

Erasmus 2021-2027: Proposal by the European Commission (30 May 2018)

Feedback and Suggestions concerning Higher Education by Universities and Institutes of Music and the Arts in Germany

The Universities and Institutes of Music and the Arts in Germany welcome the proposal by the European Commission for the new Erasmus programme generation (2021-2027). We especially appreciate the continuation of positive aspects of the highly successful Erasmus+ programme and strongly support the plan of an increased budget which is inevitable if we are to increase the quality and quantity of the programme.

From our perspective as people who work at institutions that are in many aspects different to regular universities, the following aspects should be considered:

1. Flexibility

We would like to stress the importance of sufficient flexibility in the programme. Rules and programme guides are necessary to manage such a huge programme but rigid rules should never get out of touch with reality. They then run the risk of impeding rather than enabling mobility.

Our students and faculty are very international and open to exchange. However, they often do not have the possibility to fit long-term mobility periods into their schedule (e.g. due to a more project-based character of our degree programmes). Therefore we ask for more flexible programmes with shorter mobility periods that meet the needs and reality of life of our target group (like for example the former Intensive Programmes).

In addition, exchange processes at our institutions often differ from regular universities. Exchange students are only accepted after complex and lengthy selection processes which makes the project management more difficult. More flexibility within the Erasmus programme guidelines would help with its management.

2. Recognition

We acknowledge the importance and emphasis that is placed on recognition as one central pillar of the Erasmus programme. However, we have been observing an over-regulation of recognition throughout the current and former Erasmus programmes. Rigid rules, like for example the requirement to sign the Learning Agreement prior to the mobility period, do not improve the quality of recognition. We therefore ask for more flexibility. Recognition processes have been implemented for years now which is why we call for more trust in the universities and their management especially regarding recognition. We strongly believe that the percentage of successful recognition could even be increased with more flexibility.

As important as the “credit” in “credit mobility” is, there should always be left room for “soft skills” or informal recognition in the Learning Agreement. Especially students of art and music institutions often follow a more project-based curriculum that can hardly be measured (only) in credits. If we want the Erasmus programme to be comprehensively educational, we must provide our students with the opportunity to study outside their core curriculum and make intercultural experiences that might not be recognised in a formalised way, i.e. as a certain amount of credits.

3. Simplification / reducing bureaucracy

We welcome a simplification of the programme. Simplification in the sense that access to and participation in the programme as well as the management of the programme should become easier, both for students and staff, as well as universities, including small universities with limited resources.

One way to simplify the management of the programme would be to introduce proportionality. Smaller universities with smaller mobility numbers (and thus smaller Erasmus budget) and often less administrative resources in internationalisation like our universities should not be faced with the same amount of application and report work bigger universities with high mobility numbers (and thus bigger budget) have.

4. Finances

In order to maintain the level of financial support of the year 2020, the budget needs to be increased. Therefore we appreciate the plan of an increased overall Erasmus budget. However, if we are to provide learning and mobility opportunities to 12 million people (in the overall Erasmus programme) and new, quite ambitious elements are to be implemented (like the European Universities), this increase in the budget is not enough.

All the new programme elements must not be implemented at the expense of the regular mobility schemes. Especially small universities with limited administrative resources need more organisational support due to the increased administrative requirements (e.g. Mobility Tool+, OLS, etc.).

In addition to an increased budget, we ask for more flexibility: It would be helpful to universities throughout Europe if the reallocation of funds was not only possible within projects (like for example from Staff Mobility to Student Mobility or Organisational Support to Mobility) but also from one project year to another. The more flexible reallocation of funds would decrease the potential proportion of budget not used at the end of a project and increase the number of people who benefit from a learning and mobility experience.