

Erasmus Student Network

Opinion Paper on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the period 2014-2020

The Erasmus Student Network welcomes the recently proposed Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the period 2014 - 2020 and is very pleased to notice that Education and Mobility in particular have been given proper attention by the Commission. Being the biggest international student organisation in the field of HE learning mobility, ESN would like to share some views on the financial proposal as well as the conceptual modifications to the existing programmes that are included.

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is one of the biggest non-profit international student organisations, acting in the field of European Higher Education and Youth. ESN is present in more than 360 Higher Education Institutions from 35 Countries in Europe, counting approximately 12.000 active members working on a volunteer basis with 150.000 international students per year. ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing student exchanges from different levels and providing an intercultural experience to all those students who cannot access a study period abroad (internationalisation at home). ESN's vision is the enrichment of society through international students.

ESN agrees with the Commission that spending at EU level can only bring benefits to the Member States and that an eventual alignment of the already agreed and set policies for 2020 with the proposed financial framework will facilitate the effectiveness of the policy objectives and maximise the wanted results. ESN is happy to see that, in times of financial austerity, the EU is moving towards deeper and more fundamental sectors, such as Education, which can enhance the Union without linking to an unstable or vulnerable economic system. A common education policy, supported by carefully allocated funds on the European level can only support investments in national education and training systems. It is true that - with the ERASMUS programme leading the way - European programmes have already significantly contributed to the growth of transnational learning mobility and it is positively noticed that with the new proposal there will be continuity as well as willingness to increase the effectiveness of the already existing schemes.

Education Europe

ESN warmly welcomes the proposal for a new programme that will integrate all current mobility actions of LLP, Erasmus Mundus and Youth in Action under the name Education Europe. Even though details are not yet specified with regard to the future of the specific programmes it is positively observed that the goal of the Commission is to bring a holistic approach to mobility by putting in place a more focused and easier-to-manage programme.

Reading the working paper we are pleased to see the four possible policy choices as well as their explanation and rationale. ESN supports the proposal of the Commission to work on a mixed policy between options three and four and thus focus on a more limited scheme and emphasise the links between the programme activities and the policy agenda, EU priorities and strategies.

However, we believe that personal and professional development is overly mentioned in the proposal as the predominant goal of the programmes and of mobility in general. ESN believes it is of utmost importance to stress out that even though employability and acquisition of skills and competencies are important priorities, they should for no reason (even given the financial difficulties that the EU is facing) replace the overarching goal of the European programmes to foster European citizenship and enhance the feeling of belongingness to the EU. Even though the name of the proposed programme implies so, ESN believes that European integration should be more evidently mentioned as a goal, as education and mobility play a very important role in that.

As ESN participated in the Expert Group of the Commission which discussed the future of the Erasmus Programme, we are pleased to see that our proposals for the preparation of mobility, quality assurance, validation of learning outcomes, evaluation and dissemination of results as well as combination of formal education with non-formal and informal learning throughout all cycles have been integrated in the proposal for the new Programme. We nevertheless do wish to repeat that, if the new Programme is to succeed in integrating all under one and facilitating the relative processes, the Commission needs to take care of putting in place strong implementation, reporting and control mechanisms in order to ensure quality and prevent any possible overshadowing of already successful mobility programmes.

Finances Allocated

ESN welcomes the significant increase of finances allocated to Education and Mobility in the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework for the years 2014 – 2020.

According to the [ESNSurvey 2010 “E-Value-ate your exchange”](#), 65% of the exchange students surveyed would probably not have gone abroad without financial support. This is indeed a significant number which shows the importance of financial support on the EU level as well as the necessity of allocating a bigger part of the EU Budget on Exchange Programmes.

Increasing the allocated budget to 15.2 billion euros (for Education Europe) is very positive and goes along with the relevant demand not only of ESN but of all Educational stakeholders.

ESN is also very pleased to see that the Commission sets as a target the enhancement of transnational learning mobility to the ambitious number of 800.000 mobile EU students per year even though we are not able to evaluate at the moment if the proposed budget increase would be able to sustain such a number. We recently witnessed record numbers in the mobility of Erasmus Students but we did express our concerns as the grants allocated reached their lower so far limits and we believe the Commission should keep this in mind and try to balance quantity and quality of mobility.

Policy support and involvement of stakeholders

The Erasmus Student Network actively participates through a variety of activities in the support of mobile students across Europe. ESN also strongly advocates for internationalisation and participates in policy making on the European level.

Thus we believe that in the new Programme there should be further support to policy making as well as involvement of the main beneficiaries of Education Europe, students and young people as well as relevant associations (such as ESN) to the decision taking through structured dialogue.

Last but not least ESN looks forward to the legal framework of the proposed programmes in order to provide more concrete feedback on the actions suggested and their impact.