

Recommendation on 'Erasmus for All'

1 Context: The European Proposal

'Erasmus for all' is the new EU Programme for education, training, youth and sport proposed by the European Commission on 23 November 2011.

The proposal integrates the seven existing programmes on education and training (Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig), Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialized countries).

The 'Erasmus for all' programme has to become the foundation of the ambitious goal to enhance the mobility of learners, in compulsory education, higher education, adult education and vocational education and training. The Commission also aims a bigger impact of the programmes on innovation in educational systems, as well as a stronger link with the European educational benchmarks. For these reasons, a stronger emphasis is put on learners and teachers/trainers who can generate a multiplying effect.

The new programme has to be more effective en more manageable. At the same time, the administrative barriers for the applicants have to be tackled.

2 Reflections and recommendations

2.1 The name of the programme

The name 'Erasmus for all' is acceptable for higher education. For the other educational levels, the branch names (Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Grundtvig) disappear. The Vlor thinks that the loss of these branch names can lead to less impact of the programmes because the public is less familiar with them.

2.2 Field of application

The Vlor is concerned about the field of application of the programme and the way in which different subsectors from education, training, youth and sport will be taken into account in a balanced way.

The new programme gives the impression to stimulate mobility in higher education. This is not only visible in the name. Lifelong learning is mentioned as an important objective, but this is not always translated in action points. Non-formal and informal learning experiences through adult mobility are barely mentioned.

Pupils in compulsory education (including VET) are less in the picture. We see, again, a contradiction here between the objectives on the one hand and the practical actions on the other hand. What about the EU benchmark that, by 2020, 6% of the pupils in VET have to have had a mobility experience?

The Vlor pleads for guaranties for focused support and financing of learners in secondary education and adult learners, two groups that are not often participating in mobility programmes.

Another concern has to do with the link between the programmes for education and programmes for research and innovation. The Vlor pleads for consultation with and implication of (higher) education in the research programmes.

2.3 What's the objective of mobility?

The new programme is built upon four action lines:

- Learning mobility of individuals (key action 1)
- Cooperation for innovation and good practices (key action 2)
- Support for policy reform (key action 3)
- Jean Monnet initiatives

The Vlor thinks that mobility has to have, above all, a pedagogical added value. The Vlor thinks that the new programme focuses too exclusively on employability and on the labour market. The Vlor pleads for more emphasis on the pedagogical objectives in the key actions.

2.3.1 Individual learning mobility

The EU proposes to link individual mobility with the internationalization policy of the institution, in order to enhance the impact and the efficiency of the programmes. The Vlor is concerned about the following developments:

- Mobility of teachers is linked to European benchmarks such as tackling early school leaving, enhancing key competences, and early childhood education and care. The Vlor states that there have to remain possibilities for professional development of teachers that are not specifically linked with the European benchmarks.
- The Vlor asks for stimuli for mobility of adult learners and of learners in vocational education and training.
- The Vlor is convinced that the contradiction between an internationalization policy at the level of the institutions and individual mobility is artificial. An internationalization policy will reinforce the policy making capacity of institutions and vice versa. However, this does not mean that every initiative has to be based on a written and documented internationalization policy of the institutions and that individuals cannot take any initiatives. Teachers often play an innovative role. There is no need for frameworks or criteria to which the internationalization policy of an institution has to respond. An internationalization policy at the level of the institution is an added value, but cannot be a necessary condition for an application. Every learner has to have equal opportunities to participate in a learning period abroad, even if this does not belong to the priorities of the institution.

2.3.2 Cooperation for innovation

The new structure has implications for the policy of educational institutions and for their priorities. The Vlor pleads for continuity, in higher education, and in the other educational levels.

The Vlor sees that cooperation between educational institutions and companies is stimulated. In higher education, we see the 'knowledge alliances', in VET the 'sector skills alliances'. This cooperation mainly has to do with curriculum development. The Vlor thinks that it is important that cooperation leads in the first place to workplaces and to mobility experiences for learners and teachers/trainers.

2.3.3 Policy support

The Vlor questions the relationship between European and national policy decisions. To which extent will the Member States have the possibility to look for cooperation, professionalization, exchange of good practices linked to their own policy priorities and thus not only linked to the European policy framework?

The Vlor asks for clarification about which activities can be organized under this section 'policy support'. Under which conditions will policy makers and stakeholders in education and training have the possibility to learn about education systems in other countries and to exchange good practices? At this moment, CEDEFOP study visits, for instance, offer interesting opportunities with a clear added value. Will these visits still find their place in the new programme?

Are policy initiatives concerning compulsory education included? Can organisations such as guidance services, parents associations apply for these funds?

How will the dialogue with the European stakeholders in education, training and youth be structured?

2.4 Social conditions and framework of mobility

2.4.1 Disadvantaged groups and mobility

Will Erasmus for all indeed be 'for all'? There are few guaranties that disadvantaged groups will have extra attention: there is only a general principle, no concrete measures. The Vlor points out that grants will never entirely cover the cost of a learning experience abroad.

2.4.2 Grants and student loans.

There is need for a clearer link between grants and the quality of mobility. Academic recognition is an absolute condition and the acquisition of a minimum number of credits can be the basis for the obtention of a grant.

There are questions about the principle of student loans. Middle class students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds will not easily take the step to engage to a heavy loan, given the context of economic uncertainty. The Vlor pleads for stronger systems of social provisions and financial support for learners.

2.5 Budget of the programme

The Vlor welcomes the increase of the budget with 70% compared to the current budget.

In the proposition of the Commission, 53% of the budget goes to higher education, of which 65% for learning mobility. Will there be enough budget for accompanying measures?

2.6 Management of the programme

The Vlor insists on the importance of the engagement of the social partners in the construction, the organization and the implementation of mobility in the field of VET.

The European Commission will have to decide on rules for the division of the funds amongst the Member States. The Vlor hopes that these rules will take into account the efforts that Member States (or regions) have already accomplished in the field of mobility.

The Vlor asks whether the EU will fix one single deadline for all the applications under the new programme. Now, different timetables are used for different programmes, which gives room for a better planning. On the other hand, one single deadline would enhance the transparency towards the learners and the institutions.

At the level of the institution, the Vlor states that the construction and the implementation of an internationalization policy for the institutions will have an impact on the administrative workload for these institutions. Today already, some schools don't take part in mobility programmes because of the administrative workload.

2.7 Timing

The Vlor has questions about the timing: it is important that learners are informed in due time about the mobility opportunities of this new programme, that takes a start in 2014.