



NETH-ER POSITION PAPER

MID-TERM EVALUATION

ERASMUS+

THE RELEVANCE OF ERASMUS+ FOR EUROPE AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

KEY POSITION POINTS

1. Ambitions for internationalisation and vision on Erasmus+

If Europe is serious about its agenda for growth and jobs and its emphasis on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth to build a strong knowledge economy, the Erasmus+ Programme needs a bigger budget.

2. Support from Erasmus+ for the European Higher Education Area and the Copenhagen Process

Students and institutions still face many challenges related to the incomplete EHEA and Copenhagen Process. Erasmus+ funds could be used more efficiently towards this goal.

3. Efficiency of the programme

A reduced administrative burden would greatly improve the efficiency of Erasmus+. The high administrative burden affects several areas of the programme and makes participation in some parts less attractive.



INTRODUCTION: THE SUCCESS AND IMPORTANCE OF ERASMUS+

Since its introduction in 1987, the Erasmus Programme has enabled over three million participants to study, train or teach abroad. The programme is often mentioned as **one of the most successful EU programmes** since it provides young people the opportunity to obtain intercultural skills and open themselves to Europe. International learning and work experience strengthen graduates' skills base and contribute significantly to their employability across all sectors. Educational institutions also **drive regional and sectoral innovation**, stimulating economic growth and competitiveness. These are key policy issues on the European Agenda, now as well as in the foreseeable future. Neth-ER would like to underscore the crucial importance of the Erasmus+ Programme towards building a strong European knowledge economy and achieving the Europe 2020 goals.

Although most education is developed and programmed on a national level, some challenges related to education are better tackled at an international level. Cooperation between education institutions is critical for the **competitiveness of the European education sector**, completion of the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**, and achievement of objectives from the **Riga Conclusions**. Moreover, cooperation among education institutions also contributes to issues such as the integration of refugees, recognition of foreign qualifications, and the development of curricula and programmes for cross-border sectors such as transport, hospitality and trade.

"International experience has transformed many VET students into independent, inquisitive, enterprising and culturally sensitive young adults. It's a pathway to success for future careers. We can't afford not to use such a strong instrument"

- Ton Heerts, president of the Netherlands Association of VET colleges (MBO Raad)

Participation in the Erasmus+ Programme is considered very important for student development. And as many studies show, such as the Erasmus Impact Study and the Erasmus Mundus Graduate Impact Study, the programme **equips students with essential skills and provides better career opportunities.**

Neth-ER believes it is just as essential that Erasmus+ funds are able to continue improving education policy and systems as a whole. In the years to come, **these funds should contribute to enhancing the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education, further linking education and research, and ensuring educational institutions can be drivers of growth and innovation in their regions.** The mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ provides a key opportunity to consider how Erasmus+ can contribute to these goals.



POSITIVE NEW FEATURES OF ERASMUS+

The introduction of Erasmus+ in 2014 brought even more opportunities for students, teachers and institutions around the world. It introduced many positive features, which were welcomed by the Dutch education institutes. For example, Erasmus+ provided students with **more opportunities to study abroad**, even beyond Europe.

Previous programmes allowed students to receive one Erasmus scholarship to study abroad and one scholarship for an internship abroad. In the current programme, students can use **Erasmus+ funds during each study cycle** as long as their mobility period does not exceed 12 months. Since reducing the minimum length of an eligible internship from three to two months, more students qualify for funding of their internship abroad. In addition, institutions welcome the **flexibility regarding the use of organisational support (OS)** to fund mobilities, especially important since the demand for mobility grants keeps increasing. The two-year contracts with one-year overlap also increase budget flexibility and ensure that internships can be completed within the duration of a contract.

Furthermore, the VET sector highly values the new opportunities for **Strategic Partnerships** without intellectual output. They enable education institutes to explore foreign practices (peer learning projects) with a low administrative burden. The possibility of obtaining a VET Mobility Charter is seen as a good way to integrate international policy measures at a strategic level in VET schools, establishing a structural link between international experience and education quality.

Even in a programme as successful as Erasmus+ there is room for improvement. Therefore, in this paper Neth-ER gives recommendations to enhance the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme.

POSITIVE NEW FEATURES OF ERASMUS+

- More mobility opportunities, also with Partner Countries
- Possibility to receive Erasmus+ funding for up to 12 months in each study cycle
- Minimum 2 month duration for internship funding
- Two year mobility contracts
- More flexibility regarding OS
- Strategic Partnerships
- VET Mobility Charter



“Our European ideals need to be supported by knowledge and understanding of our countries and cultures. To support the growing number of students who are willing and prepared to follow part of their curriculum abroad, we need a substantial increase of the Erasmus+ budget. Without Erasmus+ meeting its demand, the growth of mobile students will come under pressure.”

- Karl Dittrich, president of the Association of universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)

1. AMBITIONS FOR INTERNATIONALISATION AND VISION ON ERASMUS+

Erasmus+ is one of the most successful European programmes when it comes to creating jobs and growth, as the European Commission concluded in its interim evaluation of the current Multiannual Financial Framework. Neth-ER welcomes this clear statement by the Commission and the increased budget allocation that accompanied it. However, if Europe is serious about its agenda for growth and jobs and its emphasis on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth to build a strong knowledge economy, **the Erasmus+ Programme requires additional funding**. Currently, the Erasmus+ budget is 14 billion euros, which is only 1.4% of the total EU budget. This is not sufficient in both absolute and relative terms, and hampers the ability of Erasmus+ to enhance European education quality and contribute to the knowledge economy and labour market.

To realise the full potential of Erasmus+ and to achieve real impact, the budget for Erasmus+ is not enough. Neth-ER argues that at least **2.5% of the EU budget** should be dedicated to Erasmus+'s successor programme, with an absolute amount of **at least 3 billion euros per programme year**.

Dutch education institutions are very **committed to internationalisation** and to increasing the number of students and staff members who go on mobility. Neth-ER sees internationalisation as a vital tool to keep European institutions competitive. Because of the huge success of the Erasmus+ Programme, more and more students and staff members are making use of the opportunities to study or work abroad. For example, in 2014, 19,095 Dutch students and staff members went abroad with the Erasmus+ Programme, an increase in excess of 100% compared to 2007.

Erasmus+ is a European success story. This success has, in turn, led to even higher ambitions among institutions. Consequently, even with the foreseen increases, **the budget will not be sufficient to fulfil these ambitions**. Institutions do not have enough

funds to carry out all desired internationalisation projects or provide students with adequate financial support. Since many institutions want to provide all students the opportunity to go on mobility, some choose to divide the available budget among a larger number of students. Students, therefore, only receive a partial grant, which makes going on mobility less attractive to some. In the VET sector there is also a pressing need for an increased budget in order to meet the 6% mobility target in 2020 in all sectors. Nevertheless, Neth-ER does not want this extra budget to be taken from the budget for higher education.

RECOMMENDATION

Because of the success of the programme, more budget is required to realise the internationalisation ambitions of institutions and students.

More participation of **students from a disadvantaged background** remains a priority for Dutch institutions. The desire to facilitate internationalisation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds requires more support for these students.

The need for adequate support is also important for **less experienced VET institutions**. Often, they do not have adequate resources to prepare a high quality proposal. A higher budget could improve this support.

RECOMMENDATION

Provide more support to increase participation in Erasmus+ for students from a disadvantaged background and less experienced institutions.

Dutch institutions are very interested in the **Centralised Actions**. However, low success rates in some Centralised Actions discourage many institutions because costs for the preparation of a proposal are high. For example, the success rate for the very popular Knowledge Alliances was 3.9% in 2014. This low success rate is remarkable since the European Commission announced Knowledge Alliances as a priority. With respect to Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs), both the European Commission and national funding authorities should pay special attention to the sustainability of an EMJMD when Erasmus+ funding ends.

RECOMMENDATION

Increase the success rate of Central Actions.

Dutch institutions welcomed the new opportunities that emerged from the integration of various programmes into Erasmus+. In theory, this integration gave institutions more opportunities for **cross-sectoral collaboration**. However, Neth-ER has no indication that the harmonisation of the rules has truly led to more cross-sectoral cooperation. In practice, institutions and organisations from different sectors have difficulty finding each other and preparing a high quality proposal. For example, some VET colleges have

indicated that they still experience problems when trying to collaborate with the secondary education sector because their activities are so different.

RECOMMENDATION

Erasmus+ should encourage more cross-sectoral cooperation. A platform for communication between sectors is desirable.

Dutch education institutions also welcome more **synergy among other EU programmes** that support the education sector, such as **INTERREG**. Synergy would enhance the **added value of these EU programmes** and make the securing of necessary funding for projects easier and more understandable for institutions.

RECOMMENDATION

To increase synergy, the Erasmus+ Programme and other EU funding programmes used for education should complement each other.



“Spending some time abroad has a huge positive impact on VET-students. It’s an important way to pick up valuable skills needed for tomorrow’s job market. We would like to see that the Erasmus+ Programme is accessible to every VET-student, no matter which profession you pursue!”

- Roosmarijn Dam, board member of the Union of Vocational Students (JOB)

Students living in border regions have expressed regret that they are **not eligible for Erasmus+ funding when they do an internship across the border** while still living at home or returning home on weekends. Neth-ER would like to work with the European Commission to facilitate mobility in border regions. Neth-ER believes this kind of mobility offers intercultural experiences and opportunities for a group of students who are unlikely to participate in the traditional Erasmus+ mobility schemes. Neth-ER welcomes a discussion about whether funding for this kind of mobility is in the spirit of Erasmus+.

RECOMMENDATION

Consider opportunities within Erasmus+ for students going on mobility in border regions.

Dutch institutions welcome increased opportunities to cooperate with partner countries within the Erasmus+ Programme. However, these institutions feel **the budget available per region is not always consistent with the demand for cooperation** with a

certain region. One particular case is KA107. Some envelopes are substantially oversubscribed, whereas not all money is spent for certain other regions.

Moreover, incoming and outgoing mobility flows are not always balanced. Institutions are less likely to cooperate with regions where cooperation, in practice, only leads to incoming mobility. Compensation received for incoming students does not always cover the full costs. In addition, the **VET sector is currently excluded from participation with partner countries**. This is strange because certain partner countries provide valuable contributions to the (Dutch) VET sector and vice versa.

RECOMMENDATION

Budget for cooperation with partner countries per region should be consistent with demand.

RECOMMENDATION

Cooperation with partner countries should also be possible for the VET sector.



2. SUPPORT FROM ERASMUS+ FOR THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AND THE COPENHAGEN PROCESS

The **completion of the EHEA** is considered to be of utmost importance for European higher education institutions (HEIs). Dutch HEIs see full implementation of the EHEA core (3-cycles and quality assurance) as key to making learning mobility an integrated part of curricula (where desired) and, therefore, attainable for all students. In practice, too many countries have not fully implemented key parts of the EHEA. Compliance is necessary for scaling up mobility in order for mobility to become the standard rather than the exception. Currently, students and staff still face many issues related to recognition of credits, degrees and traineeships. The burden of seeking such recognition remains on their shoulders. These issues need urgent resolution. **The Erasmus+ Programme must be a viable tool in order to facilitate recognition and to improve the quality of education systems.**

In addition, **the Copenhagen Process**, initiated in 2002 with an aim to improve overall performance, quality and attractiveness of VET in Europe, has entered a new era after the Riga Conclusions. The new objective is to **translate European policy and instruments to national and regional grassroots organisations to achieve systemic and sustainable changes at this level.**

To succeed, the VET sector needs a critical mass of school leaders and companies that support (and implement) the link between international cooperation, VET mobility and quality education. **Erasmus+ is the main programme to realise this objective and must provide adequate support.**

Moreover, additional **research is needed on the effects of internationalisation in education**, and the impact of Erasmus+ on policy development. For example, what does an analysis of the content of all signed Erasmus+ charters tell us about the effect of Erasmus on mobility and institutional policies for learning mobility and internationalisation?

RECOMMENDATION

Research the impact of Erasmus+ on internationalisation policy.

RECOMMENDATION

Erasmus+ funds should be used with better focus to contribute to the full implementation and completion of the EHEA and progress in the Copenhagen Process.



“The Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences strive to equip their students with international skills to prepare them for their future jobs. International mobility contributes greatly to this goal, which is why we need to maintain programmes that facilitate mobility.”

- Thom de Graaf, president of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen)

3. EFFICIENCY OF THE PROGRAMME

In general, Neth-ER believes that the **administrative burden** for both students and institutions remains too high. While recognising the importance of the learning agreement goal, in which the interest of the student is key, Neth-ER believes that excessive paperwork does not guarantee a successful exchange. Forms must reflect the purpose they serve, which is preparing students for a successful mobility.

Unfortunately, the integration of different programmes into Erasmus+ has not led to a **lower administrative burden**. Having all information regarding an Erasmus+ project online and in one system is desired. Moreover, due to non-integrated systems, drawing up mid-term and final reports takes significantly more time than in the previous programme. In addition, content reports have become more elaborate and complex.

RECOMMENDATION

Institutions should be able to demonstrate how the money was spent at the conclusion of a project, linked to financial stimuli, instead of before the project starts. A centralised system for this activity is preferred. More support is needed for less-experienced institutions.

Institutions feel that administrative rules are built on **distrust and control**. All institutions are punished with a high administrative workload for the few that do not respect the rules. Institutions believe the administrative burden before a project's start is too high. Less-experienced institutions often do not have the capacity to comply with administrative requirements.

Students face a **large paperwork burden** before, during and after their mobility. Dutch institutions have

indicated that Erasmus+ forms, for both students and institutions, are often unclear. Participants must enter the same data and information multiple times. Students often feel they do not receive appropriate instructions regarding document completion and deadlines. The opportunity exists for both the European Commission as well as national education institutions to **simplify the documents**, and to provide appropriate support for participants.

RECOMMENDATION

Simplify forms for institutions and students.

Cooperation with partner countries is highly desirable. Erasmus+ offers new opportunities compared to previous programmes. However, institutions feel that the administrative burden, in particular for KA107, makes cooperation under Erasmus+ less attractive. These projects are very complex and the low success rates for certain regions make it less attractive for institutions to invest in applications.

Obtaining the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** and the **Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter** must reap more benefits for the institutions. After obtaining the Charter, the administrative burden should decrease. Currently, institutions must prove compliance with the charter principles each time they apply for a new Erasmus+ project.

RECOMMENDATION

Possessing an Erasmus+ Charter should mean that institutions do not have to prove compliance with charter principles each time they apply for a project.

Institutions feel that selection procedures of **Centralised Actions** are not transparent. Selection occurs isolated in Brussels. Institutions require more feedback on why their project was not selected.

RECOMMENDATION

Increase transparency of Centralised Actions through better feedback and by involving bodies like National Agencies.

Introduction of some of the new **ICT tools** within Erasmus+ was problematic. Today, many of the Erasmus+ ICT tools are still functioning poorly. Because Commission ICT tools are not functioning properly, many institutions use their own systems in addition to the Commission's system. Transferring students or staff from one contract to another is complicated; the filed Participant Report can get lost in the process. Furthermore, Online Linguistic Support significantly increases administrative burden for institutions. Unfortunately, few students make full use of it, limiting the added value.



RECOMMENDATION

The Commission needs to invest heavily in better functioning ICT tools for Erasmus+ such as the Mobility Tool in which students and staff can sign in and organise their status and grant.

AUTHORS AND PURPOSE OF THE POSITION PAPER

This policy paper is drafted by Neth-ER as input for the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+. Neth-ER is an association of twelve Dutch organisations working in the field of education, research and innovation. Neth-ER has a representation in Brussels, the heart of the European arena. This paper represents the perspectives of Neth-ER on the functioning of the Erasmus+ programme. The position paper has been created parallel to the official evaluation, which is the responsibility of the Dutch ministries involved. The position paper serves as a tool for the Neth-ER members to voice their perspectives but is not part of the official evaluation.

Neth-ER members:



Association of universities in the Netherlands (www.vsnu.nl)
(Vereniging van Universiteiten, VSNU)



Dutch National Student Association (www.iso.nl)
(Interstedelijk Studenten Overleg, ISO)



Dutch National Student Union (www.lsvb.nl)
(Landelijke Studenten Vakbond, LSVb)



EP-Nuffic (www.epnuffic.nl)
(Main expertise and service centre for Internationalisation in Dutch Education)



Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (www.vereniginghogescholen.nl)
(Vereniging Hogescholen)



Netherlands Association of VET colleges (www.mboraad.nl)
(Brancheorganisatie voor middelbaar beroepsonderwijs en volwasseneneducatie, MBO Raad)



Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (www.tno.nl)
(Nederlandse Organisatie voor Toegepast-Natuurwetenschappelijk Onderzoek, TNO)



Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (www.nfu.nl)
(Nederlandse Federatie van Universitair Medische Centra, NFU)



Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (www.nwo.nl)
(Nederlandse organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO)



Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (www.zonmw.nl)
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Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (www.knaw.nl)
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