

VLHORA Position Paper: Mid-term Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme

In March 2017, the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA) issued a survey in the 13 Flemish University Colleges regarding the Erasmus+ Programme. The framework for this survey is the Interim Evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme.

The survey questions were designed to measure the impact of the programme itself, the attractiveness of individual actions, the adequacy of the available budget, the usability of Erasmus+ tools and the programme support provided by the National Agency EPOS.

The results of this survey will be summarized throughout this report and provide the basis for five recommendations for the Erasmus+ Programme and the follow-up Programme.

1. Brief overview of the Erasmus+ Programme¹

Erasmus+ is the EU programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. The current programme emerged from the integration of the following European programmes implemented during the period 2007-2013; Lifelong Learning programme, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and Programmes of cooperation with industrialised countries in the field of higher education.

In the field of education and training, the Erasmus+ Programme contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020-strategy, including the headline education target, the objectives of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) and the sustainable development of Partner Countries in the field of higher education.

The Erasmus+ programme implements the three following Key Actions (KA):

KEY ACTION 1 – MOBILITY OF INDIVIDUALS

- Mobility of learners and staff;
- Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees;
- Erasmus+ Master Loans.

KEY ACTION 2 - COOPERATION FOR INNOVATION AND EXCHANGE OF GOOD PRACTICES

- Transnational Strategic Partnerships;

¹ Op basis van de *Erasmus+ Programmagids Versie 1 (2017)* http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/files/resources/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_nl.pdf



- Knowledge alliances between higher education institutions and enterprises which aim to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity, employability, knowledge exchange and/or multidisciplinary teaching and learning;
- Sector Skills Alliances;
- Capacity-building projects supporting cooperation with Partner Countries in the fields of higher education and youth;
- IT support platforms, such as eTwinning, the portal for school education (School Education Gateway), the European Platform for Adult Learning (EPALE), etc.

KEY ACTION 3 – SUPPORT FOR POLICY REFORM

The overall indicative budget for the Erasmus+ Programme for the period 2014-2020 is 14.774 billion euros under Heading 1 and 1.680 billion EUR under Heading 4 of the EU budget.

2. Results of the Erasmus+ Programme survey

Overall, the Flemish University Colleges are satisfied with the existence of the Erasmus+ Programme. This Programme, which supports University Colleges in achieving their internationalisation policy, remains to be the most important Programme thanks to positive branding, a clear focus on quality and the financial support of collaboration and mobility inside and outside of Europe.

According to the Flemish University Colleges, the Erasmus+ Programme certainly contributes to the quality of education. Due to the low success rate for KA2 projects (cf infra), the impact on research and educational development is limited. The Erasmus+ Programme has great potential to improve collaboration between the work field and NGOs. In the opinion of the Flemish University Colleges, however, this potential remains untapped due to the lack of concrete incentives to facilitate such collaboration.

The Erasmus+ Key Actions

Since the start of the Erasmus+ Programme all Flemish University Colleges participated in KA1 for student and staff mobility and in KA2 Strategic Partnerships. Only a few participated in KA2 Knowledge Alliances and in KA3 actions.

KA1 Student mobility

The Flemish University Colleges state that KA1 is an attractive action for student mobility in Europe. However, they regret the limited budget for this action. In addition, they plead for more flexibility for the institution in allocating the grants.

The new possibility for student mobility outside Europe (KA107) is well received by the Flemish University Colleges, though the administration for the application procedure for this action is considered abundant. Thus the limitations of the available budget and number of grants. This action could be more attractive by a simple conversion of credits at non-European higher education institutions, simplification of the application procedure and a budget increase. In addition, the Flemish University Colleges would like to extend the use of KA107 for student mobility placement in the future.

KA1 Staff mobility

Flemish University Colleges are pleased with KA1 staff mobility, both for educational and administrative staff and to a lesser extent for management staff. Two thirds of respondents stated to find this action suitable for sending teaching staff to enterprises.

KA2 Strategic partnerships

The Flemish University Colleges are interested in KA2 Strategic Partnerships to work with higher education institutions as well as with NGOs and enterprises. However, there is a great dissatisfaction towards the success rate of KA2 project applications. During the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) this issue was less problematic, as the projects were evaluated centrally on European level, which allowed quality to stand out. This was an advantage for Flemish institutions, who are successful project coordinators, due to their high-quality standards, their sense of initiative and flexible leadership. The management of these projects on the level of National Agencies and the increased scope of these projects in combination with the limited budget on Flemish level has proven to be fatal for the success rate of projects coordinated by Flemish institutions. Flemish University Colleges will still participate in KA2 projects as partners, though handing over coordination is experienced as a loss of ownership of project results. This problem can not be solved by increasing the budget for this action. Over 80% of the Flemish University Colleges plead to reinstate the centralised management of KA2 projects, as was the case in the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013). This would make a substantial difference, in particular for a small yet very active Area of Higher Education such as the Flemish Community.

Comparison of the Erasmus+ with the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)

The innovation in the Erasmus+ programme about which more than half of the Flemish University Colleges are satisfied, is the flexibility of the actions. They regret, however, that the intended simplification of the rules and administration has not been reached. On the contrary. More than half of the Flemish University Colleges was more satisfied about these aspects in the LLP. In addition to the cancellation of the centralised management of KA2 Strategic Partnerships, the Flemish University Colleges regret the disappearance of short exchange programmes such as the Intensive Programmes (IPs).

Erasmus+ tools

The start of the Erasmus+ Programme involved the implementation of several new support tools. In general, the Flemish University Colleges are satisfied with the existence of these tools, especially the PIC codes. However, they feel that the quality and usability of the programme guide, the online application forms and the Mobility Tool are not yet what they should be. Furthermore, they question the validity and quality of the Online Linguistic Support.

EPOS support

The majority of the Flemish University Colleges are rather satisfied with helpfulness of EPOS employees and the support provided with individual questions. However, there is great dissatisfaction about the punctuality and clarity of EPOS communication. Furthermore, more than half of the Flemish University Colleges complained about the lack of transparency with which EPOS handles the funding rules.

3. Recommendations for improvement of the Erasmus+ Programme

The Flemish University Colleges plead for an adjustment of the Erasmus+ Programme and the follow-up programme on the following five points:

1. A rise of the general budget of the Erasmus+ Programme, in particular for KA1 student mobility for study and placement, both inside and outside of Europe.
2. The reinstatement of centralised management of KA2 Strategic Partnerships on European level so that the quality of Flemish applications can emerge and will not have to be restricted by the limited budget on Flemish level, which is not in line with the numerous high-quality applications;
3. The reintroduction of Intensive Programmes or a comparable action which focuses on short-term mobility for students. Such mobility would not only motivate students for individual mobility for longer periods, it would also provide the ideal framework for applied project based learning related to real life cases from the work field;
4. An alleviation of the administration by consolidating existing rules, improving existing tools and adding the paperless signature of application forms;
5. Improved support of the National Agency through structural consultation with the higher education field, efficient communication and transparent application of the rules.

VLHORA Internationalisation Working Group