

Reaction of the Erasmus Student Network to the COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

on Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) welcomes the communication from the European Commission on rethinking education. ESN is pleased with the communication's clear statement that education and skills are fundamental to Europe's competitiveness in the future and that we need to focus on a broad range of skills that matter across all education levels. It is equally welcomed that the communication recognises active citizenship, along with personal development and well-being, as the broad mission of education, going beyond mere employability. ESN particularly supports the mentioning of the new Erasmus programme and the identification of student mobility as one of the four key issues towards combating youth unemployment.

For ESN, the following areas are of particular importance:

Combating Youth Unemployment

ESN believes that mobility is indeed one of the keys to decreasing youth unemployment and unemployment in general. Differences in macroeconomic conditions will persist for a long time to come and [ESN's studies](#)¹, among others, have repeatedly shown that student mobility during higher education increases future labour mobility². The communication, however, fails to recognise the significant and broader role of international mobility in education towards developing both transversal and career-oriented or job-specific skills. Many studies have also demonstrated the link between international mobility and improving foreign language skills. Matching skills with its accompanying demand and improving the transition between education and the labour market are only partial solutions to the issue of rising youth unemployment. Thus, we want to further underline the importance of mobility to combat the issue.

¹ cf. *Exchange, employment and added value: Research report of the ESNSurvey 2011*, Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

² cf. Zaiceva, A. & K. F. Zimmermann, 2008. Scale, diversity, and determinants of labour migration in Europe, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 24(3), 427-451.

European Area of Skills and Qualifications

ESN is pleased to note the communication's emphasis on the creation of a European Area of Skills and Qualifications. According to ESN's own experience and [research](#)³, the academic recognition of exchange studies within the comparatively well-structured Erasmus programme has been an on-going challenge impinging on the quality of academic recognition. Thus, we believe that the mutual recognition of all types of qualifications and skills in Europe are a major challenge that should be tackled on a broad basis. The benefits for European citizens in terms of increased personal freedom and opportunities, the labour market and the economy as a whole are evident.

Mobility Policies

As described previously, ESN acknowledges that the communication identifies mobility as a key to achieving the goals put forward in the EU 2020 strategy. However, we see the relevance of mobility going even further in many areas and therefore give certain policy recommendations to further strengthen mobility both in terms of quality and quantity.

- **Academic recognition:** Academic recognition remains an on-going challenge. According to our recent [PRIME study](#)⁴, only 73% of all Erasmus students receive full academic recognition in accordance with their previously-signed learning agreements. This situation not only severely diminishes the quality of the mobility experience but has the greatest effect on those who can least afford to lose time and money, as a lack of recognition often leads to an unnecessary prolongation of studies. The Bologna process has set the ground for increased degree mobility. After finishing degrees at a foreign university, the recognition of diplomas is an essential prerequisite to further promote degree mobility. In the wider frame of a European Area of Skills and Qualifications, these recognition issues require continued effort and attention.
- **Information about mobility opportunities:** ESN's experience and research has continuously demonstrated that the degree of information about mobility opportunities as such and vital details on how to embark on a stay abroad are not satisfactory (e.g. [ESNSurvey 2009](#)⁵). Not only should traditional ways of disseminating information be improved, but ideas such as bringing international students into local schools to talk about their experiences should gain more support. ESN promotes and develops this idea via its "Erasmus in Schools" project, while other stakeholders pursue similar concepts. Giving young Europeans a first-hand experience of Europe as early as possible lays the foundations for interest in mobility opportunities in the future.

³ cf. *PRIME Report 2010*, Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

⁴ cf. *PRIME Report 2010*, Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

⁵ cf. *Information for Exchange – Provision and Quality: Research Report of the ESNSurvey 2009*, Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

- **Financial Support for Mobility:** Mobility in higher education requires more financial support from European, national and regional authorities. To guarantee equity in academic mobility the financial support has to be sufficient, enabling everyone to have an experience abroad.
- **Flexibility of mobility:** To increase participation and make mobility accessible to a wider audience, a higher degree of flexibility should be introduced. Connecting international education with training via combining Erasmus studies and Erasmus placements, for example, is a feasible and conducive approach. The rules on obtaining grants for Erasmus placements and Leonardo da Vinci trainings are partly very restrictive. Getting access to such financial support mechanisms should be as easy as possible, to widen participation.