

Erasmus+ midterm review: the EAIE's perspective

Erasmus+ has contributed greatly to the visibility of Europe and its Higher Education Area. Since its founding in 1989, the European Association for International Education (EAIE), has proudly supported this programme and its benefits. The EAIE celebrates Erasmus+ as a real success in terms of participation and opening up the world. It exceeded its initial forecasts and expectations and is a unique programme to promote international education, a mission we share and are strongly committed to as an association.

The following pages are what the EAIE, as a key stakeholder, sees as important for launching the coming programme. The success of Erasmus+ places Europe at a crossroads when projecting the programme into the future. Funding becomes the key issue to guarantee the full deployment, particularly in terms of mobility and potential for enhanced cooperation. It is also deemed necessary to continue the simplification process to make the programme more understandable to higher education institutions in partner countries, as well as more manageable to those in programme countries, thus enlarging access and strengthening impact.

For the EAIE, the integration of the UK in the follow-up programmes of Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 are of crucial importance, both in terms of scope as well as the envisioned timeline.

Erasmus+: broadening access

Thanks to the Erasmus+ contribution, mobility and all its underlying benefits should no longer be a privilege of the wealthy. This is not only in terms of scholarships but particularly concerning the democratisation of mobility. Equitably, it should be a feasible and academically rewarded experience for participants. The next step in allocating further resources could be coordinating with other European funds (social and regional), so that everyone who would like to be mobile can do so, regardless of economic or social circumstances. New types of mobility (short-term, undergraduate research, service learning, and virtual classroom, among others that align with the new trends in the field of international education) and their funding could attract and engage more participants in a cost-effective way.

Projects, joint master degrees and international credit mobility actions have become more and more competitive, which ensures the high quality of those receiving Erasmus+ funding. Low success rates, though, combined with a heavy administrative burden along the whole project-cycle will discourage applicants.

Erasmus+: open to the world

The international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme has successfully streamlined Erasmus Mundus and other bilateral cooperation programmes under the International Credit Mobility action (KA107) and Capacity-building projects (KA2).

The EAIE acknowledges that Erasmus+ has greatly increased the visibility of Europe and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) beyond EU borders, tapping into new countries and profiles, with clear advantages for individual beneficiaries. The EAIE has very strongly contributed to the dissemination of Erasmus+ and its benefits in international forums.

On the one hand, the International Credit Mobility action has become very appealing for partner countries. It demands a lot from participating non-European institutions, which are not accustomed to operating under European standards and rules. The present learning curve and capacity-building process do not correspond to the timeframe and duration of projects, which follow the intra-European mobility scheme in a more complex environment. There should be clearer strategies and instruments to make this cooperation sustainable beyond initial funding periods.

On the other hand, capacity-building projects are perceived as being strategic in terms of the global commitment to European Higher Education and as such they should be more strongly financially supported. These projects can play a key role in European engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – an area that the EAIE is going to focus on in the near future.

Erasmus+: EU added value

As a European association, the EAIE identifies itself with the Erasmus+ motto of creating EU added value and constantly seeks this focus in many of its activities.

Projects under KA2 and joint programmes have made a real contribution in terms of advancing international education and innovating teaching and learning. Working together and gathering internal EU diversity and talents to ignite innovation not only reinforces intra-European cohesion but also creates transferable European practices to export worldwide.

For institutions, the focus here lies within curriculum development and the establishment of joint degrees. The programme is regarded as a suitable tool for this purpose. Together with Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions, Joint Master Degrees constitute the link between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area. Strong ties with PhD programmes do increase the attractiveness of Master programmes, whereas high-quality Master programmes can form an excellent recruitment base for PhD and other research programmes.

However, whether or not this division of labour between Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 is simplifying and streamlining the overall architecture can be questioned. Given the huge investment in time and budget both at the time of preparation and during the start-up of Joint Programmes, the reduced funding period seriously hampers the attractiveness of the programme, especially for newcomers. The suggestion would be that the grant

agreements could again cover the period of five years, as setting up these initiatives requires a solid foundation and intensive time investment.

Erasmus+: meaning quality

European higher education institutions have evolved with Erasmus+ and are familiar with the current programme regulations as quality assurance mechanisms. However, the general public might not be so aware of this and Erasmus+ has not always received the reputation it deserves. The EAIE strongly supports all measures focusing on quality. Quality assurance mechanisms do often come with bureaucratic burdens and a delicate balance between both should be constantly sought.

Erasmus+: simplified?

The EAIE acknowledges that Erasmus+, compared with its preceding programmes, has a far more comprehensive approach and simpler architecture. The actual experience might show, though, that there is still plenty of room for improvement in the next phase – especially when talking about different online tools and the complexity of procedures right now. Facilitation of any kind to prevent frustration among stakeholders is definitely welcomed and the EAIE, with its members, is keen to volunteer for consulting in focus groups, testing and piloting new ideas and initiatives.

The decentralisation of actions to the National Agencies has overall been a positive development. It responds to the European subsidiary principle and empowering them has resulted in many benefits for participating institutions, particularly in terms of proximity and different national cultures and contexts. However, different interpretations of the programme regulations should be abolished, as this would also reduce the number of queries forwarded to Brussels for clarification. Diverse project assessment practices are also common and might undermine the credibility of the programme, particularly when it comes to projects under KA2, where tactical approaches should be prevented. An additional constraint when operating under a decentralised scheme occurs in allocating and earmarking the budget, with efficiency and quality issues arising.

The EAIE is strongly motivated to contribute to the new programme and to share the experience of its Expert Communities, which represent practitioners in the field. We look forward to continued collaboration with the European Commission towards an even better Erasmus+ for the future!ⁱ

ⁱ Please find below a few related document from the field:

- European University Association Member Consultation on Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/eua-campaigns/EUAconsultation-Horizon2020-Erasmus>
- Coimbra Group Position Paper on Erasmus+: <http://www.coimbra-group.eu/news/45/110/Coimbra-Group-Position-Paper-on-Erasmus/d,News>
- Utrecht Network – Position paper on Erasmus+: http://www.utrecht-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UtrechtNetworkPositionPaperErasmusPlus_03_07_2017.pdf