

# Policy Paper on Mobility



European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

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## EURASHE Policy Paper

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## Introduction

**EURASHE** is the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education that offer professionally-oriented programmes and are engaged in applied and profession-related research within the 3 Bologna cycles. Currently, over 1,400 higher education institutions are affiliated to EURASHE. EURASHE has its membership in 38 countries within and outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Membership is mostly through National Associations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Individual Institutions, such as Universities, University Colleges and Universities of Applied Sciences, as well as through other professional associations and stakeholder organisations, active in the field of higher education.

### 1. General context

Increasing globalisation imposes a constant necessity to change, to evolve and to adapt. Higher education (HE) in this process, demonstrably at the apex of technological progress and the development of new ideas, is a key contributor. In being open towards universal values and in building transnational HE communities which encompass people from various cultural backgrounds, is indispensable for the building of a creative and responsive society. **Adaptability** is key to the new “Conceptual Age”, an age of creativity and innovation, acknowledged by David Pink (“A Whole New Mind”), which demands a new reaction in HE towards sharpening its effectiveness and in the preparation of societies to participate in an increasingly diverse world, in which **flexibility** is becoming a pre-eminent skill.

A vital aspect of this new HE culture is student **mobility**, which also and obviously freely accepts the challenges of **internationalisation**. Moreover, mobility strengthens capacities to adapt to different scientific and cultural contexts, as a consequence stimulating the higher velocity and easier accommodation of new ideas and emerging concepts. Hence, mobility is necessary for survival in a globalising world but through its many facets of interchange, **makes a strong contribution to the development** of better societies. It can be especially profitable for students from less privileged social groups – for whom the HE mobility is the only means towards acquaintance with another culture – for them to make a contribution towards the improvement of **openness** within global societies. That mobility is a necessity, and an opportunity for HEIs, institutions – towards participation in the global shift towards internationalisation – maintaining social coherence and temperance are not least by-products of interchange. Thus, careful implementation of mobility-related policies is a difficult task, but its importance is undeniable.

## 2. Overarching policies

The practice of mobility is an important facet of both the Bologna Process and the European Union (EU) policy level, where in both there have been strenuous efforts to remove obstacles between different countries, through equal effort and attempts to harmonise the various HE systems to accommodate mobility more readily and easily within the EHEA. Numerous programmes of the EHEA have been designed to improve the workings of mobility: “**Mobility for Better Learning**” is one such programme. Equally, initiatives such as **International Openness** & the **EHEA Information and Promotion Network (IPN)** have been actively promoted by the now well-established Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

Mobility is a desirable goal at the heart of the concept of the EU. EU freedom includes and permits citizens to travel freely between EU countries, undertaking employment and other economic activity wherever they wish and wherever they are required. The scope of the ‘First Freedom’ was enlarged by the European Court of Justice for the inclusion of not only workers, but also students by making it possible for them to pursue their studies in all EU countries. The European Commission (EC) is acutely committed to making the ideal of mobility palpable through the financing of several programmes<sup>1</sup> assembled around the “**Modernisation Agenda**”, which is corroborated and supported by the new emerging ideal of “**Fifth Freedom**”<sup>2</sup>. **We have witnessed the curious process of separating the initial idea of HE mobility as a part of the First Freedom, becoming an independent goal in itself.** All policies which target themselves on mobility also endeavour to respond to other challenges of the dynamically-globalised world such as **Lifelong Learning (LLL)**, driven at least in part by the mobility ‘philosophy’ of learning to be adaptable and flexible. There is also a more advanced and testing ideal, that is developing the adaptability towards advanced organisational concepts, in particular, the **Triple Helix** – the building of dynamically-healthy relations between state, private sector and HEIs.

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1 There is an on-going discussion on the new programme “Erasmus for All” which shall start in 2014, replacing LLP and Youth programmes.

2 “The heads of states and governments of the European Union concluded at a meeting in Brussels (March 2008) that the ‘fifth freedom’ should be based on enhancing the cross-border mobility of researchers, students, scientists, and university teaching staff. The ‘fifth freedom’ should make the labour market for European researchers more open and competitive, provide better career structures, transparency and family-friendly policies; further implementing HE reforms.

The ‘**fifth freedom**’ should facilitate and promote the optimal use of intellectual property (IP) created in public research organisations so as to increase knowledge transfer to industry. In particular, through an ‘IP Charter’ to be adopted before the end of the year, it should:

- encourage open access to knowledge and open innovation
- foster scientific excellence
- launch a new generation of world-class research facilities
- promote the mutual recognition of qualifications. “

### 3. Specific context of professional higher education

Although in theory professional higher education (PHE) institutions can participate in mobility just as any other institutions, it is the case that the specificities of PHE are insufficiently explicated in influential documents which concern themselves with the internationalisation of HE. This lacking in reference points is particularly disturbing, considering the importance of PHE, which functions more palpably as a bridge between HE and the labour market. Not only is it often the expressed view that PHE, *per se*, can be the route to safe and stable employment, but during testing economic times and oscillating performances in the job market, it is frequently the case that those already in the job market need to re-qualify or acquire new skills and competencies. PHE serves as the natural response in meeting these needs. As can be adduced, the role of PHE in relation to its service to LLL is vital, in that it allows for the regular enlarging and intensifying of knowledge and skillsets. Moreover, as both LLL and mobility are driven by the needs of **adaptivity**, the synergies between both are to be found and developed within PHE.

Is PHE a neglected sector within the current processes of internationalisation? The scope of PHE varies quite widely across Europe, as does its role and position within the overall HE system. The notion that PHE is still under-constructed and that no simple coherent definition can be assembled, is a misnomer, as many differences are to be found within the so-called classical universities, within which, it must be said, there are many PHE programmes across Europe. What is a truism, however, is the overarching objective and practice of PHE in linking education to the labour market, which is a prevalent and common denominator for PHE. This **diversity** within PHE, whether we speak about the whole institutions, or specialised programmes inside traditional HE, is in need of a more openly-developed approach to mobility. PHE holds the capacity for greater types of mobility than solely academic HE: trainee exchanges, international internships, and participation in transnational projects are some quite obvious examples. This means that traditionally-understood student-mobility programmes (such as Erasmus student exchange requiring at least 3 months of stay in another country) may be adaptable for PHE, where even a well-targeted short (few days) mobility may be very beneficial and may create a worthy “**added value**”. One key mechanism for PHE mobility is the development of reliable **learning outcomes** and PHE mobility is efficient if learning outcomes are well-defined and exchangeable. In order to make a proper use of them, there is a need for more flexible and clear reference frame-working to enable the efficient comparison of experience gained throughout the studies. **Erasmus Intensive Programmes**, which are short programmes of study bringing together students and teaching staff from HEIs of at least three participating countries, lasts for at least 10 days, providing exemplars of how PHE mobility may be managed. Clear attribution of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and international recognition of academic and professional experiences are necessary mechanisms to make PHE mobility feasible and transparent.

## 4. Position of EURASHE

EURASHE and its members are enthusiastic supporters of European actions promoting **mobility** and **international openness**. We recognise their importance to PHE, whose role and visibility in this development will be actively promoted. Types of mobility and their means towards acquiring skills and increasing employability augment **flexibility** in response to labour-market needs which are constantly evolving and increasingly require adaptability amongst students and graduates.

EURASHE underlines the necessity to diversify mobility, in its overarching need to include both long-term physical, virtual and **short-term mobility**. Furthermore, EURASHE encourages more widespread **Lifelong Mobility** (LLM) which, as a complement to LLL, requires the creation of frameworks for recognition and reward. Hence, we agree that the mobility should not be based, or adjudicated on the length of stay, but that its basic criterion should be **measurable learning outcomes**. LLM alongside with LLL will contribute to the development of **adaptable employees**, and, as a consequence, greater **employability** which is a prominent objective in PHE. There is nothing meretricious or gimmicky, in the practice of mobility; nor should mobility be perceived as a curiosity, but rather a norm fully integrated with HE and PHE precepts and working principles.

EURASHE affirms that mobility and its concomitant contents and structures should be within the remit of undergraduate and postgraduate 'programme levels', which will enable institutions to construct meaningful vocational and academically-orientated vocational aspects of an exchange experience.

EURASHE welcomes the encouragement to collect and interpret data on long- and short-term mobility, a desirable analytical-support function, expressed in the Communiqué after the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Bucharest.

The dynamic corollary for EURASHE is the practical encouragement towards institutions to adopt different kinds of mobility and towards the development of, context, varying teaching profiles and programmes. EURASHE also underlines the position of HEIs who should possess the liberty to develop the physiognomy of 'mobility', the different faces of which should afford a variety of attractive routes and destinations. Objectives will vary from the deepening of purely academic content, the acquisition of specific skills for jobs, or, contribution to personal development of students in the spirit of **international openness** and intercultural understanding. Such diversity should result in acquiring a balanced set of benefits and gains from mobility, which will also ensure that students who opt for a specific qualification or programme have the additional and enhancing guarantee of 'related mobility' opportunity.

EURASHE agrees that the added-value of mobility is secured through good practice and illustrative examples of good practice.

## 5. Recommendations

### (a) Recommendations for institutions

First, EURASHE invites professional HEIs to diversify their mobility options. HEIs should develop sets of different methods to be mobile. Starting from **short-time mobility** (ex: participation in international seminars, working groups, traineeships, internships etc.) to **full degree mobility** (ex: double diplomas/degrees). We strongly advise the undertaking of **joint/double programmes** and to cooperate actively with a variety of relevant stakeholders to **strengthen links between professional education and practice**.

Second, in particular support of what is stated above in the collection of data, professional HEIs are urged to **keep records** of the diverse forms of (inward and outward) mobility, and submit these in the form of reports to the national agencies/national administration.

Third, professional HEIs are encouraged to promote **mobility culture** and **internationalisation** in the institution as a whole, in separate faculties, departments or institutes as well as amongst all groups of academic communities – decision-makers, teachers, students and administrative staff.

Fourth, we stress the importance of developing operational **internationalisation strategies**, especially by improving organisation, mechanisms and procedures of mobility. Giving more attention to pre- and post-mobility periods, good reconnaissance strategies, removing barriers and enhancing the motivation of potential movers are preliminary conditions for any kind of mobility to exist and hopefully thrive. The importance of these formal and administrative elements are essential towards the development of sound and profitable mobility exchanges.

Fifth, institutions should search for new opportunities for mobility at both geographical and inter-sectorial levels. **Inter-sectorial mobility** requires particular attention, though the improvement of specific recognition procedures. Professional HEIs are strongly encouraged to monitor progress within both the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and ECTS-ECVET interfacing and to discharge and maintain proper **quality assurance** mechanisms. The use of **national qualifications frameworks** may be helpful towards the better understanding of mobility and its rationale by relating it to a larger context and clearly defining its desired outcomes.

Finally, EURASHE underlines the importance of virtual mobility and encourages the creation of on-line virtual campuses as places of cooperation.

### (b) Recommendations for collective action

First, EURASHE expresses its will to support the sharing of good practice and the promotion of joint activities. Mobility can develop fully only if we forge active links between different sectors and different stakeholders. Cooperation between traditional HE and **vocational education and training (VET)** institutions, as well as between enterprises and research entities, creates further favourable conditions for the development of **creativity** and enhances **adaptability** across the varying social, cultural, scientific and market contexts. All cooperation should be realised in close relationship with the sister concept and practice of LLL which, of course, stresses the importance of adaptability. Participation in platforms such as **EUCIS-LLL** may also improve relations with other players and deepen mutual understanding between LLL and LLM. Long-term cooperation with any kind of other institutions actively working for internationalisation, such as the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), is to be welcomed and encouraged.

Second, another top priority should be opening European education towards other important geographical players, such as, Latin America or the Caribbean. EURASHE, at this moment, is contributing to the Caribbean Opening to Erasmus Mundus (**CaribErasmus**) project.



Third, it will be recognised that improving mobility is strongly dependent on quality assurance. Hence, **enhancing the quality of mobility** by looking for and **testing different quality indicators** is important for the healthy development of effective and high-level transnational cooperation.

Fourth, creating favourable conditions for widening access to mobility should not be underestimated. Participation in the mobility of students from less privileged social groups is a key factor in building **international openness** and enlarging cultural capacities of societies as a whole. Establishing links with **European Access Network (EAN)** and dealing with underrepresented groups in HE are good examples for projects such as **'MoVE-iT: Obstacles to Mobility in VET'**.

Finally, we express our will to **promote the diversification of mobility** amongst stakeholders and all interested institutions and associations, at the same time, underlining our readiness to discuss how this diversification should materialise. We also stress the importance of cooperation between all networks (not necessarily connected with education) and initiatives operating around the common goal of promoting high-quality mobility and international openness.

### **(c) Recommendations for policy-makers**

First, EURASHE recognises the importance of the creation of new overarching policies aiming to improve and to support the **diversification of mobility**. EURASHE's expertise in policy-making may be helpful towards enhancing **creativity, adaptability**, and in consequence, **employability**. The legal and policy framework should establish clear sets of rules, presenting on the one hand, model examples of how mobility should best work, but on the other hand, still leaving place for the creative and flexible approaches of different institutions. The legal/organisational, macro-framework should be built around the **LLM concept**, aiming to open access to mobility at each stage of life, where supplementary experiences would be beneficial. Although the core ideals should remain the same, we realise that in different national legislations, mobility may be implemented differently according to stage, level of education or type of employment.

Second, policymakers are invited to intensify work on **recognition** and **transparency** tools, as they are conditions *sine qua non* of any kind of mobility. Their role is particularly important, and requires particular attention when it comes to inter-sectorial mobility, in which a transparent description of abilities, skills and outcomes are crucial.

Third, special attention should be paid to widening access to mobility for all groups of potential movers, especially from less privileged social groups. External financing and broad promotion of mobility seem to be focal points in this practice.

Finally, we stress the necessity to rely on empirical evidence-based research whilst elaborating mobility strategies. Numerous sociological studies, by different organisations, such as EURASHE or ACA, have been made and are at the disposal of policymakers.

## Glossary of terms

**ACA (Academic Cooperation Association)** – the federation of national organisations from Europe and beyond, which all fund and encourage the internationalisation of their higher education systems.

**BFUG (Bologna Follow-Up Group)** – the main structure of the Bologna Process which oversees the Bologna Process between the ministerial meetings and meets at least once every six months.

CaribErasmus (Caribbean Opening to Erasmus Mundus) – the project aims to foster cooperation among European and Caribbean higher education institutions in a structured and sustainable perspective

**EAN (European Access Network)** – the European NGO encourages wider access to higher education for those who are currently under-represented, whether for reasons of gender, ethnic origin, nationality, age, disability, family background, vocational training, geographic location, or earlier educational disadvantage.

**ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System)** – originally set up in 1989 as a pilot scheme within the framework of the Erasmus programme in order to facilitate the recognition of study periods undertaken abroad by mobile students, is a tool that helps to design, describe, and deliver programmes and award higher education qualifications.

**ECVET (European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training)** – the new European instrument to promote mutual trust and mobility in vocational education and training. ECVET is based on concepts and processes which are used in a systematic way to establish a common and user-friendly language for transparency, transfer and recognition of learning outcomes.

**EHEA (European Higher Education Area)** – the main objective of the Bologna Process aiming to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education in Europe.

**IPN (EHEA Information and Promotion Network)** – BFUG working group tasked with amongst others to provide clear and consistent information on the Bologna Process and the EHEA in countries outside the EHEA.

**LLL (Lifelong learning)** – the “lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated” pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. As such, it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability.

**LLM (Lifelong mobility)** – the new emerging concept which combines two major recent European priorities in education: Lifelong Learning (LLL) and Mobility.

**VET (Vocational education or vocational education and training)** – an education that prepares trainees for jobs or careers at various levels from a trade to a craft or a position. Craft vocations are usually based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic, related to a specific trade, occupation, or vocation.





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