

ESN contribution to the Communication from the Commission ERASMUS FOR ALL: The EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) warmly welcomes the European Commission proposal “*Erasmus for all*” that places the emphasis on the mobility of European citizens, investing 19 billion Euro in education, training and youth from 2014 till 2020. As the biggest international student organisation in the field of Higher Education learning mobility, ESN strongly supports making learning mobility a reality for everyone through increased funding and diversified mobility schemes.

ESN agrees that mobility is a key factor to enhance the feeling of European belongingness and to contribute to greater prosperity and growth within the EU. Increasing the global attractiveness of the EU education institutions and schemes will also allow it to attract high- potential individuals from other regions. Although it is important to address youth unemployment and it is true that mobility allows young people to gain new skills and competencies, the key role of mobility within higher education should remain, as at the start of the programme, to foster European citizenship and enhance the feeling of belonging to the EU.

ESN supports branding all formal educational programmes with the highly successful name Erasmus. We believe that merging educational programmes under one name and in a single structure will help to focus on the key priority of learning mobility, increasing their effectiveness and creating synergies between diverse programs. Meanwhile, ESN urges the Commission to ensure that all “*Erasmus for All*” actions are as strong and successful as the current Erasmus brand implies. We stress the importance of the integrity of the Erasmus brand – the highest standards should be requested for quality along with the increased numbers and diversity of learners. ESN is of course dedicated to contributing to increasing the quality of the programme and to be highly involved in its development.

ESN is pleased with the increased budget of the Erasmus programme in higher education, taking into account ESNSurvey’s expertise¹ that underlined how essential financial support is to encourage students’ mobility experience. However, ESN doubts that this increase will be sufficient to cover the projected number of beneficiaries of the programme. Therefore, ESN urges the Commission to make sure that the budget increase corresponds to the increase in the number of participants in the programme, so that not only the number of beneficiaries but also the quality of the programme improves. In particular, ESN calls for the new budget to allow the following:

- Increase Erasmus scholarships, so that all students can benefit from the programme independent of their financial background;

¹ ESNSurvey 2010, E-Value-ate your exchange: 35 % of the respondents would not have gone abroad without financial support and 30 % are not certain whether they would have gone.

- Increase the quality of information provided for the Erasmus exchange and the level of the recognition of courses studied abroad during an exchange²;
- Allow students to participate in the Erasmus exchange in each cycle of their education (Bachelor, Master, PhD);
- Increase funding for global exchanges and study programmes outside the EU and its close partner countries, to provide EU students with a truly global perspective.
- Improve the support to student's organisation accompanying the Erasmus programme³

Although ESN understands that the aim of the proposed student loan guarantee scheme is to increase mobility and especially vertical mobility, ESN sees it as a very unwelcomed break with the European tradition of offering grants, which has proved successful because it covers the additional costs which often prevent students from going abroad to study. ESN does not believe, especially in times of financial crisis, that this new strategy is the most appropriate incentive for student's mobility. Offering students a loan is asking them to finance their future themselves and underlines a low commitment to fostering mobility from the public parties, whereas all statistics underline how valuable grants are to encourage mobility.

Erasmus Student Network urges the Commission to evaluate all the possible consequences of the introduction of a loan guarantee scheme within the European Higher Education system, including the consequences on national and regional financial support or university tuition fees, before implementing this new concept. If this project was nevertheless to remain, ESN urges the Commission to ensure that the rates and conditions are very favourable for the students.

With the main focus being upon formal education, ESN also urges the Commission to address the diverse needs of non-formal education. Non-formal education is a great provider of a diverse range of social skills to complement the formal learning experiences; however its role in reaching out to young people outside of the formal education system should not be ignored. Through its initiatives, the Commission should support youth and student organisations as the providers of non-formal education in their efforts to make education and mobility accessible for all young people.

Finally, ESN suggests that the plans for implementation are further developed, consulting with the prospective learners and education stakeholders such as student organisations, to ensure that all perspectives are considered and that the programme fully suits the needs of its beneficiaries and society in general.

² Surveying nearly 9000 students in 2010, the ESN PRIME research found only 73% of students receiving full recognition of the credits successfully gained abroad and previously included in the Learning Agreement

³ The European Parliament suggested in its study "Improving the participation in the Erasmus programme" (July 2010) to "strengthen and professionalise student bodies such as the Erasmus Student Network" in order to improve the image of Erasmus.