*Draft*

# Open Public Consultation on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Programme

# Statement from the University of Oslo

## Introduction

The University of Oslo (UiO) appreciates the opportunity offered by the European Commission’s open public consultation to provide feedback on the Erasmus+ programme. UiO considers the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessor, the LLP programme, very valuable in terms of supporting and enhancing internationalization efforts. Erasmus+ provides opportunities for more cooperation and exchanges with universities both inside and outside of Europe, and cooperation with non-university entities. These developments provide valuable support for the University’s goals of increased interaction with society and enterprises and global cooperation.

UiO has identified several factors in the Erasmus+ programme that affect the University’s participation in the programme. Based on our experience we would like to suggest certain adjustments that we consider necessary to make full use of the programme’s potential.

In the following, the two main components of the programme are comment upon separately:

## Individual Mobility – KA1

**Student mobility**

The value of this sub-action remains high both for individual students and the university community at large. In general, mobility of 3 month to 12 month duration is still very valuable and should be maintained. However, in view of developments in delivery methods and structures of education in recent years, more diversified and flexible options should be included in the programme, such as combinations of virtual and physical mobility, short-term mobility integrated in study programmes. The former Intensive Programme measure in the LLP programme was a valuable supplement to more regular student mobility, enabling cooperating partners facilitating short-term exchanges within joint courses. UiO recommends the reintroduced of this measure as either a sub-action under KA1, or a separate and emphasized activity under cooperation projects (see below).

The two sub-actions under KA1; KA103 (European mobility) and KA107 (Global mobility) have currently different allocation rules. For KA107 projects it is challenging to assure a sustainable cooperation with mobility grants allocated for only two years. The Erasmus+ priority areas change from one call to the next making long term exchange cooperation difficult. UiO propose that KA107 adopt similar allocation rule as for KA103 with focus on more long-term exchange cooperation with selected strategic partners in partner countries outside Europe.

The Online Language Support tool is valuable for Erasmus+. In particular the language test component is a useful tool for both institutions and students. However, the impact of OLS in terms of language learning is limited. Students, offered the OLS online language courses, follow to a little extent the full course package. There might be various reasons why the students do not priorities the OLS course. In general students inform us that they prefer language courses offered on site at the host institutions, and/or intensive courses in the host country prior to their exchange. We will therefore recommend a better and more explicit support for host institutions to develop language courses. It is important that the host institutions are allowed flexibility to create models of language learning adapted to local needs. At the University of Oslo a MOOC for Norwegian language learning was created for this purpose, as a supplement to regular Norwegian language courses.

Proof of language proficiency has lately been introduced by several of our Erasmus+ partner institutions, often with reference to the students’ OLS test results. Since this is a new development, clarifications of the language policy within the Erasmus+ program needs to be addressed more explicitly in the Program guide, keeping in mind one of Erasmus+ objectives: *“To improve the teaching and learning of languages and to promote the Union's broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness”*.

In general the administrative burden for participants with regard to student mobility is high. The administrative procedures related to scholarship payments and Learning Agreements are both complicated and cumbersome. In particular the Learning Agreement (LA) is often mentioned by the International Office, the Department coordinators and the students to be an administrative hurdle. The LA procedures deviate often to a large extent with the admission and credit transfer procedures at the different host institutions. UiO value the quality assures of credit transfer for exchange students. However, we recommend a more flexible approach taking local admission and approval systems into consideration. A new digital LA system could be a good tool for a more efficient quality assurance.

**Staff Mobility**

Staff mobility is a very valuable tool for personal and professional development, learning and sharing knowledge establishing networks for future collaboration. With the financing provided through Erasmus+, the opportunities for such activities multiply for the University staff. However, there are several obstacles to fully exploit the opportunities, some of which are related to institutional or national issues, some to the programme itself. As for the latter, we would like to highlight the obstacles most mentioned and forward some proposals for future changes and developments:

Teaching requirements with 8 hour per week for teaching staff mobility is not well adapted and difficult to implement in regular teaching schedules. The educational value and outcome of the mobility period should be more in focus than a strict formal requirement in terms of hours. More flexible activities should be introduced in addition to regular teaching, as for example preparation of education and research cooperation between the host and home institutions and individual researchers, preparation time for teaching of new or specially adapted classes, thesis supervision, and curriculum development. This would contribute to the overall aims of increasing internationalisation, cooperative teaching and learning and the overall quality of education.

For high cost countries like Norway the financial support is insufficient especially for incoming staff, as it does not cover full costs. Also for outgoing staff increasingly participation is discouraged by low rates which require additional self -financing. The considerable co-financing in terms of in-kind contribution of staff time required by the programme should be underlined. It is therefore reasonable that extra costs are fully financed.

**Erasmus Mundus Joint degrees**

The Erasmus Mundus joint degrees offer a wonderful opportunity to merge academic knowledge from different institutions and countries, exploiting synergies and increase the quality and diversity of master programs at the participating institutions.

Unfortunately the relatively short duration of the projects with only three student intakes, has a negative impact in terms of sustainability of the study programmes and encouraging long-term transnational partnerships. A more long-term sustainable model should be developed.

The mobility grants within this action are considered well-funded. However, these projects are costly to run, in particular for the coordinator, and a higher level of financing should be made available for administration of the programmes.

Sustainability of programmes for which funding has ended should be supported by the Commission through access to promotion and communication channels. It would be very helpful if former projects could apply to keep the label for a period of several years and be promoted in an Erasmus Mundus catalogue.

## Cooperation projects – KA2 and KA3

Key action 2 (Strategic Partnership, Knowledge alliances and Capacity Building) and Key Action 3 (Support of Policy Reform) open up for a rich variety of cooperation between educational and none-educational institutions and represents a unique possibility to meet different educational aims in a wide range of subject areas.

UiO experience, however, that the different sub-actions are constructed in a way which does not always reflect the needs of the potential participators. The criteria and requirements for each sub-action are often seen as rigid and formalistic, deviating from the intended project aims. The applicants are forced to modify and adjust the project proposals and adapt to the relevant action call to meet the requirements.

UiO propose that KA2 and KA3 calls open up for a greater variety of projects. Both in terms of financing measures for small scale projects with a greater variety of approaches, and more substantial complex projects with more partners involve.

The programme is currently also seen as overly bureaucratic, with heavy reporting requirements not proportionate to the limited funding levels. Compared to H2020 the programme appears less accessible. Both the application and reporting requirements should be streamlined and simplified further. In addition, information on the requirements should be improved. In regard to the application phase, open and timely access to criteria, requirements and conditions, such as rates, eligible expenditures and participants have been lacking. All relevant information for each action or sub-action should be available in one manual. Presently, necessary programme information is dispersed and not always available in time for the application deadline.

Concerning financing, the rates are not always sufficient to cover cost in a high cost country like Norway. The rates should be adapted to the cost level of the coordinator country/the country where the activities take place. In addition, the financing of administrative costs of running the projects is too low.

As UiO emphasis support for partnerships with third countries, we could like to see the UNs Sustainable Development Goals, which all participating countries have adhered to, better integrated into the programme, as well as an open to the world policy in line with the EU Research agenda. The general funding should be increased also for this objective. The proportion of funding for each country and regions should be proportionate to the size and importance of the higher education sector in these countries.

## Closing remarks

Erasmus+ is a cornerstone programme for educational cooperation within Europe. Both for exchange and project cooperation the opportunities within the program is highly valuable. However, we believe that some adjustments of the programme structure and activities included in the programme will increase the participation and the educational output further.

We would like to see an increased streamlining of procedures overall in the program across the different actions, by using the same application platforms, digital tools, and reporting systems.

There is also a wish for greater flexibility and a less rigid reporting system in all Key Actions. This should include; flexible student exchange with both regular semester exchange and a combination including virtual learning, greater flexibility for staff mobility including a wider range of activities, and more flexibility within project cooperation in KA2 and KA3.

UiO would also like to see an increased emphasis on synergies across different EU programmes. Research cooperation in Horizon2020 should to a stronger degree be linked to educational activities in Erasmus+.