



Student Mobility barriers for regulated professions: Insight on pharmaceutical studies

European Pharmaceutical Students' Association & Erasmus Student Network Joint Position Paper

Introduction

Learning mobility fosters the development of competencies and the creation of experiences, providing citizens with social skills and intercultural tolerance and appreciation. Moreover, learning mobility fosters active citizenship and promotes the European Identity. Therefore, in order to foster economic growth, social cohesion, job creation and potentialising active citizens, the European Commission is taking different measures to achieve the European Education Area by 2025 and both EPSA and ESN acknowledge the importance of those actions.

When reflecting on the Erasmus+ Programme and the path towards the internationalisation of education, not all degrees face the same simplicity of attainability. The degrees for regulated professions face a wide range of difficulties in regards to learning mobility, with a considerable emphasis on the recognition of studies abroad. Efforts towards the digitalisation of Erasmus+, that translated into the Erasmus Without Papers initiative or the Online Learning Agreement tool, are welcomed and encouraged by EPSA and ESN.

EPSA and ESN welcome the European Universities Initiative put forward by the European Commission, aiming at opening the path towards more streamlined and standardised mobility formats which will decrease recognition barriers. The European Universities Initiative is one of several great steps towards learning mobility without borders and it is crucial that all actors understand how this initiative can greatly influence future generations of Europe. Hence, the efforts done for the recognition of studies must be empowered, in order to make them fair and inclusive.

The focus of this paper goes for the pharmaceutical field. According to the results of the survey *Obstacles in Student Mobility* of the European Pharmaceutical Students' Association (EPSA), the vast majority of pharmaceutical students do not participate in the Erasmus+ Programme.¹The most identified factor is the different curricula around Europe and how students struggle to match the curricula of their home Universities with the ones at foreign Universities. In accordance with the results of the survey, this leads to an unfair choice in students' lives: finishing the pharmaceutical studies within the defined years at their home university or going abroad for an exchange and thus delaying their graduation. The integration of Mobility Windows is a great

¹ [Survey Report on Obstacles of Mobility by EPSA](#)



example of how Higher Education Institutions can ensure accessible, fair and inclusive learning exchanges.

Globalisation plays a vital role in today's world, therefore the education of citizens with a global mindset is crucial. All professions, including those regulated by national legislations, must prioritise the component of international competencies, in order to enhance the exchange of knowledge and cooperate on solutions to global challenges that reach across borders in society. In this paper, EPSA and ESN reflect on the results of the aforementioned *Obstacles in Student Mobility* survey carried out in 2018 and call for action from decision-makers in order to achieve full recognition of studies in Europe.

Mobility for studies of a regulated profession

EPSA carried out a survey on *Obstacles in Student Mobility*² in the last trimester of 2018 that collected 970 responses. The aim of the survey was to investigate the access of pharmaceutical students to mobility projects, investigate the obstacles related to mobility and explore ways to improve the existing programmes.

More than 86% of survey respondents did not take part in an Erasmus+ exchange and only 44% knew someone who did. The percentage of students that have participated in Erasmus+ is thus lower than the EU target of 20% by 2020 set in the European Commission's strategy for the modernisation of higher education (IP/11/1043).³

Furthermore, almost 75% of students assessed their knowledge of mobility opportunities and scholarship possibilities to be on the lower side of being informed and more than 55% of students claim to have less than sufficient knowledge about Erasmus+ scholarship possibilities which proves the knowledge on mobility opportunities among pharmaceutical students is very likely insufficient.

Reflecting on the collected data, it is safe to say that students are poorly informed about the possibilities and support from European institutions. This all leads to the fact that students that come from families with limited financial capabilities and cannot finance the exchange themselves are unlikely to participate in an Erasmus+ exchange.

² *ibid*

³ [Press Release "Another record-breaking year for Erasmus" by the European Commission \(10th July 2014\)](#)



The survey has shown that more than 97% of the respondents (N=910) believe that it is at least as hard, if not harder, to take part in an Erasmus+ exchange for pharmaceutical students compared to other study programmes. The pharmaceutical students across Europe identified many different obstacles in relation to their mobility. Some of the main issues included:

- Finding matching subjects due to differences in curricula due to the length and the complexity of pharmaceutical studies⁴ (mostly a degree of 5 years*) which causes the different distribution of the same educational activities in the curricula.
- The need to prolong their studies because of incomplete recognition due to rigid and hard passing limits as a regulated profession with obligatory laboratory courses that need to be passed in the country that is issuing the diploma and/or state exam requirements and obligations.⁵
- The mobility exchange not taken seriously by the home university due to a lack of professors' trust and support to participate in mobility.⁶
- Not having enough financial support as some universities require payment of special laboratory equipment and chemicals.
- Not having information about it, as the prevalence of students who do take part in mobility is so much lower that they do not come in contact with them.⁷
- Higher probability of educational activities carried out in a country's language due to the pharmaceutical profession being highly regulated within national authorities
- The fear of not obtaining the same amount/level of knowledge as they would at their home university.

The respondents were clear; more than 91% of respondents (N=887) stated they would like to have more support when it comes to Erasmus+ student mobility.

Despite the abovementioned, there are European countries with good practices for the mobility of pharmaceutical students, although still not optimal compared to other studies. These countries include **the Czech Republic, Denmark, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia** and **Sweden**. There are differences in recognition of mobility during studies and different mobility opportunities (from mobility for thesis, obligatory practice to core studies), however, some provide support to their pharmaceutical students for mobility.

The good practices include bilateral agreements between Faculties of Pharmacy (preferably with similar curricula), targeting countries with a similar healthcare system and/or a similar education

⁴ [Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7th September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications](#)

⁵ [Regulated professions database of the European Commission](#)

⁶ n 2

⁷ ibid



system, and having a designated Erasmus Coordinator at Faculties of Pharmacy responsible for the overview and sometimes even recognition of mobility opportunities.

Call for action

Facing the above-mentioned reflection, it is safe to say that European pharmaceutical students struggle to access quality learning mobility experiences. EPSA and ESN believe that Erasmus+ should be for all, independent of their background and field of studies. Therefore, EPSA and ESN recognise and appreciate the efforts already made and hereby call on the following actors to upscale their role in improving mobility accessibility:

- EPSA and ESN call on Higher Education Institutions in Europe, EAFP and EUFEPS to continue to improve their attitude towards learning exchanges, and consequently actively spread information about Erasmus+ and other mobility opportunities to pharmaceutical students.
- EPSA and ESN call on Higher Education Institutions to more widely recognise study obligations during Erasmus+ exchanges and to actively target universities with similar curricula, if needed in countries with similar health care and education systems, and establish mobility windows in the offered curricula, ensuring automatic recognition of studies.
- EPSA and ESN call on the newly established “European Universities” to include Pharmaceutical Sciences when experimenting with innovative forms of recognition, including automatic recognition.
- EPSA and ESN call on the pharmaceutical students to engage and take part in Erasmus+, as part of their lifelong learning and holistic education, developing transversal skills such as intercultural understanding and adaptability, which add value to their professional and personal lives.
- EPSA and ESN call on the Ministries responsible for higher education to empower the National Academic Recognition Information Centres and, together, increase the access to a fair recognition of studies.
- EPSA and ESN call on the European Commission, National Agencies and Ministries to keep working on improving the Erasmus+ Programme and to always keep European pharmaceutical students and students from other regulated professions in mind when designing new policies.



The NGOs

The [European Pharmaceutical Students' Association \(EPSA\)](#) is a European independent, non-political, non-religious, non-profit, non-governmental students' organisation committed to the interests of pharmaceutical students and youth. It represents more than 100,000 pharmaceutical students aiming to bring pharmacy, knowledge and students together. EPSA's members are 44 pharmaceutical students' associations across 36 European countries as perceived by the Council of Europe.

The [Erasmus Student Network \(ESN\)](#) is an international non-profit and non-political organisation which advocates for the quality and quantity of mobility experiences. ESN is based in 42 countries within the European Higher Education Area, is represented by more than 520 local associations, and stands for the enrichment of society through international students.