

BUILDING A STRONG EUROPE THROUGH ERASMUS+

How to enhance the impact of Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is Europe's renowned ambassador programme, promoting the exchange of ideas, cultural understanding and professional development. It is unique, being the only massive transnational education programme in the world. Erasmus+ supports skills and competence development, giving fresh impetus to continuous learning. It is also instrumental in empowering people and companies to contribute to the green and digital transitions, while supporting innovation and competitiveness in Europe.

Erasmus+ can contribute to the EU 2030 social targets of at least 60% of adults in training every year, and at least 78% in employment. It also supports the 2030 Digital Compass targets of at least 80% of adults with basic digital skills and 20 million employed ICT specialists in the EU.

Therefore, ECIU calls upon the EU Member States, the European Parliament, and the European Commission to strongly invest in European education collaboration and to make Erasmus+ a key priority for Europe.

This paper shares ECIU recommendations to enhance the impact of the Erasmus+ programme. The overall recommendation is to work towards a more holistic and long-term approach to funding academia. Realising true impact requires long-term partnerships, for example, to build European University Alliances, implement innovative teaching models, and to nurture collaborative ecosystems.

THE NEED FOR HOLISTIC AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

Europe needs a more **holistic approach to university funding**, combining education, research, innovation and service to society. Europe's universities are a driver of innovation and the most broadly participating organisations in programmes for education, research, innovation and societal impact. Universities have managed and will continue to manage the vast diversity of European funding programmes. However, the complex diversity of rules demands additional resources and is a barrier to newcomers and to implement bold visions for university collaboration.

It is particularly difficult for university alliances to manage the patchwork of funding coming from Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and other European and national sources, when building an innovative European University delivering a bold vision to strengthen European collaboration.

European University Alliances are a flagship initiative of the Erasmus+ programme, designed to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU, to boost the excellence dimension of higher education, research and innovation, and inspire the transformation of higher education.

To enhance the potential of European University Alliances, a **holistic and sustainable approach to funding projects** is key. This ensures consistency in the long-term partnerships that are required to comprehensively innovate education. ECIU supports the call of European University Alliances¹ to establish a holistic and sustainable long-term funding instrument to deepen transnational cooperation of Alliances across all their missions in a coherent way. This will enable the European Universities Initiative to go beyond a short-term project approach and deliver on their long-term, innovative and ambitious vision of future-proof European universities, an important component for a competitive Europe.

ECIU is committed to enhance the impact of European University Alliances by piloting an institutionalised cooperation instrument (European Status) to overcome legal obstacles to a deeper transnational cooperation.² ECIU will work closely with stakeholders and policy-makers at national, local and European level to offer advice on a revised or new instrument.

ECIU is also committed to enhancing the impact of the European Degree by piloting an innovative approach including micro-credentials and societal needs.³ The European Degree is an opportunity to innovate our education and could support the realisation of a recognised competence passport supporting continuous learning through micro-credentials. The introduction of the European Degree is an excellent opportunity to support the transformation of European higher education from a one-size-fits-all education towards agile and personalised learning paths for life.

¹ [https://assets-global.website-files.com/551e54eb6a58b73c12c54a18/62f51528b9180f5d2c4d9443_FOR%20EU%20on%20funding%20needs%20incl%20research%20support%20\(1\).pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/551e54eb6a58b73c12c54a18/62f51528b9180f5d2c4d9443_FOR%20EU%20on%20funding%20needs%20incl%20research%20support%20(1).pdf)

² <https://www.eciu.eu/news/eciu-to-find-solutions-for-closer-international-university-cooperation>

³ <https://www.eciu.eu/news/eciu-yufe-and-epicur-will-lead-an-innovative-approach-to-the-european-degree>

COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION INNOVATION IS NEEDED

Innovation is driven by diversity, and the Erasmus+ programme, including its links to other programmes, should make diversity an even greater priority in increasing Europe's competitiveness.

Continuous learning

Erasmus+ collaborative projects have the potential to innovate Europe's education, to contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities and Europe as a whole. Erasmus+ is the glue for European cooperation and career development support.

Focusing on **continuous learners** and creating flexible learning paths must be fully rewarded, alongside continuing the more traditional Bachelor, Master and PhD degrees. This is important to respond to society's needs, to support further innovation at the European level, and to be inclusive to all learners, including those not in degree studies. An example is the concept of flexible learning pathways, which are open to all learners. Learning at work must be further developed, to enable Erasmus+ to attract people at the workplace.

The needs of continuous learners and society call for systemic change. New requirements for agility, flexibility, personalisation and digital transformation are rapidly emerging. European higher education has a responsibility to respond to this challenge, ensuring that everyone benefits from the changes. ECIU University is committed to reshaping the relationship between higher education institutions and wider society. Universities must have the flexibility to reflect and adapt to changing societal conditions while shaping societies by tackling large challenges. The **micro-credentials movement** is a powerful and disruptive force and key change lever to achieve this ambition. Additionally, the development of challenge-based education in close cooperation with societal stakeholders enables continuous learners to access education more easily. Supporting continuous learners at a European scale is of great value to Europe.

Digital transformation

Universities need greater support for **digital transformation** to create a European ecosystem for collaboration. The EU must support the establishment of virtual campuses, Learning Management Systems, sharing and storage of data and support the use of artificial intelligence, big data and innovative digital tools to personalise learning and ensure large scale deployment of immersive learning experiences.

Our new reality is virtual. The digital transformation disrupts higher education, accelerated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Universities have moved beyond online courses and have built, or are in the process of building, fully online campuses using artificial intelligence, virtual reality, big data and blockchain. To maximise the opportunities that digitalisation grants our students and society, we need the EU. An example is ECIU University's Extended Reality campus, providing new standards for instant natural interaction. Here, our students, teachers, staff, researchers and stakeholders from all our 13 countries will work together in multiple realities.⁴ Another example is the ECIU University Digital eXperience Platform (DXP), which is an interactive platform that facilitates the connection of learners, teachers, researchers, and external stakeholders.

The development of the required digital platforms is expensive and time consuming. Digital connectedness and digital infrastructure of universities in Europe needs increased support.

STRENGTHENING THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF ERASMUS+

Smart digitalisation of mobility (ESCI, EWP)

To ensure the funding of Erasmus+ goes directly to the learner, and not the bureaucracy surrounding the learner, smart digitalisation of mobility should be a high priority in the coming years. Erasmus Without Paper and the European Students' Card Initiative are important tools for going digital and for bringing down the amount of paper currently part of an average student's file in an international office. However, Erasmus Without Paper has limitations, e.g., in its dashboard. Additionally, the implementation of the European Students' Card has been pushed back to 2025. Therefore, this topic needs to be the highest priority in the coming years. On a positive note, the Blended Intensive Programmes are very much welcomed by ECIU, to enable short blended mobility and innovative teaching and online collaboration.

Strengthen links between National Agencies

Cooperation partnerships have a lot of potential for allowing colleagues to learn to work in a transnational partnership, and also supporting grassroots innovation. By strengthening communication and alignment between National Agencies, duplication of project outcomes might be avoided. Furthermore, stronger cooperation between National Agencies could help to address gaps and barriers in terms of how rules are applied and interpreted in different countries.

4 More information about the ECI UXR Campus, November 23, 2021: <https://www.eciu.eu/news/xr-campus-virtual-reality-for-instant-collaboration-shared-understanding-and-focus>

The introduction of transnational consortia

A group of higher education institutions, termed a “mobility consortium”, can currently only apply for funding if each participating organisation in the group is established in the same EU member state or third country associated to the Erasmus+ programme.⁵ Other public and private organisations active in the labour market are equally eligible to participate in a mobility consortium.

ECIU proposes that a mobility consortium should be able to apply for funding if each participating organisation is established in any of the EU member states or third countries associated with the programme.

The creation of a European accreditation procedure and a scheme for providing mobility grants for students and continuous learners in the context of European Mobility Consortia would make it possible for institutions in several EU member states or countries associated with the Erasmus+ programme to pool their resources efficiently. This would allow them to work in deep cooperation towards developing new learning opportunities for higher education students and staff, as well as continuous learners. ECIU University is ready to contribute to the development of the present concept and to participate in any pilot project that may result from this debate.

Mobility

We need an even greater flexibility in organising mobility to match the learning opportunities we deliver. Although partnership agreements can be multilateral, mobility is still generally perceived as a bilateral endeavour. Mobility offers for students should be made available in multilateral formats, matching the objectives of the flexible learning pathways of the ECIU University. Innovative mobilities with several institutions can be achieved in practical terms. However, it is not possible to include this in the Learning Agreement, which is a trilateral contract between one sending and one receiving institution and the student. In this way, it is difficult for multilateral deep level cooperation alliances trying to innovate on mobility.

In addition, even better accessibility for physical mobility should be considered. Digital versions of mobility alone cannot solve the inclusion challenge. A greater focus on funding for accessibility of physical mobility, and stronger demands for institutions to provide real support mechanisms is recommended.