

The future of international credit mobility in European higher education

Statement from the Working Group on Erasmus+ Mobility with Partner countries (ICM Working Group) in Germany

The ICM Working Group is a group of German Higher Education Institutions that have successfully applied for Erasmus+ funding in KA107 since its launch in 2015. It is an important networking instrument for all participating HEIs providing direct, personal support and exchange of good practice among colleagues. The group is working closely with the German National Agency DAAD to facilitate easy communication and a joined development of the programme.

Current Status

International credit mobility in Erasmus+ enables universities to determine the strategic use and content design of cooperation projects, achieving significantly enhanced thematic relevance. Universities pave the way for developments in the educational systems of all countries. That is why we state that the international credit mobility is the most important innovation of Erasmus+ in higher education. From the perspective of German higher education institutions, it was successful from its start in 2015 and became, with growing flexibility, a powerful tool for internationalisation since 2016.

Mobility projects enable European players to build bridges through cooperation with partner countries. The thematic scope of the projects with partner countries sometimes surpasses that of projects within Europe, for example in terms of methodology transfer and regional integration. The relationships established enable support for different objectives, depending on the region and the extent of the subsidies. They also ensure that programme countries work with partner regions that have not had traditional ties to the European Higher Education Area so far.

Development, in particular of decentralised funding lines (mobility projects), takes place in close and trust-based consultation with stakeholders at all levels: the Directorate of Education and Culture, the Executive Agency of the Directorate, national agencies, national Erasmus+ offices in the partner countries of the European neighbourhood region, universities in programme and partner countries. It provides a model for successful and effective cooperation between European Member States and their global partners.

Impact of the International Dimension

The international dimension already acts as an important stimulus in those regions where change can be triggered by exchange. We are thinking here of the Eastern partnership with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other countries, as well as the Southern partnership with the countries of the Maghreb and the Sahel. Social, cultural and linguistic issues, as well as systemic or political ones, make up the thematic portfolio of German universities. The approximately 650 applications submitted in 2017 for mobility between programme and partner countries contain innovative academic approaches.

The funding lines are based on structural elements of European cooperation. The support facilitates the implementation of far-reaching European reform agendas in the higher education systems of partner countries. Innovative project monitoring concepts by national agencies ensure that the academic projects implemented always produce systemic effects, too.

Financial Impact

Compared to intra-European projects, the financial resources for the international dimension are extremely limited. With higher levels of assistance being provided for the individual participants in the programme, the financial assistance for the administration of the projects remains unchanged. The fact that activities with rather limited funding are intended to achieve their objectives worldwide and beyond the European Union severely limits their effectiveness. Looking at the current picture, only individual projects are active within many countries and only a few individuals are mobile. Much more effort is needed to make European higher education globally competitive and also to ensure greater visibility for the high performance of the European academic system beyond research cooperation.

The current project funding model presents major hurdles - in terms of strategic applications at both decentralised and central level, regional variations in project facilities and policies, and short-term contracts. The combination of these factors makes it very difficult to build sustainable academic relations and achieve systemic effects. For a new generation of programmes, a more flexible approach would take successfully introduced incentives to the next level – thus giving the programme more weight within the higher education policy as well as achieving a better perception of the European Higher Education Area throughout the world.

Requirements:

- If we look at the ratio of eligible applications (assessed by experts) and the available budget, we can detect significant regional differences in needs. These need to be taken into consideration in the future. From the perspective of German higher education institutions, this applies first and foremost to cooperation with Latin America and industrialised countries, but also with Russia and the Eastern partnership.
- In addition to the absolute requirement of continuing the funding lines, we promote the reinforcement of regional structures. Higher Education Institutions in general have a positive internationalisation and globalisation concept and support sustainable development of this vision in all participating countries.

As German Higher Education Institutions engaged in Erasmus+ mobility projects with partner countries we propose the following concrete measures from 2021 onwards:

Application and Project management

- Consider past performance and established projects to reward success in the application process
- Equal opportunities for HEIs regardless their size and localisation
- Easier entrance for “new” interested HEIs
- Structure applications and grants also by regions, not only by countries
- Extend the project duration from 26 to 38 months

Involvement of Partners in Partner Countries

Implement OLS for Partner Countries in order to allow smaller Higher Education Institutions a free, flexible infrastructure for the language preparation of participants, thus improving the quality and success of individual mobilities

Budget

- Allow more funding for less represented groups
- Triple the budget with emerging partner regions in the world (Latin America, Asia)

CONTINUE

- the flexible usage of the funding
- the use of the Mobility Tool+ and the continuous adaption to processes
- the simplification of bureaucracy
- the usage of the name Erasmus+
- the action in a future generation of European Education programmes

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