

Erasmus and the Bologna process

Promoting shared values through mobility, reform, and common instruments

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Erasmus is the European Union's flagship education programme supporting student and staff mobility. Indeed, it is among the best known of all EU initiatives precisely because it has touched the everyday lives of citizens in a tangible way and is arguably the one EU project which has universal approval and has tapped into grassroots popular support for European integration among citizens, particularly youth. Young people, at a critical stage in their personal development, experience the European ideal through freedom of movement, contributing to a form of soft integration, consistent with the idealism of Europe's post-war architects of the integration process. This contrasts with the common interpretation of integration as driven by economic interests and leading to the formal, legal integration of the Single European Market, an explanation suggested by, among others, Milward (2000), Moravcsik (1998), and Kapteyn (1996).

The Erasmus programme provides funding for education, training, and sport.¹ It mainly supports young people under the age of 25 but is open to participants of all ages. The EU views Erasmus as a set of instruments to promote skills development and to address socio-economic issues such as unemployment and social cohesion.

From a quantitative perspective, Erasmus has been highly successful. In 1987, the first year of the programme, just over 3,000 higher education (HE) students spent a study period abroad. For the 30th anniversary of the programme in 2017, the European Commission published *From Erasmus to Erasmus+: A Story of 30 Years*, indicating that a total of 9 million people had received Erasmus support (European Commission, 2017a). Almost 2 million students from Europe and beyond benefited from Erasmus+ between 2014 and 2016 alone (European Commission, 2017a). The annual number of Erasmus+ higher education student and staff participants in 2018 was 423,648, and across all components, the programme recorded 852,940 participants (Erasmus+, 2019, p. 17). It can reliably be asserted that by January 2020, the cumulative total of HE Erasmus students surpassed 5 million (Erasmus+, 2017). If all strands of Erasmus are included, the cumulative figure may be around 10 million, extrapolating from the same data (European Commission, 2020a).

The Bologna process was formally inaugurated with the signing of the Bologna Declaration by 29 countries in June 1999 (EHEA, 1999). As we argue in the following, the Bologna process grew out of and owed its inspiration to Erasmus and to a large extent depends on Erasmus as a vehicle for realising its objectives, so the two have become entwined. Its origins lay in an agreement in 1998 between four ministers of higher education from France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom who signed the Sorbonne Declaration on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System (EHEA, 1998). This focused on the recognition of first- and second-cycle qualifications (bachelor and master level) using the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the incorporation of mobility in degrees, and the implementation of the Lisbon Convention. The latter, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, is significant because it was promoted by the Council of Europe together with UNESCO (Council of Europe, 1997). It was not a European Union initiative but a document potentially applying to 47 countries. It was subsequently recognised and adopted by the European Union.

Piqued by the 'exclusivity' of the Sorbonne four-country meeting, a ministerial conference attended by 29 countries was convened in Bologna the following year. They confirmed the Sorbonne Declaration and inaugurated the Bologna process, which was designed to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The process quickly acquired momentum, and in 2021 includes 49 countries, plus the European Commission.² In March 2010, in the Budapest-Vienna Declaration, the signatory ministers declared that the original goal had been realised, officially launching the EHEA (EHEA, 2010).

Erasmus is the largest structural and organised student and staff mobility programme in the world and is the model to which other international student mobility programmes aspire. Since 1994, it has changed from depending on the initiative of individual academics to one for which the participating university has to accept responsibility.

In parallel with Erasmus, the Commission launched ambitious smaller programmes for schools (Comenius), vocational education (Leonardo), adult education (Grundtvig), languages (Lingua), and information communications technology (Minerva). Initially free standing, these were combined under a single programme, Socrates 1 and 2 (1994–2006) (European Commission, 1997), followed by the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007–2013) (European Commission, 2009). This finally assimilated the Leonardo vocational scheme and extended the potential for work placements and traineeships to all higher education students regardless of the subject of their degree.

Integrating the vocational programme Leonardo into the Lifelong Learning Programme provided an opportunity for a shared mindset between vocational and so-called academic education, but the two strands developed in parallel and in somewhat opposing directions. Beginning in 1989, Erasmus developed the European Credit Transfer System, albeit initially without a full credit accumulation mechanism. ECTS might have been applied in the vocational field, but a rival European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) system was used instead (ECVET, n.d.).

The divide may explain why the EU has had less impact on vocational education. In the context of EU aspirations regarding enterprise and innovation, social cohesion, and the development of artificial intelligence, a more comprehensively integrated approach to tertiary education could have strengthened the status of vocational training. Had this proved possible, the EU might have achieved the permeability between vocational and higher education which has long been a stated policy objective. This divide continues in the new 2021–2027 programme.

In 2014, motivated by the popularity and name recognition of Erasmus, all the education programmes were merged into a single new programme. The European Commission

proposed what was deemed an inclusive title, 'Erasmus for All', but this raised a series of semantic and philosophical objections. Agreement on the title threatened to delay the new programme, but after much wrangling, in 2013, the uninspiring title Erasmus+ (sometimes written 'plus') was adopted. This continues under the Commission's multiannual finance period 2021–27.

Mobility has been the hallmark of the Erasmus programme. Study mobility involves an integrated period of study of between 3 and 12 months at a partner institution, usually in another EU Member State and perhaps more formatively, living, working, and socialising with fellow students from many countries (Luca, 2019). Most higher education institutions (HEIs) have multiple-subject bilateral partnerships to facilitate student exchange within disciplines. This is important with respect to recognition for credits gained from the study abroad. Erasmus work placements or traineeships (between 2 and 12 months) should, where possible, be fully integrated within the study programme.

Several Erasmus Impact Studies (European Commission, 2019a) report that mobility extends students' educational experience; develops their multicultural understanding and skills, adaptability and flexibility, resilience, and confidence; and enhances employability and expectations for career advancement (see Table 5.1). It also contributes to a genuine sense of European and

Table 5.1 Benefits of Erasmus+ for students – based on Erasmus+ Impact Study (European Commission, 2019b)

Asset	Evidence, experience
Living abroad	23% of Erasmus+ students took employment abroad on graduation (15% non-Erasmus)
Enhanced employability	64% of employers viewed an exchange experience as positive asset, identifying better 'soft skills' as significant
Erasmus alumni experience different teaching and learning practices	66% report gaining new perspectives on learning, future study; 80% of first-cycle (bachelor) mobile students report wanting to go on to further/second-cycle (master) studies
Better ideas and plans for future careers	10% set up their own businesses on graduation 75% report 'clearer' career plans
Travel	Learning about and experiencing another country, enhanced confidence
No tuition fees for year abroad, Erasmus grant assistance	Learning self-reliance and finance management
Gain in international and intercultural experience	Openness to and tolerance of others
Friendships and partnerships that could last a lifetime	Life changing, life enhancing
Traineeship/work placement	40% gained employment with their work provider on graduation
Love	23% Erasmus+ graduates living with a partner are in an 'international relationship' (13% non-mobile)
Stronger sense of European identity	32% express their identity 'only' or 'primarily' as European post-mobility; (25% pre-mobility). Better understanding of 'Europe' and EU affairs; 90% report positive view of 'Europe' and the EU

international citizenship and identity (European Commission, 2019a, pp. 181–182; Teichler, 2015). Umberto Eco expressed the essence of Erasmus as follows:

Erasmus has created the first generation of young Europeans. I call it a sexual revolution: a young Catalan man meets a Flemish girl – they fall in love, they get married and they become European, as do their children. The Erasmus idea should be compulsory – not just for students, but also for taxi drivers, plumbers, and other workers.

(Eco, cited in Riotta, 2012)

A former pro-vice chancellor at Coventry University emphasises the value of study abroad:

Every home student I have ever spoken to who studied abroad has found it to be transformative. It changes lives, and this is what universities are about. It gives them a global mindset, a sense of intellectual achievement very early on in their careers.

(David Pilsbury, cited in Baty, 2009)

In addition to the student benefits, higher education institution staff participating in Erasmus+ exchanges report multiple benefits to their professional lives, learning from increased exposure to and willingness to use different and often innovative teaching methods. These include computer-based technologies, open educational resources, blended learning, mixed media, and better preparedness to use visiting staff. Mobile staff also report enhanced intercultural openness and understanding (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 98–99).

The contribution of Erasmus to HE and youth policy is relatively unknown among the general public, and there is little appreciation that the geographic reach and influence of Erasmus extends well beyond the EU Member States and an additional six non-EU 'Programme' countries (Republic of North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey).³ Erasmus distinguishes between 'Programme' countries and 'Partner' countries, those neighbouring the EU as well as other designated Partner Countries by region (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 21–24). Erasmus-related initiatives exist in the United States, Canada, Latin America, Africa, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), China, Russia, and many other regions (European Commission, 2019b, p. 25). Moreover,

[w]ith about 17% of the Erasmus+ budget going towards projects and scholarships with a worldwide focus, the period stretching from 2014–2020 [sees] funding translate into 180,000 students and staff moving between Europe and the rest of the world; 1,000 capacity building projects for higher education; and 30,000 scholarships for students worldwide to take part in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree programmes.

(Erasmus+, 2020)

Bologna developed from a state-led initiative and has remained in theory the preserve of signatory states. It is an intergovernmental process. However, Bologna incorporates and promotes principles, practices, and instruments developed and underpinned by Erasmus student mobility. This commitment to student mobility is reinforced in the Leuven Communiqué in 2009, which committed EHEA countries to the target that 'at least 20 per cent of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad' (EHEA, 2009). This objective was endorsed by the European Commission in 2011 as an EU target (European Commission, 2011). Although the European Commission was not an original signatory, it subsequently joined the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG, 2020) and has what might

be termed a symbiotic relationship with the process. Indeed, the only body which has proved capable of realising the Bologna transnational aspirations, through Erasmus and other initiatives, is the European Commission. The BFUG, established in 1999, is the body tasked with implementing Ministerial Communiqués relating to the Bologna process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (BFUG, 2020).

Before looking in detail at Erasmus and Bologna, we provide a brief theoretical contextualisation of these initiatives and their relationship to European integration.

Erasmus, Bologna, and European integration

A feature of Erasmus is grassroots involvement and initiative. Individuals and universities seek and set up partnerships and organise student and staff mobility. They manage processes, ensure quality, and implement credit recognition using ECTS. The Bologna process is under Member State control, albeit through instruments derived from Erasmus, such as 'the promotion of mobility', 'European co-operation in quality assurance', the 'use of ECTS', 'European dimensions in the Higher Education curriculum', and 'inter-institutional cooperation' (EHEA, 1999). The Commission Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DGEAC) is responsible for Erasmus and represents the European Commission in the Bologna process (EHEA).

DGEAC has helped to consolidate the EHEA through the Erasmus programme and improve quality, transparency, and recognition between national jurisdictions. Since 1999, this work has provided the main facilitation of the Bologna process.

Erasmus and the Bologna process fit with a seminal interpretation of Europeanisation. Radaelli (2003) describes Europeanisation in a way that reflects the dual processes of EU-level policy being incorporated into state-level governance and having formal and informal impact on institutions and discourse. Integration is achieved through various levels, down to grassroots implementation, which is dependent on cooperation between institutions and actors. Radaelli defines Europeanisation as:

processes of a) construction b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic . . . discourse, political structures and public policies.

(2003, p. 30)

The appropriateness of this definition to Erasmus and the Bologna process, meaning the construction of the EHEA, is striking. There are important differences between the two: Erasmus was created by the Commission and is Commission-driven, although dependent on local actors and buy-in from higher education institutions. Erasmus must be approved by the European Council and the European Parliament, which enhances its legitimacy at the Member State level. It has received powerful support from the European Parliament.

In contrast, Bologna is Member State-driven. However, Bologna (the EHEA) is strengthened by the Commission adopting and promoting its frameworks and instruments, with ECTS imported directly from Erasmus. Erasmus and the Bologna process combine goals that are promoted at the European level, by ministers in the case of Bologna and by the Commission for Erasmus. Both are facilitated, implemented, and maintained by bottom-up activism in universities, agencies, and stakeholders. EU institutions provide steering towards cooperation, which contributes to soft integration. The qualifier 'soft' is important: unlike single market integration, which is enforced by law, Erasmus depends upon shared aspiration, common interests, mutually

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reinforced norms, and the adoption of frameworks and quality guidelines. The impact on HEIs is profound: large-scale reciprocal mobility, the use of the European Credit Transfer System, and growth in joint programmes, accelerated by the innovative Erasmus Mundus joint master's, have all contributed to long-term partnerships and networks.

The Erasmus and Bologna experience demonstrate aspects of multilevel governance (MLG) (Nugent, 2003; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003, p. 115; Marks and Hooghe, 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 2001a, 2001b). Bologna proceeds through biannual ministerial communiqués proposing actions to be executed on a voluntary basis by each signatory state. The European Commission contributes 'guidance'.

The Commission manages and monitors Erasmus through the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) within the Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, subject to approval by the European Council and Parliament. Both Erasmus and the Bologna or EHEA process depend on Member State and institutional implementation.

MLG analysis 'examine(s) the interaction of sets of institutions, norms, and values that react to and influence international relations' (Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003, p. 257). The influence on policy, and its implementation, show a form of 'heterarchical' influence from various institutions and actors across different levels from the European and supranational, the intergovernmental, and the sub-national and local (Mérand et al., 2011, p. 124). The Bologna Follow Up Group helps to draft the communiqués, which set a policy agenda (see EHEA, n.d.). The range of representation in the BFUG contributes to the heterarchical nature of the Bologna process. BFUG participants include the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the European Students Union (ESU).⁴ The Prague Communiqué stressed the importance of engagement and input from HEIs, and the central role of students in creating the EHEA (2001).

A further process at work is the open method of coordination (OMC), an approach towards building policy cooperation that the Commission has championed since the early 1990s (McCormick, 2015, p. 297; Smismans, 2019, p. 133). Pollack (2015, p. 42) refers to OMC as a means to 'reconcile the imperatives of joint governance with respect for national control and subsidiarity' (the Maastricht principle by which decisions should be taken at the closest level possible to the individual citizen [Kubicek, 2017, p. 208]). Wallace and Reh (2015, p. 108) refer to the efficacy of OMC in achieving 'soft integration'. Grassroots engagement ensures Europe-wide implementation of Erasmus and Bologna initiatives with institutional backing at the European level, mainly from the Commission (Drachenberg and Brianson, 2016, pp. 207–209). Key processes inherited from the Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2000) include goal setting, fixing guidelines, benchmarking and monitoring, peer review, and adopting measures while taking national and regional differences into account (Drachenberg and Brianson, 2016, p. 206). OMC is explicitly referred to in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide as the means to achieve programme objectives (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 11 and 323). Drachenberg and Brianson (2016, p. 208) note that the Commission's European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (European Commission, 2018) acted as a catalyst for Member States to create compatible frameworks where previously none existed.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) method is anchored in the European Agenda for Culture. It is a flexible but structured way for European Union Member States to cooperate in the field of culture, supported by the European Commission. Through an exchange of good practices between EU countries it contributes to improving the design and implementation of policies which are outside regulatory instruments.

(DGEAC, 2019, p. 15)

We suggest that both Erasmus and the Bologna process contribute significantly to soft integration through Europeanisation as defined previously. They also contribute to the construction of European identity (Corbett, 2005). Erasmus has been the driving force in developing inter-institution cooperation and a range of networks such as the Santander Universities network, the Coimbra Group, the Compostela Group, and UNICA, a network of 49 universities from 37 capital cities in Europe, catering to 1.9 million students. More recently, the ambitious European Universities Initiative was launched, again under the Erasmus+ programme (European Universities, 2020; European Commission, 2020b). These networks and the European Universities Initiative all contribute to 'Europeanisation' and integration.

The overarching purposes of the European Commission are set out in the proposal for the 2021–2027 Erasmus+ programme:

The Programme is a key component of building a European Education Area. . . . In its Communication on Strengthening European identity through education and culture, the Commission highlighted the pivotal role of education, culture and sport in promoting active citizenship and common values amongst the youngest generations. Strengthening European identity and fostering the active participation of individuals in the democratic processes is crucial for the future of Europe and our democratic societies.

(Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 20)

The explicit references to 'strengthening European identity' through education programmes illustrate the potential of soft power to achieve results (European Commission, 2017b).

The reference to the European Education Area, to be realised by 2025, is distinct from the EHEA and applies only to EU Member States. It is significant because it sets both an agenda and the means for coordinated action to reach the goal intended (European Commission, 2020c).

History, development, and key Erasmus-related frameworks

The idea of student exchanges as a vehicle through which to promote the European ideal has deep roots and is integral to the European integration process. The 1963 Treaty of Friendship, known as the Elysée Treaty, between France and Germany was built on citizens seeking a new Europe of reconciliation and mutual understanding. The Treaty included commitments to prioritise the learning of French and German as second languages in both countries and to develop student exchanges between them (Corbett, 2005). Corbett (2005, 72) says the widespread student unrest in 1968 was in part a youth-led appeal for 'more Europe'. Soon afterwards and feeding off similar sentiment, the precursor to Erasmus, the Joint Study Programme (JSP), was introduced by the European Commission in 1976. It was an immediate success in the nine European Economic Community (EEC) Member States. They were joined by Greece, Spain, and Portugal when these countries acceded to the EEC in the 1980s. The United Kingdom was the most active participant, averaging over ten years around 67 per cent of all the JSP exchanges (European Commission, 1987).

Having established a strong and tested network, the JSP provided the platform for the inauguration of Erasmus in 1987. Erasmus operates under legislation approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, but responsibility for policy and management of the programme rests with the European Commission through its Directorate General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. Within DGEAC, the Education, Audio-Visual and Culture Executive Agency provides arms-length management assisted by national agencies in each Member State. These are responsible for the devolved actions concerning student and staff mobility. The

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national agencies give each country a sense of programme ownership and relate to their institutions on a day-to-day and personal basis. Such a structure may appear cumbersome but should be set against the scale of the programme and the range of activities it now covers. Since 2014, Erasmus+, has developed a global dimension with International Credit Mobility (European Commission, 2020d, n.d.a, n.d.b).

From 2014, Erasmus+ incorporated the Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies, known as TEMPUS, which promoted institutional cooperation between the EU and the 29 Partner Countries, focusing on capacity building, reform, and modernisation of higher education systems in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans, and the Mediterranean region, that is, countries that formed part of the Commission-defined 'EU Neighbourhood' (Prodi, 2002). TEMPUS explicitly endorsed the political role of higher education in driving change, with mobility being a central instrument, although not on the same scale as Erasmus. As formal Partners in the European Neighbourhood Policy, Partner Countries not only participate in specific Actions within Erasmus+, but they also have support from their own National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs).

Erasmus+ had a budget of €14.7bn for 2014–20, plus €1.68 billion for international mobility. In the next multiannual period, 2021–27, this will increase to €26.2 billion (European Commission, n.d.c). Although a large figure, it is modest given the objectives, the scope of the education fields involved, the number of countries, and the demand for participation. Erasmus+ built on previous initiatives, providing more explicit support for international impact beyond Europe. It also dovetails with other policy fields, such as the EU social and employment agenda. Erasmus+ focuses on improving employability and tackling youth unemployment. New priorities for Erasmus 2021–27 are shown in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1 New Erasmus priorities 2021–27 (Source: European Commission, 2020e, pp. 3–4)

Inclusion and diversity:

- Equal opportunities and access of underrepresented organisations and participants
- Better outreach to participants with fewer opportunities and disadvantaged
- Dismantling barriers related to, for example, disabilities, socio-economic status, discrimination, geographical location

Digital transformations:

- Meaningful contribution by stimulating innovation and bridging Europe's knowledge, skills, and competences gap
- Take up of digital technologies and of innovative and open pedagogies in education, training, youth, and sport

Participation in democratic life:

- Knowledge and awareness about European matters
- Active citizenship and ethics in lifelong learning
- Social and intercultural competences, critical thinking, and media literacy

Environmental sustainability and climate goals:

- Awareness-raising about environmental and climate change challenges
- Competences in various environmental sustainability relevant sectors
- Development of green sectoral skills, strategies, and methodologies, as well as future-oriented curricula that better meet the needs of individuals

The new programme supports volunteering, vocational training, and apprenticeships. Essential to the Erasmus+ ethos is fighting social exclusion: one-in-three youth mobility participants is from a disadvantaged background (European Commission, 2020a, p. 2), broadly defined as of low socio-economic status and often children of migrants (Guerin, 2014, p. 2). The Erasmus+ Programme Guide defines disadvantaged as having a disability or special needs; low educational attainment; economic obstacle/low standard of living; cultural differences, immigrants or children of immigrants, cultural marginalisation; health problems, chronic illness; social obstacles, victims of discrimination; geographical obstacles, peripheral regions, poorly served areas (European Commission, 2019b, p. 10).

Erasmus+ includes large-scale projects supporting strategic partnerships between universities, knowledge alliances, sector skill alliances that consider employer perspectives, capacity building, and IT support platforms. From 2014, the International Credit Mobility (ICM) action has supported outward and inward staff mobility for teaching and teacher training and limited student mobility to virtually all regions of the world, thus achieving a truly global dimension (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 22–24), which is a further objective of the EHEA.

The evolution and growth of Erasmus is not represented simply by the statistics of growth in mobility and the number of participating HEIs but also by the ways in which it both revealed and responded to challenges arising from large-scale mobility. The first was the need for student grants. This was partially addressed through the allocation of small 'top-up' grants for student and later for staff mobility. It was intended that each Member State and, for staff, their institutions would supplement this to facilitate and encourage mobility. Grants from the EU were supposed to reinforce awareness and appreciation of the European dimension of mobility.

The second challenge was more complex and harder to resolve and related to broad questions about the quality assurance of the mobility experience. Erasmus requires full academic recognition for study or work placement mobility. In practice, this has proved problematic, partly because of national and institutional regulations and resistance from institutions and academics. There was no agreed-upon currency for the transfer of academic achievement or structures to facilitate recognition. Moreover, the requirements of each institution or country were not always well formulated or translatable, so even if there was a will to acknowledge academic success during mobility, the basis for doing so was not always readily available. The solution to this dilemma was the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System, a system of academic credits explained in the following.

It should be noted that central planks of the Bologna process are mobility and the use of credits as the means for recognition. Both the original Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration have explicit references to the use of ECTS, demonstrating from the outset the Bologna debt to the Erasmus programme.

A further and critical challenge arose from what many regarded as the essence of the success of the JSPs and the early days of Erasmus. The initiative in starting, managing, and maintaining

exchanges was several years, and their role was, for example, in the past. In a particular case, it was weeks from a retiring professor colleague at the University of students' plans.

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exchanges was taken by inspirational and committed individual academics, in many cases over several years, often facing reservations on the part of colleagues and their institutions. Although their role was understood and appreciated, reliance on individuals had an innate vulnerability, for example, if the individual moved university, changed responsibilities, or simply lost interest. In a particularly egregious example, a year in Grenoble for ten University of Kent students was weeks from starting when a new Grenoble faculty dean vetoed the arrangement set up by a retiring professor, a seasoned advocate for student mobility over several years. Fortunately, a colleague at Jean Moulin Lyons III University stepped in at virtually no notice to rescue ten students' plans for a fully integrated year abroad.⁵

Indeed, universities' commitment was often lacking. In response to the sometimes rather improvised process of managing student mobility, the Commission embarked, under Socrates 2, on a new approach based on an institutional contract involving a charter of obligations (see the following section on ECHE). This generated more institutional engagement, but some would argue that this was at the expense of the academic champions who continue to play a critical role in successful mobility.

The Commission's appreciation of the need for action on academic recognition led to a pilot trial of the ECTS (starting in 1989) which prescribed the number of credits for an academic year as 60. The pilot involved a limited number of institutions who applied to join the project and was a great success. Soon the use of ECTS for mobility became an Erasmus requirement, and guides on the implementation of ECTS, drafted by ECTS experts, were published on a regularly updated basis by the Commission. Despite its success, ensuring the correct use of ECTS remained a concern, as some universities denied full credit recognition to returning students. The Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project helped to address this problem by focusing on the quantified relationship between workload and credits (EHEA, 2003). The concept of student workload has manifest difficulties involving a sense of the norm or 'average' student. Nevertheless, linking the student's workload to credits marked a real departure towards a more student-centred or learner-oriented perspective. Workload must have a result expressed in terms of learning outcomes. This marriage of workload, learning outcomes, and assessment linked to achieving learning outcomes is now embodied in the ECTS Guide (European Commission, 2020f).

A further indication of the success of ECTS is that it has become the basis for accumulating credits towards the award of a qualification. This enhances the transparency, readability, and recognition of degree programmes throughout Europe. Furthermore, the ECTS Guide, developed and owned by the European Commission, has been adopted as a formal instrument of the Bologna process EHEA (2015a).

The Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area⁶

The success of ECTS and the impact of Erasmus is demonstrated in the Bologna process, launched in 1999 (European Commission, 2020g). It is doubtful whether the Bologna process would have been launched, or received such strong intergovernmental support, without Erasmus, which became a crucial vehicle for implementing Bologna objectives. Three of the initial six core Bologna objectives draw directly on Erasmus: promotion of mobility, establishment of a system of credits, and promotion of the European dimension in higher education. The other three are closely related to the objectives of the Erasmus programme set out in 1987 (European Commission, 1988). Since 1999, the Bologna process has sought to prioritise various 'action lines', a set of objectives that have developed over the years through the regular communiqués produced at ministerial meetings. See Box 5.2.

Box 5.2 Key Bologna/EHEA 'action lines' 1999–2016

- 1 System of easily readable and comparable degrees.
- 2 System essentially based on two cycles: bachelor, masters.
- 3 System of credits – ECTS.
- 4 Mobility – for at least 20% of EHEA graduates.
- 5 European cooperation in quality assurance.
- 6 European dimension in HE.
- 7 Promotion of lifelong learning.
- 8 Higher education institutions and students as partners in establishing EHEA.
- 9 Promotion of 'attractiveness' of the EHEA to the world – external dimension.
- 10 Doctoral level as the third cycle; synergy between EHEA and ERA.
- 11 Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- 12 Social dimension: accessibility of higher education to all.
- 13 Fostering graduate employability.
- 14 Student-centred learning.
- 15 Data collection.
- 16 Enhancing quality and relevance of learning and teaching.
- 17 Meet United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

One of the first achievements was to articulate a framework for qualifications using ECTS as the key component in describing first- and second-cycle qualifications, allocating 60 ECTS credits to a full academic year, 180 to a first-cycle programme of three years (240 for a four-year programme), and 90–120 credits to a second-cycle programme (EHEA, 2005). The third cycle represents doctoral studies, for which there is no prescribed credit system (Table 5.2 below). The number of Bologna (EHEA) countries formally adopting this system (now 49) is a testament to the impact of Erasmus, which provided the impetus for defining the European Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (2005).

The EHEA EQF is separate from, but compatible with, the Commission's more extensive European Qualifications Framework, which describes eight levels of competence through school up to full professional competence (European Commission, 2018).

The extraordinary success of ECTS was marked in 2015, when it was formally adopted by all Bologna signatory countries as the designated credit system for the 49 countries in the EHEA. The ECTS Guide (European Commission, 2020f) is a quality assurance and enhancement document with advice and good practice recommendations. Its achievements are also manifest in other regions worldwide. In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a major project for harmonising higher education, European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region, known as SHARE, has focused on shared understanding of credits. It draws on the ECTS model, though it is not yet a full credit transfer system (ASEM, 2017). In Africa, the African Union Commission uses the Tuning and Harmonization of Higher Education in Africa programme to promote an African credit system (Tuning Africa, 2016; Tuning Academy, 2016). A similar process is underway in Central and South America, using a credit system closely allied to ECTS.

Notwithstanding the success of ECTS, recognition remained an ongoing concern, as did other aspects of the management and organisation of mobility, including the proper management of support systems for mobile students. To engage universities, the Commission contract

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Table 5.2 Framework for qualifications of the EHEA (also known as EHEA EQF [EHEA, 2005])

First cycle (bachelor level)	Three to four years (including 'short cycle'). 180–240 ECTS
[Short cycle (pre-bachelor level diploma)	Two years min. 120 ECTS
Second cycle (master level)	Normally two years 90–120 ECTS at M-level Min. 60 ECTS at M-level (e.g. UK integrated masters)
Third cycle (doctoral/PhD level)	Normally three to four years full-time, not linked to credits

involved formal commitment to quality principles in what has become the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). This is a prerequisite for HEI participation in Erasmus+. The ECHE includes a requirement for a formal three-way learning agreement between the mobile student, the home university, and the host university. The learning agreement concept has also been adopted by ASEAN countries and in the intra-Africa mobility programme. The ECHE, with its annotated guidelines, has effectively become a good practice guide to quality assurance and enhancement in student and staff mobility (European Commission, 2020h).

The success of Erasmus mobility and the focus on quality and organisation encouraged HEIs to set up administration frameworks to handle mobility, supporting incoming and outgoing students, and staff. This created a new profession of European or international office administrator and led to the formation in 1989 of the European Association for International Education (EAIE). This body has over 3,000 members in 94 countries. It undertakes research and training and stages an annual conference of administrators and academics engaged in European cooperation. A parallel organisation, the European University Association (EUA), represents over 800 universities in 48 European countries. Both organisations are significant contributors to the international professionalisation of higher education and to the sharing of good practice, bringing benefits to the sector, its employees, and students.

Erasmus and the European Commission have been the main vehicles for turning the objectives of biannual Bologna ministerial communiqués into reality. Originally excluded from the process, the Commission has become a key player, overseer, and funder of education and training. Since the Bologna process is intergovernmental, implementation is, in principle, the responsibility of each Member State. However, the major projects have required EU support. Thus, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, approved in 2005, have been promulgated by the European Commission (European University Association, 2015). The establishment of national quality assurance agencies (QAAs) has been promoted by Commission support for a European network of quality assurance agencies (ENQA), thus ensuring transnational sharing of best practice. It should be noted that as early as 1984, the Commission initiated the establishment of National Academic Recognition Centres (NARICs) and supported the NARIC network – later part of the wider European Network of Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC, 2018).

All EHEA participating countries have established QAAs and developed national qualification frameworks which conform with the EHEA EQF. All have committed to implement the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (still referred to as ECTS), and all promote the use of the Diploma Supplement (DS) developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The DS is a transparency document issued by each university for all graduates. It explains at a more granular level than an award certificate exactly what the student's studies were at university. It details module titles, credits, and performance, including marks achieved, and any additional attributes relevant to the student's time at university, including, where appropriate, work placements or study abroad.

Expansion of Erasmus after 2014

The extent of universities' engagement with Erasmus-supported mobility led to a recognition that partnership models developed for inter-university collaborative projects could provide a basis on which to expand the context of Erasmus. This led to the new post-2014 Erasmus+, consisting of what the Programme Guide (European Commission, 2019b) refers to as 'Key Actions'. The first builds on previous mobility initiatives, including those under Leonardo (vocational education and training), while Key Action 2 under the broad heading 'Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices' contained four forms of cooperation: strategic partnerships, knowledge alliances, sector skill alliances (vocational education), and capacity building in higher education (Partner Countries).

A third Key Action provided for capacity building in the field of youth (*ibid*, p. 98). Box 5.3 provides an overview of the post-2014 Erasmus+.

Box 5.3 Erasmus+ Key Actions and objectives (adapted from Erasmus+ Programme Guide, European Commission, 2020d).

Erasmus+ Key Actions and objectives

Key Action 1 Learning mobility for individuals

Mobility for higher education students and staff

Mobility for vocational education and training (VET) learners and staff

Mobility for school education staff

Mobility for adult education staff

Mobility for young people and youth workers

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees – two-year M-level, consortia of min. four universities

Erasmus+ Master Loans – for Programme Country residents applying to M-level study in another Programme Country

Key Action 2 Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices

Strategic partnerships in the field of education, training, and youth

European universities – developing partnerships for joint initiatives, programmes, and projects

Knowledge alliances between HEIs and enterprises to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity

Sector skills alliances supporting vocational training curricula and sector specific skills training

Capacity building in the field of higher education (Partner Countries)

Capacity building in the field of youth

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Key Action 3 Support for policy reform

Youth dialogue projects – national and transnational meetings, conferences, consultations, and events to promote active participation of young people in the democratic life of Europe

Additional actions.

Jean Monnet Activities – promoting teaching, learning, and research relating to European studies and European integration in universities

Sport – supporting individuals and group initiatives and not-for-profit events

Aims of Erasmus+ Key Actions

improve key competences and skills relevant to labour market and contribution to a cohesive society through increased opportunities for learning mobility and cooperation between education and training and the world of work.

foster quality improvements, innovation excellence, and internationalisation at level of education and training institutions through enhanced transnational cooperation between providers and other stakeholders.

promote emergence and awareness of European lifelong learning to complement policy reforms at national level, support modernisation of education and training through enhanced policy cooperation, transparency, and use of recognition tools and dissemination of good practices.

enhance the international dimension of education and training through cooperation between Programme and Partner Country institutions in fields of VET and HE by increasing the attractiveness of European HEIs, supporting EU external action, including development objectives, through promotion of mobility and cooperation between Programme and Partner Country HEIs and targeted capacity building in Partner Countries.

improve teaching and learning of languages and promote EU linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness.

The post-2014 Programme provided two or three years of support for consortia of universities as well as other forms of cross-sectoral collaboration. In each aspect, there are specific priorities which link with the development of the EHEA. Here the Commission is both implementing and realising Bologna objectives. As the only transnational body with the means to do so, it has effectively become the central player in the process. It supports joint master programmes through Erasmus Mundus and doctoral degrees through Marie Curie (see subsequently). It sustains the global dimension through International Credit Mobility and inter-institution cooperation through the partnership projects mentioned previously. More recently, it has provided backing for the ambitious and innovative European Universities initiative, also referred to previously. Erasmus+ in 2021–2027 will support other flagship European Commission initiatives, such as teacher training academies (Europass Teacher Academy, 2020; Erasmus Learning Academy, 2020), Centres of Vocational Excellence (European Commission, 2020i), and youth travel grants (DiscoverEU, 2020).

Capacity-building in higher education provided a new extended format for the earlier TEMPUS programme. It aims to support the modernisation, accessibility, and internationalisation of higher education in the Partner Countries in the context of priorities identified in the 'European Higher Education in the World' communication (European Commission, 2013) and 'the New European Consensus on Development' (European Council, 2017).

Expanding the Erasmus brand to a Key Action explicitly aimed at youth seeks to address marginalisation and lack of opportunity among disadvantaged members of society (European Commission, 2019b, p. 7). It also attempts to promote European/EU ideals and democratic values through providing opportunities for young people to engage in transnational partnerships and shared international activities. The initiative builds on the European Council aspiration to develop a European Union Youth Strategy (Council of the European Union, 2018, 456/1). The Council highlighted risks of marginalisation based on discrimination owing to 'ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion, belief or political opinion', also commenting that 'socioeconomic exclusion and democratic exclusion go hand-in-hand' (Council of the European Union, 2018, 456/1).

Until 2014, the Commission programmes were restricted to EU Member States and the neighbourhood countries, or separate bilateral initiatives. The addition of International Credit Mobility to Erasmus+ marked a significant breakthrough, extending Erasmus mobility and the Erasmus brand to a global context, broadening its quality expectations and the reach of the European Union throughout the world (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 23–24). ICM participation is dependent upon the established standards for recognition, quality, and mobility, using the various recognition tools applied on a global scale. It develops the international profile of European higher education and creates new links for strong and effective partnerships. It successfully promotes the global dimension of the EHEA both practically and on a scale that no individual government acting alone could achieve. This is an impressive example of soft power as an agent of change, bringing fresh cooperation between countries, even where political relations are not the strongest.

Joint masters, doctoral programmes, and research

Another imaginative innovation was the Erasmus Mundus joint masters, which started in 2004. The concept of joint degrees had been mooted for some time and endorsed by statements from the European Commission and in Bologna Process Communiqués. However, it required European Commission commitment and support to implement the joint degree concept. The Commission established joint programme criteria and standards involving a minimum of three partners and student mobility between at least two of them. Erasmus Mundus was an extraordinary success, meaning only the highest-quality programmes were successful in the application process. It became the best-practice model for joint degrees. Now over 120 such programmes are available, offering opportunities, including scholarships, to students worldwide (Erasmus Mundus, 2020).

Following the success of Erasmus Mundus masters programmes, Erasmus Mundus joint doctoral programmes were developed. These too were successful, utilising management and selection requirements to ensure high-quality recruitment with an emphasis on formal doctoral training and mobility. They provided financial support to cohorts of students, justifying universities' investment in the demanding application process.

Erasmus Mundus not only provided a quality model for joint programmes, it also challenged national legislation and accreditation systems, which in many countries would not permit joint degrees involving universities from another country. Even joint degrees between institutions

in the same country had to be adjusted to participate in the Erasmus brand and legal recognition.

Erasmus Mundus was a response to a long-standing education dispute between the European Commission and the DG Research and Innovation. The Commission's remit under the Erasmus+ regulation (2020j, 456/1) is to promote the European Union's role in Europe (European Council, 2018, 456/1).

Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme for research and innovation maintained a strong presence in the Erasmus+ programme. It is proposed to be replaced by an Erasmus-based postgraduate research programme (ERA) (Horiowitz, 2020).

European higher education institutionalisation has gone through several iterations. The Erasmus+ programme in Europe are still a strong presence in the ERF programme. The emphasis is on management and the substantial impact of the Erasmus+ Higher Education programme.

The prior Erasmus+ programme was relevant for the Horizon Europe programme. The European Commission's role in the Erasmus+ programme, the results of the Erasmus+ programme following the Erasmus+ Online, 2019, are still a strong presence in over 100 countries. The Erasmus+ programme with Horizon Europe out of the Union's intensive union cooperation programme. The Erasmus+ programme participate in Horizon Europe, although the Erasmus+ programme is still a strong presence in the Erasmus+ programme.

Challenges

The Commission's role in the Erasmus+ programme is still a strong presence in the Erasmus+ programme.

in the same country were rare and difficult to administer. Validation and accreditation systems had to be adjusted in several countries, with fundamental legal changes to enable institutions to participate in joint degrees with institutions in other countries, a change that needed formal and legal recognition.

Erasmus Mundus masters have continued within the Erasmus+ programme, but the demarcation disputes which bedevil ministries, and affect the European Commission, meant that the DG Research argued successfully that doctoral programmes should fall within its broad research remit under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action within Horizon 2020 (European Commission, 2020j, 2020k) and continuing under the new 2021–27 research programme, Horizon Europe (European Commission, 2020l; Horizon Europe, 2021).

Marie Skłodowska-Curie (often abbreviated to Marie Curie or MSC) is a more diverse programme for supporting researchers at both early career stages and post-doctoral, but it has not maintained all the innovative features of the Erasmus Mundus programmes, although mobility is still a strong component. Marie Curie applications are heavily oversubscribed, so after 2021, it is proposed to reduce funding for each individual programme to fund more programmes. Erasmus-based Erasmus Mundus established a basis for inter-institutional collaboration in joint postgraduate education, setting quality criteria which have become standard, and in the doctoral programmes, creating a bridge between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA) (Horizon 2020, n.d.).

European Research Framework (ERF) programmes have benefited from strong personal and institutional links established through the Joint Study Programme and Erasmus in its various iterations. The budget for Horizon 2020 and the projected budget for its successor Horizon Europe are substantially greater than for Erasmus+. However, many Erasmus principles apply in the ERF programmes. Support is only given to consortia of universities showing convincing management quality. Inter-institutional agreements are the bedrock for cooperation. The emphasis is on integrated projects with full engagement from all partners. This has had a substantial impact on the quantity and quality of European research and led to the establishment of the European Research Area, which, while geographically narrower, parallels the European Higher Education Area.

The priorities for the post-2021 research framework programme Horizon Europe are highly relevant for the research communities and citizens of Europe, including the United Kingdom. Horizon Europe has a budget of €95.5 billion for 2021–27 (European Commission, 2020l; European Council, 2020, p. 18). Just as Erasmus is damaged by the absence of the United Kingdom, the research communities in the United Kingdom and in EU-27 are expected to suffer following Brexit, even if some *modus vivendi* is established (Johnson, 2019; Gibney, 2020; BBC Online, 2019). The global charitable foundation Wellcome, which supports 14,000 researchers in over 100 countries, called on the United Kingdom to secure the closest possible association with Horizon Europe (Wellcome, 2019, 2020). This appeal was backed by researchers throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, including the Russell Group of 24 leading research-intensive universities in the United Kingdom (Russell Group, 2020). The EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (HM Government, 2020) provides for the United Kingdom to participate in Horizon Europe and other programmes on essentially the same basis as in Horizon 2020, although exact details have still to be agreed upon.

Challenges Erasmus faces

The Commission's aspiration is that student exchange for study or work, and closer institutional cooperation, would embed a sense of European identity and values. Some studies suggest that

John Reilly and Simon Sweeney

the data are inconclusive (Van Mol, 2018), but the experience of student cohorts and Commission impact surveys over the lifetime of JSPs, Erasmus, and Erasmus+ suggests that for most participants, the Erasmus experience has been life-changing in positive ways (see Pilsbury quote previously). Countless post-mobility reports suggest increasingly shared values and attitudes and a strengthened sense of European identity. Many returnees mention their enthusiasm and changed attitudes. Now, social media makes it easier to maintain relationships. A report on an Erasmus impact study states:

over a quarter of those who take part in the Erasmus scheme meet their long-term partner while studying abroad (and) more than one million babies may have been produced as a result. . . . A third of ex-Erasmus students had a partner of a different nationality, compared with 13 per cent of those who stayed at home during their studies.

(Independent, 2014)

Of course, the social background of many Erasmus students may pre-dispose them to the idea of European citizenship. Another study highlighted other benefits, such as cultural enhancement, personal development, and language proficiency (Jacobono and Moro, 2015). A multinational and longitudinal study based on 1,729 respondents from 28 universities in six countries suggested significant shifts towards perceived European identity among Erasmus exchange participants, though less marked among UK students (Mitchell, 2015).

There is evidence that other forms of mobility, including short term (up to two weeks), or longer and within the scope of Erasmus+ youth opportunities, or even tourism, can contribute to greater engagement with, and interest in, the EU and European citizenship (Mazzoni et al., 2017). However, the same study notes the relatively high socio-economic position of most of the respondents, a factor that Erasmus+ sought to address after 2014 with some success (see previously).

In 2009, EU Member States agreed on four objectives and set a target to reach these goals within ten years (Box 5.4).

Box 5.4 A strategic framework for cooperation in education and training (ET, 2020)

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship at all levels

Source: Council of the European Union (2009).

The result was the Education and Training 2020 programme, ET2020 (European Commission, 2020m) which aimed to address the need for enhanced competitiveness, innovation, and cooperation between Member States, as well as to promote an understanding of European identity and citizenship, a key objective of the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2019b, p. 33). A sense of European identity is less evident among disadvantaged lower socio-economic

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groups, where social exclusion from equal access to educational and cultural opportunities remains a reality. Erasmus achieves a considerable multiplier effect on the families and friends of participants. This is largely unresearched but bears comparison with how increased participation in HE has led to more societal engagement with universities.

A key Erasmus objective is to promote graduate skills, including competence in at least two languages in addition to the native language (European Commission, 2019b, pp. 7, 11). Although the data indicate mobility from and to all the participating programme countries, it has not generated the degree of multi-language competence to which the programme aspired. There are two reasons: the mobility is skewed towards the most spoken languages, English, French, Spanish, and German; to encourage inward mobility, universities in countries with less-spoken languages are increasingly offering courses in key languages but chiefly in English (House of Lords, 2012, para.81). This has contributed to English becoming the effective *lingua franca* in European HE and in EU institutions (House of Lords, 2012, para.81), which has the advantage of opening programmes to more international students, who are actively recruited throughout the EU, a further by-product of Erasmus. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU prompted the suggestion that English should no longer be one of the EU official languages, but this has been strongly resisted by eastern Member States and the smaller countries for whom English is the primary second language.

In the face of heavy demand for outward mobility in most countries, the Commission has struggled to maintain the value of the Erasmus top-up grant. Some countries have been generous in providing supplementary grants, but inevitably, there has been a limit, since demand exceeds supply. While the Commission affirms that around a third of Erasmus+ beneficiaries are from lower socio-economic groups (see previously), this success has been less evident in the United Kingdom, where mobile students tend to come from better-off families (National Union of Students, 2010; British Council/YouGov, 2011). The grant system does provide for more assistance to less financially secure students, but this does not cover the significant costs of mobility. Nor does it address deeper cultural impediments to mobility for students from lower-socio-economic and minority ethnic groups, where the prospect of study abroad is daunting. Nevertheless, as we have said, participation in Erasmus+ from disadvantaged groups has continued to grow.

Ideally, outgoing students should be replaced by incomers, but this is difficult to achieve not only between countries but also between institutions. Smaller Member States have limited capacity, and unless they offer programmes taught in English, there is a language barrier. Lack of knowledge and innate conservatism inhibit mobility to unfamiliar destinations. However, the Erasmus programme has done much to stimulate and raise HE standards, and it has enabled students from smaller, less well-known regions to act as ambassadors for their institution and their country.

Erasmus, Bologna, and Brexit

Brexit presents a substantial challenge to Erasmus programmes. The United Kingdom has been a net receiving country for incoming students, and this has benefited non-mobile UK students socially and academically. UK academic staff, too, have valued the high quality of the incoming students. Many Erasmus students have returned to the United Kingdom to register for a master or PhD, and this source of talent is likely to be severely curtailed, not least because EU students will have to pay much higher fees now that they are defined as 'international'.

In an ideal world, a pragmatic, negotiated solution would have allowed full UK participation in Erasmus. In January 2020, the prime minister stated that there was no threat to the United

Kingdom's continued participation. During the negotiations, the formal UK position was to join 'the next Erasmus+ programme if it is in our interests to do so' (*Guardian*, 2020; House of Commons, 2020, p. 17). The UK education minister, Gavin Williamson, told the British Parliament that the United Kingdom may develop its own 'alternative arrangements' (*Times Education Supplement*, 2020). Ultimately, the United Kingdom rejected participation and declared it would set up a new student exchange instrument, the Turing programme.

The UK government announced its Turing scheme with high rhetoric. However, it will not match the Erasmus+ infrastructure, its breadth of opportunities, and the number of countries and HEIs involved. Turing starts from the disadvantage that the planned mobility is not reciprocal and does not depend upon partnership projects. UK immigration policy means that all international students are regarded as 'migrant' rather than 'mobile', with implications for fees, healthcare, and other rights. Equally, UK students will not enjoy these rights in EU countries, thereby significantly increasing the costs of mobility.

In 2021, the UK government published the guide to the Turing Scheme (HM Government, 2021a), and the European Union published the new 2021 Erasmus+ Guide (European Commission, 2021). In contrast to the 2021 Erasmus+ focus on the development of the individual through a multi-cultural international experience designed to transcend national identity, while also addressing issues such as climate change and sustainability, Turing is explicitly a vehicle for implementing the UK government's 'Global Britain' agenda. This was adopted as the basis for UK foreign policy in 2018 and reaffirmed in a 2021 policy paper (HM Government, 2021b). The Turing Programme document states that projects seeking support must be 'in line with the Government's vision of a Global Britain (and demonstrate) value for UK taxpayers' (HM Government, 2021a, p. 6).

While Turing does offer wide mobility opportunities, its scope is narrow and overtly geared towards national interests, not wider integration. It excludes staff. It is not based on reciprocal exchange, has no shared partner quality code like the Erasmus Charter (ECHE), and lacks the infrastructure provided by the network of national agencies and the European Commission. Moreover, it does not have the breadth of the Erasmus mobility objectives and the Action 2 Partnerships for Excellence. These are identified in the 2021 Erasmus+ Programme Guide and include innovative projects such as:

- European Universities – cross-border networks of higher education institutions
- Centres for Vocational Excellence – supporting transnational centres of vocational training
- Erasmus+ Teacher Academies – developing a European and international outlook in teacher education embracing multilingualism and cultural diversity and contributing to the objectives of the European Education Area
- Erasmus Mundus – fostering excellence and internationalisation through jointly delivered and recognised master-level programmes (European Commission, 2021, p. 15)

These initiatives are designed to foster cooperation, mutual learning, and exchange of best practice and to embed the international dimension in the educational experience of learners, staff, and institutions on a multinational and reciprocal basis.

A disturbing feature of Turing, which seems not to have bothered the leaders of the academic community in the United Kingdom, is the way in which it extends the reach of government into universities' international relations. Insofar as institutions sign up, the Turing scheme makes them explicit instruments of national policy in the implementation and endorsement of 'Global Britain'. While Erasmus+ may also have a political agenda, it is one based on encouraging an integrated and mutually enhancing approach to collaboration. The entry ticket is a universally

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The United Kingdom will remain a full and active member of the Bologna process (the EHEA). But losing its status as a full member of the EU and no longer being a participant in its education programmes or contributing to policymaking and new projects may diminish its influence within the EHEA and on the Bologna process. London did negotiate to remain within Horizon Europe and will contribute to its budget. UK participation will require a sizable financial contribution, but the United Kingdom will cease to be a key player in policymaking and priority setting.

There has been a tendency in the United Kingdom to regard the impact of departure from the EU from an introspective, narrow, national perspective. Hence, those who triumphed in the Leave campaign focus on the anticipated benefits for the United Kingdom. Equally those who supported Remain think mainly about perceived harm and loss to the United Kingdom. Neither party contemplates the potentially damaging impact on the remaining 27. Yet in tomorrow's uncertain world, we are faced with borderless challenges in relation to global health – COVID-19 illustrates this in the starkest terms – the environment and climate change (see Barnes, 2021: in this book), security (see Sweeney, 2021: in this book), and depletion of finite resources. Solutions will only be found through closer international cooperation and multilateral partnerships. Erasmus has sought in a variety of ways, at a human level, to demonstrate the benefits of interaction, cooperation, mutual recognition, and support in all spheres of study.

In general, the academic community recognises the risks and costs attendant on the UK's departure from the Union, but it is doubtful whether it has learnt the attendant lessons. The university sector has profited from the privileges and opportunities afforded by Erasmus and Horizon 2020. But it continues to focus on institutional and personal benefits and reputation. The academic community has failed to engage with political and economic realities. In the future, it will surely need to recognise the importance of combating the rise in populism and nationalism, trends which threaten the values underpinning the cooperation described in this chapter, values sponsored and sustained by the European Union. These threats are explicitly recognised in the EHEA Paris communiqué:

Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA. Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation.

(EHEA, 2018)

Conclusion

Erasmus embodies the European ideal. It has been and continues to be an engine for change and a key contributor to the Bologna process. It has developed a global dimension to 'ensure quality, visibility, and attractiveness in the global HE world' (EHEA, 2015b). This has been facilitated by the worldwide extension of Erasmus through International Credit Mobility. The EHEA has elicited international interest as a model for regional intergovernmental cooperation in HE in the United States, Canada, Australia, Latin America, Japan, China, the ASEAN countries, and Africa. Credit-based systems are being considered and adopted in many regions.

These European ideals may be the real explanation for what amounts to an ideological decision on the part of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the Erasmus programme. The argument that the scheme is too expensive does not stand up to a cost-benefit analysis which would include the contribution of EU incoming students to the UK economy. The UK Cabinet post-2019 is dominated by individuals who campaigned for the United Kingdom to leave the EU. For these Brexit enthusiasts, detachment must be complete. Analyses of the 2016 referendum results suggest that young people voted by a large majority to remain. The prospect that future generations of young people might experience the European dimension, identify with their European peers, and develop an awareness of their European identity is anathema to the Brexit proponents. Their hostility is compounded when they read communications on 'Strengthening European identity through education and culture' (European Commission, 2017b) and establishing a 'European Education Area' (European Commission, 2020n). This doctrinal attitude is exemplified by the initial decision not to grant ambassadorial status to the EU Ambassador to the United Kingdom on the grounds that the EU is merely 'an international body' (BBC Online, 2021; Whitman, 2021). The Erasmus decision contrasts with the choice to remain in Horizon Europe and other programmes for which the costs will be much higher than Erasmus. Sadly, staying with Horizon Europe may be attributed to the strength of university research and industry lobbying compared with comparatively low-profile support for Erasmus.

The Bologna process has contributed to change across the European higher education landscape. The realisation of its goals depends on the active engagement of HEIs and their staff and students. However, whether the wider academic community is aware of the latest EHEA communiqués (EHEA, n.d.) is an open question. The lack of awareness is a major concern and reflects a communication failure in the process itself (Birtwistle and Wagenaar, 2020). If many or even most in academia remain ignorant of Bologna and associated proclamations, then the endeavour risks becoming a worthy talking shop and will lose the impetus gained in its early years. The academic community must be fully engaged, or it may find that the core academic and societal values underpinning the initiative are subverted or diminished.

Erasmus mobility will continue to flourish. It will foster and strengthen long-term partnerships and friendships across the EU and beyond. It is a tragedy that UK students and staff will be excluded from this 'future shaping' process.

We suggest that the long-term impact of Erasmus is still to be realised. The millions who have participated and have been changed, and who in today's world will maintain, through social media, friendships made through Erasmus, and those who have married other Erasmus alumni, all represent a new generation. It is for them and for their children that the European dimension is a lived and living experience, one that influences attitudes, values, and aspirations into the future.

Notes

- 1 https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en
- 2 EHEA membership: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium – Flemish Community, Belgium – French Community, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United Kingdom (Scotland).
- 3 See www.erasmusplus.org.uk/participating-countries

- 4 European Union, www.ehea.eu
- 5 John Reilly
- 6 Updated in (EHEA, 2021)

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