

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

GRANT AGREEMENT FOR AN ACTION

AGREEMENT NUMBER – 2014-3619/001-001

PROJECT NUMBER – 559252-EPP-1-2014-BE-EPPKA3-BOLOGNA

Peer learning activity on permeability between different categories of higher education

Brussels, Erasmus University College, 20 and 21 June 2016

Conclusions of the PLA on Permeability

1. The drivers, the rationales and purposes of short cycle study programmes are varied. They depend on and change according to:
 - a. Demographic changes;
 - b. Societal changes;
 - c. Economic changes (level of economic growth or economic stagnation);
 - d. Technological changes;
 - e. The employment of graduates in general (unemployment and underemployment)
 - f. The needs of the labour market.
2. Short cycle qualifications play a role in (and contribute to):
 - a. Widening participation and improving the retention and the academic success;
 - b. The social dimension
 - c. Meeting the needs of the labour market
 - d. LLL and improving the position of graduates on the labour market (reverse permeability)
 - e. The further development of the higher education system as a whole;
 - f. Regional and local development of disadvantaged regions and local communities.
3. Short cycle study programmes should have a value in itself: SC is not only serving the societal needs but also other purposes such as personal development. It is a constituent part of a higher education system providing opportunities for all individuals to reach their full potential.
4. Short cycle study programmes require different and sometimes innovative pedagogic approaches due to the different profile of the learners (for example, the mature adult learner bringing with her or him a lot of life and work experience). By definition the curriculum design for adult learners is learner-centered. Blended learning is also part of the design and delivery of curricula for adults. The development of short cycle study

programmes may have an impact on the higher education system. To a certain extent we have to overcome the gap between initial education and continuous education.

5. Teaching in short cycle study programmes may require that the teachers acquire new competences. What does it mean to teach adult learners?
6. To provide flexible learning paths throughout higher education and to provide fair opportunities to progressing to other qualifications is a matter of equity and social justice.
7. To achieve a successful and meaningful articulation between different HE sectors, a competence-based approach for the curriculum design, with credits linked to learning outcomes, degrees included in national qualifications' frameworks self-certified to the EHEA-QF and to the EQF, together with a genuine recognition of prior learning, is critical. Besides, in terms of preparation of the students, making articulation work belongs to the joint responsibility of the 'sending' and the 'receiving' institutions.
8. Quality assurance in short cycle higher education – according to the ESG – is an important structural element. There is a need to develop a common system including common principles. This may require also some institutional, structural and governance reforms as it was shown in the Irish case (to overcome institutional fragmentation). Bigger entities could be held responsible for the internal quality assurance, complemented by an external quality review.
9. Destinations of graduates after being awarded a level 5 (or level 6) qualifications may be:
 - a. (Self-) employment in an economic sector in line with the study programme
 - b. Employment in a different economic sector
 - c. Further studies: bachelor or master
 - d. Unemployment and underemployment

The main destination of the graduates holding a short cycle qualification will/should have an impact on the teaching and learning process and on the curriculum:

- If the main destination is further studies the curriculum will perhaps more focus on the academic components;
- If the main destination is employment in the relevant economic sector the curriculum will focus more on the work-based components;
- If the main destination is unemployment a redesign of the curriculum may be required or even a cancellation of the programme (due to lack of relevance).

10. With regard to the development or the relevance of level 5 qualifications as well as to the elaboration of the competences/learning outcomes it is important to bring the world of work (stronger focus on transversal competences and field specific practical competences) and the academic world (stronger focus on knowledge and disciplinary competences) together.
11. The modular approach to the design of curricula could be helpful to facilitate horizontal (from one level 5 qualification to another level 5) as well as vertical (from level 5 to level 6 and from level 6 to level 7) progression. A curriculum shaped in a modular way (the completion of a module leads to a certificate) will require us to rethink the concept of 'a drop-out' and the way of rewarding performances in the area of teaching and learning. The modular structure facilitates getting the relevant education and training 'just in time' according to the personal needs and situation.

12. To complete a learning path through articulation between level 5 and level 6, level 6 to level 7 takes more time than the traditional learning path. But we need to take into account that there is a different underlying paradigm. With regard to the traditional learners (18th years old) to obtain a first degree and in some countries to obtain a first and a second degree as quick as possible in order to enter the labour market, is the main priority for the individual, the institution and the government. With regard to the articulation students, especially those who are combining working and studying, to acquire the knowledge and skills in order to improve their personal situation is the main priority. Therefore, there is a need for sophisticated data collection enabling to link personal characteristics and the socio-economic status to the achievements and to develop more relevant indicators. An articulation student who is still studying after 6 years could not be considered as a drop-out while a traditional full time student may be considered as a drop-out if the student has not yet graduated after six years. The same applies to other indicators such as 'time to graduation',
13. The respective roles and responsibilities of the education sector and the employers with regard to the adjustment of the competences of the labour force to the economic, technological, societal changes and with regard to continuous professional development are evolving.
14. Qualifications frameworks in general but also sectoral QF including short cycle qualifications are very helpful and should play an increasing role to enhance the permeability because they provide a framework to align the competence-based learning outcomes (including knowledge, skills and competences) of the different qualifications from different sorts of QFs.
15. Guidance and counseling of students, especially at levels 5 and 6, are crucial and have to be developed further.
16. There is some worry about the stigma on short cycle higher education in general, on awarding level 6 qualifications partly based on recognition of prior learning and on work-based learning. Parity of esteem between the traditional route and the articulation route has not yet been realized at least in some academic environments. But the opposite could also occur: in France for example, short cycle programmes (DUT – 120 ECTS – especially), which are prepared at university (at IUT) and very valued by employers) are more appreciated by many students than the first two years of the traditional 1st cycle academic programmes, due to the fact that the admission to these short cycle programmes is more selective, and allows both easy integration into the labour market, and smooth access to "*Licence*" (ie : Bachelor level) programmes afterwards .
17. There are three different types of permeability:
 - a. Permeability between different study programmes;
 - b. Permeability between work and study;
 - c. International permeability.
18. The Dutch case shows it clearly that there are many advantages to have different learning routes and paths in the same study field: level 5 full time study programme, level 5 combination work/study programme, level 6 full time study programme and level 6 combination work/study programme. This allows students to switch easily between those different routes depending on the personal situation.
19. We have to make a shift in the minds from validation of learning outcomes (could be considered as a merely statistical approach) to valuing learning outcomes. Hence also the importance to further develop guidance services.

20. Especially in systems where short cycle qualifications meet multiple needs and change over time, it is important to design communications for (prospective) students, employers and other stakeholders to that make the options as clear and simple as possible.