



NETH-ER POSITION PAPER on Erasmus

March 2019

Key principles:

- Foster the quality of the European education systems
- Internationalisation for all
- Innovation in European education

Key conditions:

- Make Erasmus user-friendly
- Big ambitions require a bigger budget



In this position paper, the Dutch knowledge community, associated in Neth-ER, reflects on the European Commission's proposal for Erasmus and the following discussions in the European Parliament and Council of Ministers. In general, the members of Neth-ER welcome the proposal. Some aspects can however still be improved. This paper builds on the key messages from the 'Neth-ER Vision Paper on Erasmus+, Knowledge First', published in November 2017. It includes specific recommendations on the Commission's proposal for Erasmus and the proceedings in the European Parliament and Council of Ministers.

Introduction

The Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) continues to demonstrate its great European added value by fostering intercultural exchange, social cohesion and smart European growth. The Dutch knowledge community underscores the crucial importance of investing further in the European Union's education programme in order to build a strong European knowledge economy. Currently, Europe is confronted with challenges such as increased radicalisation, inequality and the spread of misinformation. Now is the time that we need critical and open-minded thinkers. High quality education equips young people with the skills they need for the jobs of the future, empowers European citizens and contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

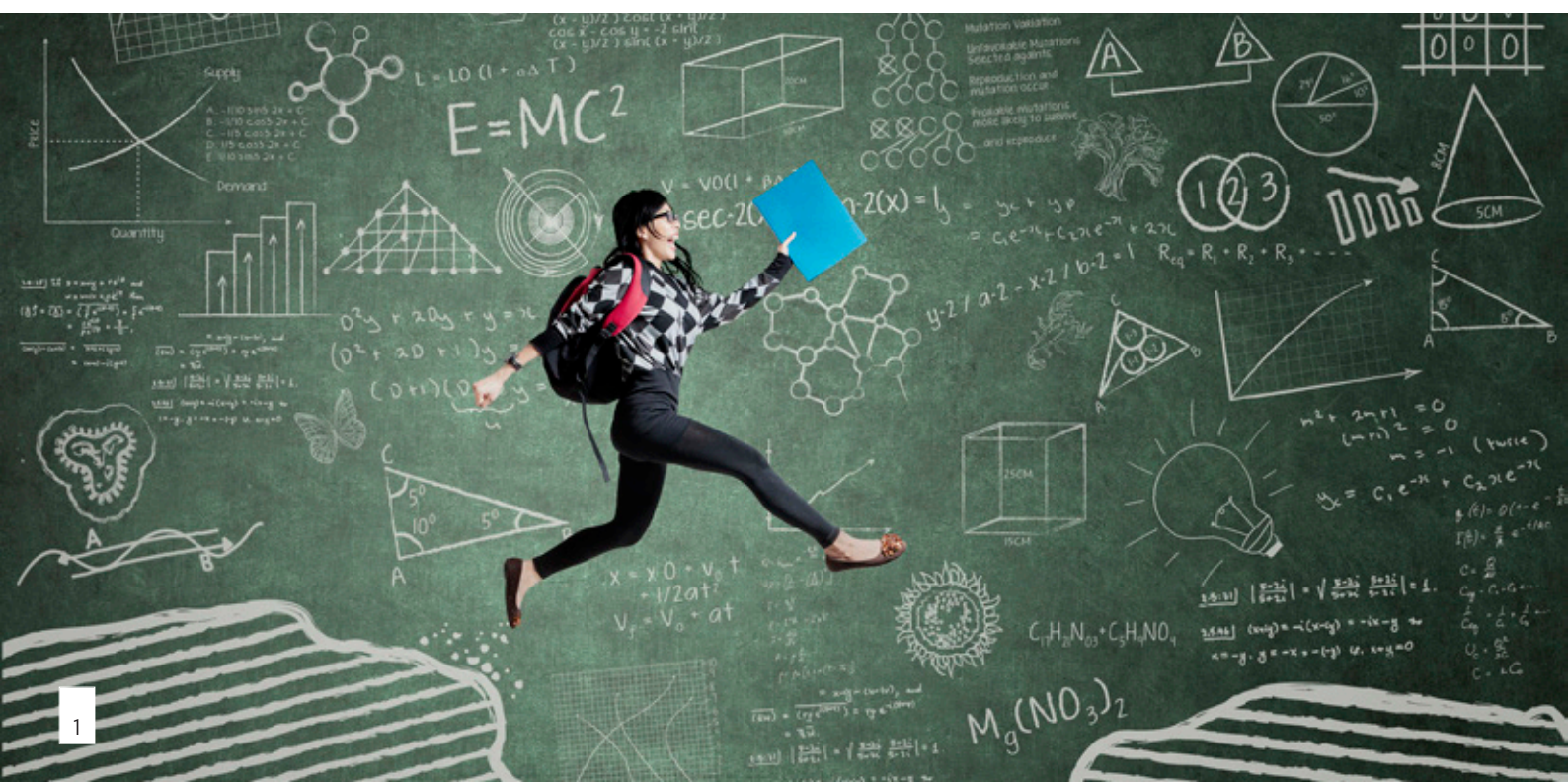
Erasmus should therefore play a crucial role in future EU policy strategies; it should contribute to improvement of the quality of education in the EU, provide ample opportunities for intercultural experiences for all Europeans and further stimulate innovation in education.

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Neth-ER's key principles and key conditions for Erasmus

Key principle 1: Foster the quality of the European education systems

Funds from Erasmus should continue to be employed for improving European education, education policies and education systems as a whole. The programme should contribute to enhancing the quality, relevance and inclusiveness of education. Erasmus should therefore not operate in isolation: to optimise the impact of the programme, it should be properly linked to a coherent EU policy for education, research and innovation and to other EU funding programmes, such as the Framework Programme for research and innovation and the European structural and investment funds (ESIF).

Neth-ER welcomes the proposal to create more synergies with other EU programmes and the possibility to scale up successful Erasmus projects with other EU funding sources. How synergies with the other EU programmes (ESF+, Horizon Europe and ESIF) will work out in practice will need to be further elaborated. The Digital Opportunity Traineeships are a positive example of synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 which Neth-ER would like to see continued.



Key principle 2: Internationalisation for all

To contribute to social cohesion on the European continent, Erasmus should reach beyond the 'usual suspects'. Underrepresented groups should be identified on a country-to-country basis, so as to be able to extend possibilities for learning mobility. Knowledge is indispensable for an inclusive society. Moreover, inclusion is indispensable for the creation of knowledge. Widening the focus of the programme to include groups that are currently not reached increases the legitimacy of using European funding for student mobility and enhances its impact on society. Erasmus should truly be a programme for all.

Neth-ER therefore welcomes the focus on inclusion, employability and European identity in the proposal for Erasmus. Neth-ER also supports more recognition for the VET sector and opening of the international dimension to the VET sector. The programme envisages reaching more students who are less likely to participate in standard mobility actions. To achieve such an increased participation of this target group of students, a more detailed strategy is needed. Erasmus could and should function as a stepping stone for newcomers to learning mobility. For instance, this could be stimulated through short-term mobility opportunities for students and staff lasting two weeks. Neth-ER also recommends providing education institutions with more funding to reach out

to these students in advance (before they decide to go abroad) and to improve their communication and coaching activities. In addition, there should be more flexibility to adjust the grant amount and grant duration.

A combination of physical and virtual mobility in blended learning approaches can increase both the impact and efficiency of the programme. Nevertheless, virtual mobility cannot be a substitute for a mobility period abroad. It should therefore be used in addition to physical mobility, and not as an easy way to achieve higher numbers of Erasmus participants.

Last but not least, the DiscoverEU action lacks an educational component and is not inclusive: it is targeted at the 'usual suspects' for an international experience. Erasmus should remain an educational programme aiming at formal and informal learning experiences and not tourism. DiscoverEU should therefore not be funded under the Erasmus programme and be taken out of the Erasmus regulation.



Key principle 3: Innovation in European education

To compete with the rest of the world, education within Europe needs to be as innovative (and of high quality) as possible. Further collaboration between different education sectors could contribute to innovation in education. Separate cross-sectoral cooperation calls are welcomed to stimulate cross-sectoral cooperation. To facilitate the exchange of good practices, eTwinning should be extended to all education sectors.

Neth-ER agrees that partnerships for innovation, aiming to achieve systemic impact at European level, should be managed at centralised level by EACEA. However, the Dutch knowledge community strongly recommends that cooperation for innovation also remains an important element in partnerships at decentralised level. Therefore, partnerships for innovation should also be possible under decentralised management in Key Action 2 (a). These partnerships should, among others, stimulate interdisciplinary cooperation between research, education and entrepreneurs.





Key condition 1: Make Erasmus user-friendly

For Erasmus to function optimally and be attractive to a broad range of participants and organisations, its administrative burden needs to be minimal and proportionate. New digital and paperless administrative procedures need to be introduced. Erasmus could follow the example of the EU research and innovation programme, which has a number of digitalised administrative procedures.

Neth-ER welcomes the continuity regarding the structure of the programme and the three key actions. However, the programme introduces a lot of new initiatives. The introduction of many additional smaller actions will put the programme at risk of losing its focus. Their purpose needs to be absolutely clear: what they will entail and what will be the envisaged added value and impact. Several new elements need to be further elaborated, such as: the European Universities, the Centres for Vocational Excellence and the Forward-Looking Cooperation Projects.

In addition, simplification efforts should be further elaborated and what they will look like and accomplish in practice should be explained. In addition, continuity of the IT tools used is also important for participants to make the programme more user-friendly. The Erasmus programme should make better use of existing digital tools to enhance the effectiveness of the programme. For example by creating one big tool for digital mobility and a centralised system through which students can upload the required documents.





Key condition 2: Big ambitions require a bigger budget

If Europe is serious about its agenda for growth and jobs as well as its emphasis on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth to build a strong knowledge economy and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, Erasmus requires additional funding. Furthermore, an expanding European social agenda that will cater for everyone and increasing ambitions for internationalisation of education necessitates further investments in EU education.

Neth-ER argues that, in line with the Lisbon target on investing in knowledge, at least 3% of the EU budget should be allocated to Erasmus. Neth-ER thus welcomes the Commission's proposal to increase the budget for Erasmus to 30 billion euros in the next programming period as a first step. To achieve the proposed ambitions this budget should be further raised to at least 40 billion euros, as this is necessary to allow Erasmus to realise its full potential and achieve real impact.

The Commission has the ambitious goal to triple the number of participants with only double the amount the funding, while also aiming for more social inclusion. It wishes to achieve this number of participants by lowering the grant amount, and aiming for more short-term mobility and/or more virtual cooperation. The Dutch knowledge community, however, strongly believes that the focus should be on the quality of the mobility and the impact on participants rather than the quantity of participants.

In addition, the youth sector has been allocated a disproportionate rise in the budget proposal. The members of Neth-ER doubt if there is sufficient demand in the youth sector to justify this high rise, especially since the voluntary service activities will be funded under the European Solidarity Corps in a separate budget line. Therefore, Neth-ER suggests lowering the budget for the youth sector to allocate more funding to the education and training section of Erasmus to match the high demand in that part of the programme.



Colophon

This paper was drafted to support EU institutions during the negotiations for Erasmus. Neth-ER is a Brussels-based association of eleven Dutch organisations working in the field of education, research and innovation. Neth-ER looks forward to help shaping the future of EU knowledge policy together with European institutions, national governments and stakeholder organisations



Neth-ER members:

KNAW - Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences
MBO Raad - Netherlands Association of Vocational Education Colleges
NFU - Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres
Nuffic - Netherlands Organisation for the internationalisation of education
NWO - Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
TNO - Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research
VH - Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
VSNU - Association of Universities in the Netherlands

www.knaw.nl
www.mboraad.nl
www.nfu.nl
www.nuffic.nl
www.nwo.nl
www.tno.nl
www.vereniginghogescholen.nl
www.vsnu.nl

Neth-ER associated members:

ISO - Dutch National Student Association
JOB - Union of Vocational Students
LSVb - Dutch National Student Union

www.iso.nl
www.jobmbo.nl
www.lsvb.nl

This statement is also supported by:

PNN - Dutch Network for PhD students
ZonMw - Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development

www.pnn.nl
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