

Erasmus+ and a vision of the future from 2021

Resolution of the ERASMUS coordinators from higher education institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany on the occasion of the Erasmus+ Annual Conference in Heidelberg on 1 and 2 June 2017

The participants of the 2017 Erasmus+ Annual Conference are strongly in favour of continuing the ERASMUS-Programme's success story from 2021 on. Although the ERASMUS-Programme has been in existence for 30 years, European mobility is not a foregone conclusion and certainly not an end in itself. The internationality of academic studies and teaching, and thus of university life as a whole, is a distinctive quality attribute of a modern university.

A high degree of mobility at all levels, combined with demanding quality standards and interdisciplinary research networks, paints a picture of academic communication and global cooperation in academic studies, teaching and continuing education. More than ever, there is a need for young (and older) citizens of the European Union to have the opportunity to learn from one another, to understand one another and to cultivate tolerance and mutual respect.

The ERASMUS-Programme offers students, teachers and mobile staff the unique opportunity to extend their professional skills and to gain linguistic skills and cross-cultural experience. This is essential for developing personalities with a European perspective. In the final analysis, the many facets of the ERASMUS-Programme are at the heart of the internationalisation process in higher education institutions. The ERASMUS-Programme was, is and should remain in the future a "visionary programme with ambitious goals"¹.

Over the past 30 years, many programme objectives have already been realised, even if one thing or the other seemed to be unrealistic at first. However, the aim of the programme is to take a realistic approach. The envisaged higher education policy objectives can only be achieved if we manage to create, through targeted incentives, additional administrative capacities at higher education institutions. This would allow institutions to further develop the programme beyond its current level in quantitative and qualitative terms.²

¹ Expectations for the future of Erasmus+. A contribution from the directors of the European national agencies for education and training dated 15 March 2017.

² See also: The development of Erasmus+ in the second half of the programme period and the design of the subsequent programme generation (2021 – 2027), position paper of the National Erasmus+ Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation within DAAD, 30 May 2017

Expectations for the new programme generation

The ERASMUS coordinators at higher education institutions in Germany expect the following from the new programme generation:

Programme continuity

The ERASMUS-Programme – or rather Erasmus+ – must be continued as a success story and the basis of university mobility. The internationalisation of academic studies and teaching at home and abroad and the increasing interconnection of university administrative staff are key parameters in the higher education sector – at European and non-European levels.

Budget

Increased financial support under the current Erasmus+ programme is greatly appreciated; however, it is still not sufficient for high-quality implementation of the Programme. If higher education policy aims at perpetuating or further extending the degree of mobility achieved, there is a need for a significant increase in the budget. At present, it is generally only possible to pay students the basic rate for the individual groups of countries. The aim should be to significantly increase the budget for students.

Quality assurance

High standards for high-quality programme management go without saying. However, higher budgets must not lead to more bureaucracy in the administrative and mobility processes and would do great damage to the public image of the programme. The limits have already been reached today.

The rationale behind the programme must be:

more money, more mobility, more quality, the creation of incentive schemes for better staffing, efficient active management structures, together with the timely availability of documents, project budgets as well as manageable and compatible databases.

Conversely, it would be counter-productive to demand:

more money, more documents, more comprehensive data collection, more signatures, more bureaucracy.

It continues to be of great importance to comply with the contractual chain, from the call for applications right through to recognition. However, the learning agreement (LA) as a study document that forms the basis for the recognition of

study-relevant activities abroad must be adapted to the practices widely used in Europe. The current procedure for agreements and signatures needs to be changed. The LA must be a study document agreed between the student, the home university and the host university – but the date when it is signed by all participants is of secondary importance.

Flexibility and responsibility of the national agencies

A higher budget needs to be combined with greater programme flexibility and responsibility at national level. This applies for content-related objectives such as:

- Programme modifications in line with current political and socio-economic developments in Europe
- Consideration of the special needs of higher education institutions and universities (e.g. schools of music and art)
- Simplified application procedures for newcomers and small institutions
- Support for small projects, i.e. intensive programmes and summer schools that offer a unique opportunity for networking between higher education institutions and support for students whose financial situation does not allow them to spend a semester or a year abroad
- Use of returned funds at university level, or at least at national level. In this case, various scenarios are conceivable and desirable, such as:
 - Redistribution of unclaimed budget allocations for projects to make additional scholarship payments
 - Small-project support for intensive programmes or summer schools (capped at a maximum of €25,000 as flat-rate financing for a minimum participation number of 10 students from at least three programme countries):
 - Redistribution of remaining funds by the national agencies at the end of the project period
 - Introduction of a special budget for a variety of projects so that the national agencies can support universities in their society role at local and regional levels³.

Strategic partnerships

The EU Commission's idea to recentralise strategic partnerships in Key Action 2 is categorically unacceptable. Decentralisation has generally lowered the application hurdle and project management is more efficient than with centralised applications and administration directly in Brussels. The principle of programme continuity should also be applied for strategic partnerships. It seems more sensible to leave this programme line with the national agencies. Here, too, a higher budget is desirable.

³ See *ibid.*, Point 2, p. 3

Erasmus+ partner countries

In any case, Erasmus+ international credit mobility should be continued – with the following changes:

Project management

- A simplified application procedure for subsequent applications
- Longer project periods to increase planning reliability
- A budget increase for regions in high demand
- More flexible use of regional budgets within regions, not just within a country
- Increased funds for organising mobility (OM)

Staff mobility (ST)

- In the case of ST, zero grants should be organised in line with programme countries
- It should be possible to pay only travel expenses or only subsistence expenses
- Furthermore, it should be possible to spread the minimum period of 5 working days across several universities per country/region