

Position Paper

UiB POSITION ON ERASMUS+



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

Introduction

The University of Bergen welcomes the opportunity to give input to the European Commission public consultation on the Erasmus+ programme, 2014–2027. As a comprehensive university offering research-based education across a wide range of disciplines we consider Erasmus+ as an important tool to foster strong academic collaborations and partnerships with institutions across Europe and worldwide. It is a pillar for European cooperation, reinforcing a shared culture and European identity.

The university offers a wide range of research-based study programs and research opportunities across various disciplines, including humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medicine, law, and more; and is particularly recognized for its research in areas such as marine sciences, climate research, sustainable development, and global health. We are an international oriented university with a high proportion of outgoing Erasmus+ students compared to other institutions in Norway, while welcoming more than a thousand international students each year.

Key overarching messages

- **UiB recommends** giving continued priority to current Erasmus+ programme objectives of inclusion and diversity, the twin digital and green transitions, as well as democracies, values and civic engagement. At the same time the programme must remain flexible for addressing emerging needs.
- **UiB supports** the current priorities of programme, however, we **recommend** that a clearer distinction is made between digital teaching and learning as a tool and methodology, and targeted actions for the development of digital skills in the wider sense.
- **UiB emphasizes** that Erasmus+ should contribute to stronger links between research, innovation, and education. **We call for** a focus on research-based higher education, in support of providing students with future-proof skills, such as critical and analytic thinking, creativity and problem solving.
- **UiB welcomes** the opportunities for global cooperation in Erasmus+, and the flexible use of the programme in support of Ukraine. **We encourage** further efforts to strengthen the international dimension of the programme.
- **UiB support** the continued investment in various forms of cooperation projects. **We would welcome** a reduction of the number of calls and sub-calls, and to increase the level of funding available for bottom-up academic cooperation projects.

- **UiB welcomes** the European University Initiative and encourages a programmatic funding approach for the future Erasmus+ programme. Alliances should to a stronger extent be able to pursue their own paths for reaching the overall objectives of cooperation and quality in higher education.
- **UiB encourages** further efforts for flexibility and simplification of mobility and project actions in Erasmus+.

The contribution of European cooperation in education

The Erasmus+ programme is a key driver for internationalization, and it allows students and university staff to benefit from an international experience at high quality European universities. The University of Bergen is deeply committed to European cooperation and to establish and maintain close relations to our partners in Europe and beyond. The Erasmus+ programme contributes to an international campus at UiB, and the provision of quality research-based education, academic and cultural diversity, and intercultural competences.

The Erasmus+ programme provides a framework to shape the European higher education area and to contribute to the European education policy. The project instruments are key for reaching objectives such as strengthened links between education and research, and developing inclusive, relevant and high-quality innovative and quality education, the twin digital and green transitions, diversity, inclusion and engaged citizenship.

UiB supports the current priorities of the programme and its promotion of inclusion and diversity, the twin digital and green transitions, as well as democracies, European identity and values, and civic engagement. UiB has a strong strategic focus on digital understanding, knowledge, and competence offering modules to all students and staff. We **recommend** that a clearer distinction is made between digital teaching and learning as a tool and methodology, and targeted action for the development of digital skills in the wider sense.

Higher education has a key societal role, bridging research, education, innovation and creativity, and a knowledge-based public discourse. While the Erasmus+ programme, successfully bridges various education sectors, it should enhance links between research, innovation and education.

There are links through the EIT, MSCA and the European University Initiative, however, more efforts could be made to benefit from synergies between research, education and innovation.

UiB believes that research-based education ensures active participation and learning, fosters critical thinking, and enhances problem-solving skills. Students learn to identify knowledge gaps, formulate research questions, develop methods for data collection, and analyze results. This trains them to be analytical, curious, and creative when confronted with complex and current issues. Therefore, **we call for a focus on research-based education** for the higher education sector also for bottom-up actions for academic cooperation, and it should be considered to reintroduce actions such as knowledge alliances (2014–2020) which successfully targeted these links.

The importance of global cooperation in education

Recent changes in the geopolitical context and war in our neighboring countries has highlighted the importance of global cooperation and outreach. The Erasmus+ provides opportunities to establish and maintain links with global partners, and contributes to knowledge exchange, tolerance, and support for academic freedom.

Capacity building in higher education is important tool for cooperation with global partners. While we strongly support the objectives of for strengthening higher education in the eligible third countries, **we would welcome** a more reciprocal global partnership approach focusing on mutual learning between the EU/EEA and partner countries.

UiB supports the objectives of International Credit Mobility (ICM) and see this as a very important action in the Erasmus+ programme, securing wider scope of cooperation beyond EU/EEA, and in many cases, partners in Europe's close neighborhood. **We commend** the efforts of the European Commission to utilize this tool in support for Ukraine the recent years. The University of Bergen has been a strong and active participant in the work to secure higher education for Ukrainian students in Norway. We remain dedicated to support Ukraine, and we have not only made great use of the Erasmus+ programme, but also worked intensively to support and welcome Ukrainian students and to support the struggle of the Ukrainian universities.

ICM is a very important tool to secure funding for students and allowing them to study in Europe and in Norway, and with current trends of tuition fees leading to more restricted access to European education the action has reinforced relevance. It also gives European students a unique opportunity to study in a partner country, and to learn from our global partners. **We strongly support further expansion** of this action for inclusion, sustainability, quality education and diverse campuses in Europe and partner countries.

Still, while significant improvements have been made, additional simplification is needed as the action remains somewhat complex, unpredictable and inflexible. **UiB recommends** continued simplification to make ICM a more flexible and predictable action within the Erasmus+ programme, preferably on the model of European mobility (KA131).

Erasmus+ project instruments

UiB actively participates in Erasmus+ projects, and in recent years we have increased our participation both in smaller and larger projects. **We support** the continued investment in quality and innovation in higher education through cooperation projects. Attractive funding instruments for **bottom-up academic cooperation** in education is key to address rapidly changing societal needs and to ensure European competitiveness. The decentralized management of smaller projects help ensuring accessibility, information, and transparency. We believe national agencies should have a stronger role in centralized project to ensure equal support for applicants in all eligible countries.

However, the diversity of calls in terms of different actions and sub-actions (lots) provide for a complex landscape. Many calls have very limited budgets and are highly competitive. **We would welcome** merging certain actions and increasing funding in the most competitive calls. Furthermore, funding caps for projects in various calls has not increased since 2014. In line with the rise of costs, **UiB believes**

that the funding for projects need to increase to enable academic and institutions to meet the overall priorities of the programme.

UiB support the European University Initiative and would welcome a more programmatic funding approach, rather than the current project-based approach. Alliances should to a stronger extent be able to build their own paths for reaching the overall objectives of cooperation and quality in higher education. Reducing the focus on deliverables and project results in favor of a more strategic and visionary approach-based priorities defined by the Alliances would better serve the overall objectives. Furthermore, reliable, and impactful funding is needed as the development cross-institutional structures requires further investments. Still, we underline the importance of achieving the right balance between investment in the Initiative and project instruments targeting academics at institutional level.

Flexibility and cutting red tape

UiB welcomes the efforts made to simplify, digitalize, and reduce administrative procedures linked to the programme. Significant improvements have been made, however, there is still a wide scope for further simplification. The programme has grown significantly along with its ambitions. For the mobility actions there are significant costs linked to the administration of the programme. Administrative burdens remain a significant barrier for students and staff to engage in mobility and international cooperation. **We encourage further efforts to simplify the programme.** Administrative burdens and documentation need to be proportionate to the risks, and unnecessary burdens on students and staff must be avoided. The Erasmus programme was designed 35 years ago when there was a need for certain structures and processes that is no longer needed, and structures and processes should be addressed to benefit fully from the current digitalization process of Erasmus+ mobility. This includes the development of integrated tools such as a one-stop shop, for students and staff. It is key that systems and resources provided by the EC must be fully functional when introduced, building on the Erasmus Without Paper making one entry point a reality.

Similarly, many efforts have been made to simplify Erasmus+ project participation, such as the applications in the funding and tenders portal, one common EU financial

framework and the lump sum approach. Still, there is further scope for simplification, especially during the application and reporting phases. Compared to the level of funding the application phase is too burdensome, and **we believe** application forms and reporting procedures need to be significantly simplified.





uib.no

University of Bergen / P.O. Box 7800, N-5020 Bergen
post@uib.no / +47 55 58 00 00