Higher education: co-operation with third countries, Erasmus Mundus programme 2004-2008

2002/0165(COD) - 23/12/2009 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents its report on the ex-post Evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus Programme 2004-2008, as required under Decision 2317/2003/EC. An external evaluator was used by the Commission. The latter considers that the balance of evidence collected for the ex-post evaluation of Erasmus Mundus suggests that the programme has been effective in achieving its stated objectives and has created a significant Community added value. Erasmus Mundus has succeeded in bringing together some of the best higher education institutions in the EU to offer **103 new and innovative joint masters programmes**, which were unlikely to have been created without the programme. These masters programmes are considered to be of high quality by both the academic staff and current and former Erasmus Mundus students consulted during the evaluation and have generally managed to attract large numbers of applications from third-country students.

In response to recommendations made by evaluators, the Commission makes the following points:

- in order to increase the participation of less-represented EU countries in the programme, the Commission is supporting a project under Action 3 (co-ordinated by the Slovak National Structure) that aims to spread information on how to participate and provide support to potential participants from new Member States. It will be possible to assess the impact of this project in the summer of 2010;
- particular attention should be paid to the level of integration in the curricula and study tracks offered. In future, applicants should be asked to explain and demonstrate more clearly the level of integration of their course and evaluators of proposals should be asked to take particular care in the analysis of integration and mobility mechanisms;
- while scholarships for EU students have been introduced under the new Erasmus Mundus programme to increase the proportion of EU students on Erasmus Mundus courses, the actual application rates and numbers of EU students selected should be monitored closely during programme implementation;
- the Commission will make every effort to raise awareness of gender balance among participants in the programme;
- in order to monitor the impact of Erasmus Mundus on the numbers of third-country students coming to Europe, improved data are required. Participating institutions should therefore be asked to provide data on the overall numbers of third country students they recruit to allow more systematic analysis of the impact of Erasmus Mundus in this respect. This information should be provided via the existing student database (managed by the Executive Agency);
- the Graduate Impact Survey should become more effective in order to interpret key trends;
- whilst the evaluator states that Erasmus Mundus should move away from the current situation in which the vast majority of third-country students on Erasmus Mundus courses receive a full scholarship the Commission deems it necessary to reflect on the future of the scholarships system. This may become separated from the support given to excellent courses, with scholarships attributed as a function of the courses' capacity to attract students;
- the Commission is concerned about the lack of a precise strategic approach in the definition of specific objectives under Action 3 (Partnerships with higher education institutions in third countries, including scholarships for students and scholars from EU countries for mobility towards third countries). This year, the Commission has decided to avoid an open call for proposals and launch a

call for "clusters" to draw the best out of past Action 4 projects (projects to enhance the worldwide attractiveness of European higher education). Future calls for proposals will focus on a limited number of priority areas. The Commission will also continue funding some actions from the Erasmus Mundus Global Promotion Project to support the promotion of European higher education worldwide;

- whilst the evaluators recommend that visiting scholars should be required to contribute directly to the course for which they receive their Erasmus Mundus grant, the Commission states that scholarships were mainly intended to allow teaching or research activities related to the course. Directly contributing to the course may imply some previous participation of the scholars in the definition of the curriculum. Certain courses may already require a direct contribution, in which case this good practice could be made known to other consortia;
- graduation rates should be clearly stated to allow a more transparent analysis of the success of the course.

The Commission agrees that Erasmus Mundus has made an important contribution to the internationalisation of European higher education. The programme retains a high level of enthusiasm among co-ordinators, partners, students and scholars. The results of the evaluation show that Erasmus Mundus continues to meet its political and operational objectives, as well as the objectives of the Treaty. The fundamental quality of Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses, of the institutions behind them and of the students and academics they attract, are essential to the future development of the programme.

The new programme has been designed to overcome certain structural shortcomings identified in the 2004-2008 programme, offering scholarships for EU students and allowing third country institutions to participate as full partners in joint programmes, for example. The Commission notes the findings as to where further improvements could be made, and will pay due respect to these over the remainder of the 2009-2013 programme.