



Position Paper

October 2017

Erasmus+ Mid-term evaluation

In summary, EUROCHAMBRES:

- Acknowledges the crucial role played by ERASMUS+ programme to foster the skills and mobility of young people.
- Regrets that the programme doesn't give a stronger emphasis to vocational education and training (VET)
- Considers that potential for cross-sectorial cooperation should be further untapped
- Regrets that procedures remain heavy and are not adapted to the specific characteristics of VET and the specific needs of the companies.
- Recommends fewer and more efficient IT tools
- Believes that language preparatory courses should continue to be implemented
- Highlights the need to take into account the specific requirements of apprentices and companies in the implementation of long-term mobility schemes

Introduction

EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe – 98% of which are SMEs – through members in 43 countries and a European network of 1700 regional and local Chambers.

Chambers are active players in in the development and delivery of education and training policies. Chambers are both business representatives and Vocational and Education Training (VET) providers. 80% of all Chambers of Commerce and Industry are involved in education and training and 48% of all Chambers deliver initial or continuous vocational education and training. Every year, nearly 1.8 million people receive training qualifications via the Chamber network and 600.000 apprenticeships are managed directly by Chambers, mainly in Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg and Spain.

In this context, EUROCHAMBRES and the Chamber network have been involved in the management of projects under ERASMUS+, the EU programme in the field of education, training, youth and sport for 2014-2020. EUROCHAMBRES believes the programme is a crucial tool to foster the skills and mobility of young people. EUROCHAMBRES welcomed the simplification effect which unified all former programmes under the umbrella of ERASMUS+. However, further the first three and a half years of implementation, EUROCHAMBRES has identified room for improvement in particular as far as vocational education and training are concerned. Specific comments can be found on the following pages.

Greater emphasis should be given to vocational education and training

The importance of VET as a tool for tackling youth unemployment and bridging the skills gap is acknowledged in various recent or forthcoming EU initiatives, including June 2016's New Skills Agenda for Europe, the EU Vocational Skills Week and the recently published proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships. Reflecting this, EUROCHAMBRES considers that stronger emphasis should be placed on VET within the ERASMUS+ programme. It is regrettable that, since the beginning of its implementation, ERASMUS+ has focussed too heavily on conventional academic higher education. The budget allocated to VET within ERASMUS+ should reflect the political priority attached to it. The urgent need to strengthen the transnational mobility of VET learners, teachers and trainers and to promote cooperation through partnerships at all levels between stakeholders concerned must be addressed through ERASMUS+. EUROCHAMBRES considers that it is crucial, in particular, to involve more apprentices in ERASMUS+ as one aspect in order to contribute increasing the attractiveness of VET overall. Regarding the new initiative Erasmus Pro, ECH approves the intention of the European Commission and the European Parliament to identify possibilities to foster the long-term mobility of apprentices. However the amount of budget allocated to these actions should reflect the actual demand and should not be to the detriment of financial support available for regular VET mobility since short-term mobility are already beneficial to the apprentices. Mobility longer than three months can be challenging for SMEs, as in some countries like in Germany, companies have to continue to pay their apprentices while they are abroad. The programme must therefore remain flexible and consider the specific needs and situation which can differ from a country to another and from a company to another.

Untapped potential for cross-sectorial cooperation

EUROCHAMBRES considers that the cross-sectorial cooperation which should have been fostered by the streamlined architecture of the programme should be more encouraged and the opportunities offered by ERASMUS+ further developed. Cooperation between schools / higher education institutions and companies should be in particular further promoted.

SME specific support needed to mitigate burdensome administrative procedures

Despite efforts to simplify the procedures, EUROCHAMBRES regrets the overall administrative burden of the programme for beneficiaries, in particular for small organisations, such as SMEs. ERASMUS+ should be better adapted to the specific characteristics of VET and the specific needs of businesses. SMEs in particular are less able to absorb onerous procedures in their internal structure and consequently more likely to refrain from applying at all.

The Programme Guide is too complex, too long and not user friendly enough. Registration and application procedures are too cumbersome. They could be improved with clearer role definition and guidelines. Contracts are too detailed and procedures for payment and reporting should be also simplified.

Moreover, forms, IT tools and rules have changed too frequently. These updates oblige the beneficiaries to focus on technical and administrative issues, to the detriment of the content of their activities.

Specific advice and support for companies, in particular for SMEs, which have less financial and human resources, should be foreseen to increase their participation in the programme. The European Chambers of Commerce and Industry play a crucial role in supporting SMEs to handle the management of sending or hosting apprentices transnationally.

Financial management: unit costs to be adapted to the living cost

The general use of the “unit cost system” has simplified the financial management of the programme. However, EUROCHAMBRES regrets that the levels of unit costs are not always in line with actual expenses. They are too often too low and should be adjusted to the cost of living in each country.

Fewer and more efficient IT tools are still needed

While the development of IT tools is a positive step and it should improve the management of the programme, EUROCHAMBRES considers that their functionality remains problematic. The IT tools are too many, too unstable, too time-consuming and not user-friendly enough. IT tools under Erasmus+ should be technically further improved, better connected and streamlined.

Online Language Support cannot replace existing language preparatory courses

The online language tool should not replace language courses. Linguistic and intercultural preparations should be reintroduced, with systematic support for apprentices and VET learners. EUROCHAMBRES regrets that the Online Language Support (OLS) is not working properly and is only available for the most widely spoken languages.

Take into account specific requirements of apprentices and companies in long-term mobility schemes

EUROCHAMBRES, while supporting the development and promotion of VET mobility, believes that long-term mobility schemes for apprenticeships (from three to twelve months) - ERASMUS PRO - should be implemented according to the actual demand in the different Member States and take into account the specific requirements of apprentices, who are on average younger than academic students participating in long-term mobility schemes. The requirements of businesses, in particular SMEs, for which a return on their investment in apprentices is of particular importance, also necessitate specific support for involvement in long-term apprenticeship mobility schemes.

EUROCHAMBRES is following closely the on-going discussions on the Midterm review of ERASMUS+ as well as the discussions on the human capital funding post 2020, which should give a strong signal that VET is considered as a priority in the efforts to enhance Europe’s growth and competitiveness.

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