooperation between NAs, EU COM and EACEA.
- We support the overall objective of Erasmus to better reach out to beneficiaries with fewer opportunities. In the higher education sector, inclusion may be achieved through a combination of new forms of mobility, better preparation, digitalisation, target-group specific marketing as well as higher mobility grant levels. As experience clearly shows, efforts at inclusion require not only special funding for the beneficiaries, but are also personnel-intensive. It does not seem quite realistic to expect to reach three times more beneficiaries with only a doubling of the programme budget – and more inclusion -while at the same time lowering the administrative budget from 3,4% to 3,2%.
- The international dimension of Erasmus+ is one of the keys to the programme's success. Higher education institutions operate globally; the international actions of Erasmus+ are in high demand by HEIs. The amount of funding allocated to the international dimension will need to reflect the additional inclusion of VET, which we welcome.
- We also welcome paragraph 16.1.d as it provides the UK with the possibility to join Erasmus, in accordance with the rules set by the programme. Continued collaboration with the UK in the framework of Erasmus is of mutual interest to both the EU and the UK.

## COMMENTS ON THE STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

The Erasmus regulation provides a basic framework. It describes the future programme's objectives and intentions. In the following section the NA DAAD gives concrete suggestions how these objectives can be implemented in practice, based on the structure of the EC's staff working document for the new programme generation and comments on its specific proposals for each key action.

### KEY ACTION 1 – LEARNING MOBILITY IN EDUCATION, TRAINING, YOUTH & SPORT

#### MOBILITY PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, TRAINING, YOUTH & SPORT

##### Mobility of higher education students

- The NA DAAD welcomes the continuation of the mobility scheme, which is a core activity of Erasmus. The mobility scheme needs to be reinforced by at least doubling the budget for its implementation.
- The introduction of short term mobility in combination with virtual/ blended mobility would provide added value to the present mobility scheme in order to reach new groups of participants which previously did not benefit from it adequately.
- We urge that the new focus on the development of competences in “forward looking fields or disciplines” will come on top and not at the cost of the current Erasmus scheme which is open to all disciplines and demand-driven, and that it shall not lead to further complications for the applicants. The fields should be selected in consultation with HEIs.
- Virtual exchange and blended learning shall not only be addressed in projects (such as currently the case in Erasmus+), but be mainstreamed within the programme. HEIs shall receive substantial support to develop and implement digital support (preparation of mobility, virtual exchange, etc.)
- In general, new measures should be integrated as much as possible into current application procedures rather than leading to a number of different applications for the relevant institutions.
- The introduction of the European student card should be considered in the allocation of funds to the HEIs.

#### LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- The NA DAAD appreciates the continuation of the Erasmus Online Linguistic Support. We support that while OLS will maintain its focus on supporting physical mobility, the tool will also continue to be available for target groups not necessarily involved in mobility activities, such as refugees. To foster the inclusion of participants from partner countries, OLS should be extended for this group of students.

## KEY ACTION 2 – COOPERATION AMONG ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING, YOUTH AND SPORT

### 1) PARTNERSHIPS FOR COOPERATION

#### Cooperation partnerships

- The NA DAAD appreciates that the Strategic Partnerships (SP) seemingly find their continuation in the future “cooperation partnerships” on decentralized level. However, the current term of the programme is not mentioned. The unique feature of the Strategic Partnerships of having to be innovative and strategic cannot be found in the description. Especially in higher education it is of utmost importance that the term “strategic partnerships” will be maintained. The term better describes the ambition to be expected from these co-operations. Furthermore, HEI’s need to find a continuation of the action in content e.g. regarding intellectual outputs and also in its visibility and definition among stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- From a higher education perspective, the division chosen under Key Action 2 in partnerships for cooperation, excellence and innovation is not very target-oriented. Higher Education partnerships generally aim at all three fields.
- We welcome the strengthening of third country cooperation. The proposal is, however, unclear about the instruments: The action “Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE)” is neither explicitly mentioned in the Commission proposal nor in the staff working document. However, it is extremely important to continue this action line, especially with focus on world-wide HE cooperation and regarding the challenges that the EU faces with its neighbourhood regions and developing countries. Several of the current projects already show a win-win situation in which capacity building is a two-way street. This aspect could be strengthened in the new programme generation and thus make this action even more attractive to European Higher Education Institutions.
- At the same time, we believe that the cooperation within the European Union shall be reinforced in the new Programme generation in specific funding lines (e.g. Strategic Partnerships), allowing only for limited participation of partner countries.
- Considering the importance of the sustainability and impact of Erasmus+ projects, we propose to introduce a financial module for an additional phase with the purpose of effective dissemination and impact on regional/ national and systemic level after the end of the regular project funding.
- It is desirable to extend the National Erasmus Offices network to more regions of the world to support applicants and project coordinators. This support is currently only available for former Tempus countries.

#### Small-scale partnerships

- Even though the regulation does not give any indication if the small-scale partnerships will be available for all education sectors, we explicitly welcome the introduction of small scale partnerships also for higher education to allow newcomers to the action as well as grass-roots initiatives. In Germany some of the smaller Higher Education Institutions face the same challenges as other smaller institutions and therefore do not yet participate in Erasmus. We would like to use this format to encourage these smaller institutions to join the programme (for both mobility and partnerships).
- However, a clearer definition of potential activities is needed. We recommend that e.g. intensive programmes/summer schools can be supported under the small-scale actions.

- It is desirable to fund ambassadorial activities of peer-groups. The large networks of Erasmus student initiatives are crucial for the development of an “Erasmus identity” and therefore need to be better integrated into the programme. We welcome the provision in the Commission staff working document to “encourage participants to actively participate in the local community in the host country (e.g. acting as Erasmus ambassadors in local education and training institutions and associations)”. Since 2009, the NA DAAD runs the programme “Europa macht Schule – Europe meets School” in which exchange students present their home country through a cultural project in a local German school (link [web-site](#) and [European dissemination conference](#)). We propose that this programme will be implemented Europe-wide through dedicated funding provided by the Erasmus programme under the small-scale partnerships. In this context even larger HEIs could participate in small-scale projects.

## 2) PARTNERSHIPS FOR EXCELLENCE

### European universities

- The NA DAAD welcomes the new funding line for “European Universities”. We see a great potential in this new initiative to further develop the European higher education area and to boost mobility and strategic cooperation between HEIs.
- We suggest finding a creative way in which institutions from the European Higher Education Area, but not an EU member state or Erasmus programme country, can participate in the initiative on a self-financed basis, for example as associated partners. Such a solution is in line with the principle of a “bottom-up” process and would allow to maintain cooperation schemes in Europe that have been developed over many years.
- European Universities will need to be supported by different funding programmes, and we welcome that the proposed regulations for Horizon Europe and Erasmus provide this possibility. We urge the Commission to find a way of easy and light administration, such as pooling of funding under one programme or alternatively the use of identical rules for the administration of funds and joint reporting.
- We ask for clarification if the mobility within the partner consortium is envisaged to be paid from the budget of the European Universities or through separate application from the mobility budget (KA1).

### Erasmus Mundus Joint Master degrees (EMJMD)

- The affiliation of EMJMDs to Key Action II is welcomed and sensible due to its project-oriented character. Given the fact that a majority of the current EMJMDs award double/multiple and not necessarily joint degrees, the Commission should think about renaming the action “Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Courses (EMJMC)”. Paragraph 15 in the proposed regulation defines “joint master degrees” as integrated study programmes resulting in a “**single** degree certificate”. We believe that also in the future the definition of joint master degree needs to include the possibility for institutions to provide double or multiple degrees since the provision of single joint degrees is still not possible in all European countries.
- In accordance with the goal of the EU-Commission to foster closer links between education and research, NA DAAD favours the possibility to reinstate the Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorates into the future Erasmus Programme.
- The focus on excellency in the EMJMD needs to be more visible for this funding line and for HEIs in order to promote the action even better in the future. We recommend that,

while maintaining its focus on excellence, criteria for the EMJMD shall be inclusive enough to also attract smaller HEIs.

- The NA DAAD supports the introduction of an Erasmus Mundus ‘label’ to foster the sustainability of former EMJMDs.

### 3) PARTNERSHIPS FOR INNOVATION

- The Commission proposal describes that the actions shall be focused on “thematic areas that are strategic for Europe’s growth and competitiveness and social cohesion”. We invite the Commission to include stakeholders, National Agencies and the Erasmus Programme committee in the process of defining the annual (or better multi-annual) thematic priorities.
- The NA DAAD welcomes the continuation of knowledge and sectors skills alliances.
- We recommend to keep the “Forward-Looking Projects” (as replacement of the “Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects” of the current programme) in Key Action 3 as a strong and effective tool to foster policy-related cooperation.

### KEY ACTION 3 – SUPPORT TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION IN EDUCATION, TRAINING, YOUTH AND SPORT

General remark: We recommend that all actions under Key Action 3 should be defined more precisely in terms of target group, method of implementation and procedures applied. The experience from the current programme generation shows that it is often not clear, which target groups are addressed by the various instruments and what kind of activities are eligible. Without a more concrete description of the instruments, it is difficult to implement the key action to its full potential.

All proposed action types under Key Action 3 have so far closely been linked to the European Union policy aims and have left space for flexible measures in different priority areas. A good example for this flexibility is the call for Social inclusion in the field of education and youth in the current programme. We urge that this action type will be maintained as the topic is of utmost importance to tackle societal challenges within Europe from a grassroot level.

#### **MEASURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE QUALITATIVE AND INCLUSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME:**

We welcome the proposal to equip National Agencies with ‘think-tank’ resources that allow for the elaboration of activities and strategies and create synergies between different action lines. A more concrete description is recommended on how these think tanks should be set up and which actions will be supported.

- We support the programme’s objective to “mobilise the potential of former Erasmus+ participants and support activities in particular of alumni networks, ambassadors”. We believe, however, that this objective cannot be fully achieved through a centralized approach. We propose to set-up concrete funding lines, that are decentrally managed via the NAs, giving them the possibility to directly allocate funding to institutions to allow them to set up projects for and with their alumni or other grassroots initiatives.
- The regulation encourages participants to actively contribute to local communities. A good practice example on how this effectively works on a decentralized level are local Erasmus initiatives in Germany (see [www.eu.daad.de](http://www.eu.daad.de)), These are currently nationally

funded but we encourage to implement their ambassadorial engagement at European level.

## **JEAN MONNET ACTIONS**

### **JEAN MONNET ACTION IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

- We welcome the inclusion of other education sectors in the Jean-Monnet actions. There is a great potential for cross-sectoral projects in this field. The amount dedicated to Jean-Monnet actions needs to reflect this additional component and shall not be undertaken at the expense of higher education. Since this action is a very crucial one to support dialogue with the society in general, the NA DAAD deems it very important to supply additional funding.
- We recommend that all actions of the current programme, including projects and networks, will be continued in new programme for all education sectors, including higher education.

We are looking forward to further discussing our ideas with the European Commission and other stakeholders on relevant occasions.

Bonn, 5th September 2018