

## Statement for the interim evaluation Erasmus+

Leuven, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Fifty-one leading doctoral-granting universities of science and technology from twenty-six European countries herewith report on their experiences with Erasmus+ to contribute to its [interim evaluation](#). Our key messages are:

**We urge the European Union (EU) to draw on its historical and geopolitical responsibility to provide new *momentum* to maintain and strengthen the Europe of Knowledge. We need to reinforce our joint efforts to safeguard the necessary boundary conditions that promote sustainable peace and prosperity in Europe.**

- We encourage the European Commission (EC) to reinforce fostering an open mind set, intercultural competences, problem-solving skills and autonomy in general and civic competences, respect for the rule of law and entrepreneurship in particular.
- The possibilities of creating more synergies on top of the complementarity with Horizon 2020 should be investigated, e.g. concerning Knowledge Alliances and Strategic Partnerships, allowing institutions to implement institutional development strategies across both programmes.
- We greatly welcome the increase of the available funding for Erasmus+ to €14.7 billion and the allocation of 43% of funds to higher education, but point out that the level of funding needs to be assured, and preferably further increased in the future if the ambitious goals of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are to be realised.
- The Strategic Partnerships should be centralised again, thereby creating critical mass and leverage for innovation, as well as allowing all institutions to effectively use these actions to realise their intuitional strategies, and research objectives.
- Three-year contracts for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees should revert back to five years if this sub-programme is to remain attractive and to ensure the participation of high-quality consortia offering innovative programmes, which need this period to safeguard sustainability.
- We urge the EU to safeguard the longstanding and excellent intra-European cooperation in higher education through direct participation in Erasmus+ and its successors. The EU must prepare for a new ethical, legal and financial framework allowing for direct participation of institutions from the entire EHEA.

We - universities of science and technology united within the Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research ([CESAER](#)) - are committed to work together with European institutions, countries and other stakeholders in making Erasmus+ a success. We hereby offer our expertise and constructive input, together with sharing best practice.

## PREAMBLE

With growing concern we perceive the changing political and societal context concerning international cooperation and European integration in recent years: post-factual politics, populism and separatism threaten the free circulation of knowledge and its bearers (students, teachers, researchers, inventors and other staff), the international orientation of our universities and in some cases even academic freedom and our institutional autonomy. Migration and terrorism are topping these crises. Amongst others, the adoption of popular votes on the limitation of mass immigration on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014 in Switzerland and on the Brexit on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 in the United Kingdom, and the political developments in Turkey pose great challenges to our longstanding intra-European cooperation with institutions from these countries. The EU as the main driver of the Europe of Knowledge risks failing to promote and deliver the overall policies and financial means to enable us universities of science and technology to optimally contribute to safeguarding sustainable peace and prosperity in Europe.

**We urge the EU to draw on its historical and geopolitical responsibility to provide new momentum to the Europe of Knowledge. We need to reinforce our joint efforts to safeguard the necessary boundary conditions for sustainable peace and prosperity in Europe - such as the respect for the rule of law and human rights, democratic citizenship, evidence-based policy making, free circulation of knowledge and its bearers, academic freedom and institutional autonomy. A renewed focus on knowledge - i.e. youth, education and training, sports, research, innovation, culture and media - is paramount and more involvement of civil society at large in all EU programmes and funded projects is necessary, so that the people better understand the added value of being part of our European community and culture.**

## Links with European higher education policies

Erasmus+ fosters excellence in education through the exchange of students, staff and good practice, leading to sustainable partnerships between higher education institutions, thereby increasing the attractiveness and relevance of the educational offer. The programme makes student mobility a reality, thereby linking the personal development of our students to our strategic interests as institutions, in particular in the field of internationalisation.

- Erasmus+ fundamentally contributes to key competences and skills, relevant to the labour market and a cohesive society. It successfully fosters the employability of our graduates as studying abroad provides them with an open mind set, intercultural competences, problem-solving skills and autonomy. We encourage the EC to reinforce these aspects in general and civic competences, respect for the rule of law and entrepreneurship in particular.
- Concerning the quality improvements, innovation excellence and internationalisation of education and training, we welcome the EC's increased attention to tools easing recognition and quality of study abroad, in particular the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). We encourage the continuation and strengthening of these efforts in order to guarantee quality in mobility across all institutions participating in Erasmus+. We recognise the need to deepen cooperation at the level of the study programme and to use teaching staff mobility as a driver for raising quality.

- Erasmus+ indeed supports policy reforms notably through its support to the inter-ministerial EHEA and the modernisation of European higher education. However the impact of Erasmus+ does not reach its full potential, due to its small-scale and bottom-up nature particularly with respect to Key Actions 2 and 3.
- We emphasise the importance of engineering science and research on our industry, business, public services and civil society. Universities of science and technology base engineering education on research findings and convey an open attitude to research and innovation to our students; the inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs of the future.
- We call for the continued and more explicit support of the modernisation of higher education through collaboration and exchange, in particular in the field of the new opportunities offered through digitalisation (MOOCs, blended learning, virtual exchange, etc.).
- Possibilities for creating synergies and complementarity with Horizon 2020 should be investigated, e.g. concerning Knowledge Alliances and Strategic Partnerships, allowing institutions to implement institutional development strategies across both programmes. Moreover, links and synergies with other EU programmes should be investigated or strengthened, such as Erasmus for Entrepreneurs, the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT), the European Social Funds (ESF), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

## Structure and budget

The integration of several former programmes (LLP, YiA, five external HE cooperation schemes and sport) into one framework is a general improvement and works well, specifically in promoting the programme to candidate-beneficiaries. This is also true of the clarified delineation towards the EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation (Horizon 2020).

- We welcome the increase of funding for Erasmus+ to €14.7 billion and the allocation of 43% of funds to higher education, but point out that the level of funding needs to be assured and further increased if the ambitious goals of the EHEA are to be realised.
- The decentralisation of the management of certain sub-actions - particularly the Strategic Partnerships - to National Agencies has led to uncertainty among (candidate) beneficiaries concerning support, selection and project management, despite the joint efforts of the EACEA and the National Agencies. It has also put European added value at risk through e.g. perceived differences in the evaluation of project proposals across National Agencies. Furthermore, the decentralisation of the budget has significantly reduced the participation in certain actions of beneficiaries in some small countries. They should be centralised again, thereby creating critical mass and leverage for innovation, as well as allowing all institutions to effectively use these actions for realising their intuitional strategies, not least towards joint degrees and integration with their research objectives.

- The communication of information on what actions are covered under which sub-programme can still be improved, in particular Key Actions 2 and 3. In order to increase the programme's attractiveness towards academics and sustain their participation, the promotion of the programme's objectives and opportunities needs to be aligned with research and innovation policies to clarify that Erasmus+ entails more than a student mobility scheme.

## Third country participation

Overall, the EHEA needs to keep up and reinforce its efforts to attract global talents through the pooling of resources, e.g. through Joint (Degree) Programmes with a proven track record of excellence. The division between `programme countries` and `partner countries neighbouring the EU` in our view is not fit for purpose.

- We urge the EU to safeguard the longstanding and excellent intra-European cooperation in higher education through direct participation in Erasmus+ and its successors. The EU must prepare for a new ethical, legal and financial framework allowing for direct participation of institutions from the entire EHEA.
- Compared to the previous funding period, we regret the reduced chances for cooperation with global (Partner Country) higher education institutions, in particular in the field of student mobility. The current Key Action 1 International Credit Mobility is only a limited compensation for the loss of the original Erasmus Mundus Action 2 (2009-2013).
- The low unit cost ceilings in Capacity Building projects risk reducing attractiveness toward Partner Country participants, while the relatively large Mobility Strands included in these projects detract from the main project objectives. The available funds could be put to better use in Key Action 1, where the focus is on mobility.
- In order to assure the participation in and impact of the decentralised International Credit Mobility programme, its budget allocation over Programme Countries should allow for a greater alignment of budgets available per Partner Country / Region with institutional higher education internationalisation strategies. We also flag the positive experiences in determining such national strategies involving the universities.

## Actions and simplification

The design with three Key Actions and sub-actions is clear and facilitates the promotion of the programme to candidate-beneficiaries and potential partners.

- While easing administration at first sight, in particular *vis-à-vis* the EACEA or National Agencies, the increased use of unit costs has not decreased the administrative burden on university administrations. It also led to a reduction in overall project funding and unit costs for similar activities are not unified across sub-actions.
- The projects funded under the centralised actions are, in our view, often too small leading to limited impact at the institutional level, i.e. high effort for comparatively small impact. Therefore we advise more defined calls for proposals that are more catered for universities.

- Three-year contracts for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees are too short and thus should revert back to five years if this sub-programme is to remain attractive and to ensure the participation of high-quality consortia offering innovative programmes, which need this period to safeguard sustainability.
- The introduction of the PIC-number substantially reduced overall paperwork (with the exception of Partner Country Participants with limited administrative resources), but the electronic submission system, although an improvement itself over hard copy applications, still needs further improvement to bring the ease of the application procedure to the same level as Horizon 2020 applications.
- In spite of an improved template for the inter-institutional bilateral agreements, the administrative burden for student and staff mobility increased, particularly through the overly complex and long learning agreements and background documents, as well as the calculation of student mobility grants based on days of stay. While we welcome any genuine efforts to increase student language skills, the implementation of the Online Language Support (OLS) system is in need of evaluation, in particular with regard to efficiency, flexibility and quality. We discern potential in the further development of the Mobility Tool into a centralised application and mobility information system, thereby easing the administration, grant calculation and reporting of mobility flows, and avoiding duplication of institutional-level development efforts.

## **Commitment and contribution of universities of science and technology**

We, universities of science and technology, translate scientific research and technological and social development into innovative solutions for the benefit of society and educate and train future generations. University engineering education transforms the world in which we live and contributes to solving the challenges of tomorrow. Based on our intense collaboration with business, industry and public services and the strong culture of entrepreneurship within our institutions, our activities encompass higher education, research and innovation and bridge academia, state, market and civil society. We bring open education, open science and open innovation into practice on a daily basis and we are open to the world.

In light of our prominent participation in Erasmus+ and as key stakeholders in Europe, we are prepared and committed to work together with the EC, member states, programme and partner countries and the European Parliament as well as with other institutions and stakeholders in improving the working Erasmus+ and making it a success. We hereby offer our expertise and constructive input and sharing of best practice.

For more information and enquiries, please contact our Secretary General David Bohmert at [david.bohmert@cesaer.org](mailto:david.bohmert@cesaer.org).

# CESAER

conference of european schools  
for advanced engineering education  
and research

The Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research ([CESAER](#)) is a non-profit international association of [fifty one leading doctoral-granting universities](#) of science and technology from twenty six countries. We stand for scientific excellence in university engineering education and research, and the promotion of innovation through close cooperation with business, industry and public services in order to ensure the application of cutting-edge knowledge in society. CESAER maintains and promotes the highest quality standards. CESAER's mission is to:

- serve as a close network and platform for mutual learning;
- contribute proactively to European developments by conducting a permanent dialogue with and influencing European institutions and other stakeholders;
- inspire reflections and policy decisions of stakeholders at European and national level;
- foster public understanding of the role of engineering in societal and economic development considering the principles of sustainable development.