

VSNU
April 2017



Position paper Erasmus+



1. Ambitions for internationalisation and the budget of Erasmus+

All Dutch research universities aim to show strong growth of outgoing (credit) mobility in the years to come. Many universities have set ambitious targets, expect to show substantial growth or have a large share of credit mobility already. In all cases, the intention is to have credit mobility as an essential part of the curriculum.

Mobility can take shape in different ways, be it following courses or components of the curriculum at other universities (including within the Netherlands), or doing an internship at home or abroad. Universities have increasingly encountered the need to make additional funds available to encourage outgoing mobility. This cannot endure structurally.

In other sectors (education and youth alike), too, a substantive growth in demand is foreseen. Therefore, more financial means should be made available for Erasmus+, more than already foreseen for the near future.

In order to realize our ambitions for mobility, Erasmus+ is indispensable. Dutch universities see a tension arising between their ambitions and the available means in the near future. The multi-annual budget will need to be increased sharply, exceeding the growth foreseen at present.

2. Integrating different programmes into Erasmus+

Regulatory framework

Within the previous Life Long Learning and Youth programmes, different sets of regulations and policy frameworks applied: in pillars such as Erasmus, Leonardo, Comenius and Grundtvig.

Integrating these pillars into Erasmus+ has led to more transparency and consistency in the regulations for the educational institutions, for instance regarding internships that were previously regulated under the remit of Leonardo. At the same time we see that the new possibility for mobility outside EU/EER (financed from a different EU Budget Chapter) has separate regulations, and thereby extra administrative burden.

As of yet, we cannot definitively say whether the integration has led to more interaction between different educational (and youth) sectors. The institutions none the less experience an increase in administrative burden.

A uniform framework for different sectors within Erasmus+ has failed to prevent an increase in the administrative burden as a whole.

3. Linking Erasmus+ and the agenda for internationalisation

Growth of mobility

With reference to universities' ambitions, we need to consider the consequences of a substantially larger group of students being eligible for an Erasmus+ grant.



Our experiences with Erasmus+ grants show that the available means have been fully depleted so far. And the expectation is that the financial increase, as already foreseen in the European budget, will not be able to keep up with the growth of individual mobility of students at Dutch research universities.

For both the next years of Erasmus+ and the upcoming successor, we need to consider how the expected growth of mobility can be met by the programme.

The significance of Erasmus+ grants for stimulating mobility needs to be taken into consideration. A lack of financial means can never be an impediment to the desired mobility, either in general or for specific target groups.

The Erasmus Master Loan scheme is not yet available all over the EU. In due time, Dutch universities will be able to welcome MA-students with such a loan. It remains questionable whether this loan is an attractive alternate option for the Dutch student loan, which is also portable.

Notably, the Erasmus+ programme aims to direct the mobility process. However, the programme is not based on trust in its execution and seems to aim at influencing the outcome by presenting a set of regulatory measures, instead of stating the desirable outcomes and allowing university and student to give input. Some universities note that students end up looking for less cumbersome alternatives.

The question arises whether heavier regulation is in proportion to quality and effectiveness.

We note the limited possibilities to including online education in the context of Erasmus+ credit mobility.

Importance of supporting the construction and full implementation of the EHEA

Projects for the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are supported with financial means from Erasmus+. The EHEA is regarded as an important prerequisite for substantial growth of learning mobility. Considering the expected rise of mobility numbers, for most students we will need to accomplish learning mobility within Europe. Both the cost for the individual student and the necessary inter-university networks and agreements have proven to be crucial factors in outgoing mobility.



In the international context, a clear European standard could also function as a norm for other parts of the world. Developments of HE in the world are presently going at a rapid pace. Without a clear European stand we are at risk of becoming outpaced. Therefore, the lack of progress in the Bologna process is of great concern to us. In realising a 'common standard', we will improve our position with respect to the rest of the world. Therefore, the core of the EHEA should be fully implemented and finalised on the short term. This core should be presented as a worldwide standard.

Because of the aforementioned reasons, the EHEA should be able to give a perfectly clear picture of all countries in which the HE system is compliant to these two essentials:

- The full implementation of the 3-cycles BA, MA, PhD;
- The necessary guarantees for a sound system of quality assurance: full compliance to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance; and full disposal of an independent and full organisations for guarding the QA.

We will need more financial means from Erasmus+ to be focussed and prioritised for the implementation of the EHEA. It is desirable to fully implement and finalise the core of the EHEA on the short term, and present this core as a realistic standard.

Position of the institutions

Our universities expect that a substantive growth of outgoing (credit) mobility will lead to a paramount increase of incoming mobility: the one cannot go without the other. An institution demanding from its students to spend part of its studies at another university, will need to take into account the need to show equal hospitality to incoming students. Agreements with partner universities on the mobility of students and programme cooperation will further grow in importance.

In the Netherlands the importance of the 'truly international classroom' as an educational concept is growing, as well as the teaching language of the courses on offer. Thereby, international exchange students are contributing to the international campus, which is a necessity for an international learning environment for students remaining at home.

Growth of outgoing (credit) mobility and an increase of incoming (credit) mobility go hand in hand.

4. Student perspective

Students need financial regulations to be clear in order to plan an exchange or internship abroad. The current zero-grants, differentiated tariffs, and increased regulations are drivers for more uncertainty.

The financial contribution from Erasmus+ offers student important support for learning mobility. Without this contribution, or with lack of clarity, the number of students that is willing and prepared to follow part of their curriculum abroad will come under pressure.

5. Central Actions (and specifically KA and SSA)



Within the so-called Central Actions, partnerships are supported. In this pillar, with broad political support, specific possibilities are created for Knowledge Alliances. These Knowledge Alliances are projects in which HEI's and enterprises from different countries cooperate, aimed at renewing and modernising European Higher Education. In addition, Sector-specific Skills Alliances were created aiming at VET institutions, with a possibility for HEI's to connect.

The interest in these projects has proven to be overwhelming, resulting in most dismal success rates: 4% for the KA-projects. We note that within the projects awarded in 2016 (20), two were initiated by Dutch universities and one by a Dutch university medical centre.

For the success and effectiveness of Erasmus+ instruments, it is desirable to have a substantial success rate. Better communication on the expected success rate is needed to raise realistic expectations with applicants.

With regard to Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs), both the European Commission and national funding authorities need to pay special attention to the sustainability of EMJMD-programmes when Erasmus+ funding ends.

6. Key Action 2: decentral actions National Agency

Decentralising the awarding procedure of cooperation projects (not being KA or SSA) brings the National Agencies in a better position as intermediary for the programme.

Universities note that it would be odd to connect national policy priorities to this awarding process. By definition, projects will need to be relevant to a significant number of European partners. Policy aims in which European partners can identify themselves jointly will, within reasonable expectation, already be included in the European policy agenda, as established by the ministers. It would seem that adding national priorities results in oversteering the programme.

7. Mobility and cooperation outside EU /EER (decentral action)

Only a limited number of universities chose to make use of the possibility to send their students on exchange outside of the EU/EER, with the help of Erasmus+. The main reason appears to be serious concern for the administrative burden and the need to keep this within limits. Here, again, we see the relation between administrative burden and a limited success rate. Universities report that enforcing Erasmus regulations outside of the EU is difficult, since the necessity of these regulations is unclear. Support structures within the framework of the programme need to be better equipped for this.

Annually, institutions are expected to submit an application which reflects the internationalization strategy of the institution and partner institutions. Funds and scholarships are provided only for the duration of 2 years therefore no sustainability can be guaranteed.

Institutions do value the need for a partnership to be connected to the institutional strategy of both partners. They see this as a possibility to widen the exchange relationship and find a solid bedding within the internationalisation strategy of both institutions. Currently the



budget per KA107 is not in line with the demand for cooperation, i.e. the strategy of the HEI's. This seems to indicate that steering of the EC for specific regions or countries is not working. Therefore, the envelopes per region need to be reviewed.

Universities consider international credit mobility (KA107) an important part of the programme, which needs to improve drastically regarding the high administrative burden and low sustainability.

8. ICT-tools

Both the quality and implementation of the *mobility tool* was inadequate. This resulted in many problems and extra costs for HEI's. They do not see how this is positive for European cooperation.

The limited use of the OLS Linguistic Support does not justify the connected administrative burden. From our perspective, students show little interest in the system.

The increasing number of English-taught courses all over Europe further decreases the necessity for centrally offered language courses. We note that some institutions use OLS results for purposes which are not allowed, e.g. deciding whether a student is entitled to a free language course or not.

In view of all these considerations, we believe the tool is losing ground for continuation.

Universities underline that fully operational ICT-tools are indispensable for a proper implementation of the programme. These tools have failed since the preparation and start of Erasmus+. This EU Flagship programme was therefore under serious risk of compromise.



9. Students in border regions

Student mobility in border regions is growing rapidly, especially when looking at full courses. Erasmus+ knows no provisions for this, other than the loan facility (applicable for Master's courses).

The European Structural Investment funds (such as Interreg) should be considered in the case of border mobility among students and for cooperation between institutions.

10. Administrative burden

Our final remarks concern the administrative burden, in relation to the programme. These burdens hamper the effectiveness and therefore impact of the programme. Universities note that many examples of administrative burden exist, e.g.:

- A learning agreement consisting of 11 pages with documents to add is not a guarantee for a successful exchange. It would be preferential to render account ex post, in combination with financial incentives, preferably in a centralized system where students, teachers and universities feed their information.
- Flat rates may be more effective than differentiated tariffs for mobility. The added value for transparency, assurance and certainty would outweigh the present financial tailoring and added burden.

Universities stress the importance of significantly lowering the administrative burden, which Erasmus+ poses. This burden decreases the effectiveness and impact of the programme.