

Brussels, 15th of January 2021

ESN Belgium's opinion on the future of student mobility between Belgium and the United Kingdom

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Belgium together with ESN International and many other stakeholders regret to see that the UK chose to not continue the cooperation with the EU in the field of Education under the Erasmus+ programme. According to the latest Erasmus+ annual report, the UK is among the top 5 countries both for outgoing and incoming students on the European level (European Commission, 2020a). A similar trend can be observed in Belgium. According to the statistics published by EPOS (2019) and AEF Europe (2018), the UK is among the top 5 destinations for students in Flanders and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and it is among the top 10 countries of origin for students under Erasmus+. Furthermore, in Belgium, almost 9 percent of the students who went on mobility under Erasmus+ chose the UK as their mobility destination (European Commission, 2020b).

There's no doubt that all stakeholders, including the government, Erasmus+ agencies and Higher Education Institutions will try to do the necessary to guarantee student mobility to and from the UK in the future. However, this alone is not enough. Erasmus Student Network Belgium believes that an international study mobility experience should be an opportunity for all students, regardless of their background or circumstance. The inclusion aspect is one of the aims of Erasmus+ in the past and the current programme and it should also be one of the principles in the many negotiations yet to come concerning Internationalization of Higher Education, including the further student mobility between Belgium, regardless of the community, and the UK. We therefore ask for sufficient grants and support for students going on a mobility to the UK. Erasmus+ stands for quality, which is assured by the rights and obligations for both students and institutions in the light of a mobility programme. We therefore think that the content of the Erasmus+ Student Charter and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education should serve as a basis for the quality assurance of the future student mobility between Belgium and the UK.

Although we regret to see this development and while we believe that Erasmus+ is irreplaceable, we will help to make sure that student mobility will continue through the Turing scheme. ESN Belgium will therefore always be available to represent the voice of (international) students in Belgium concerning Internationalization of (higher) education.

Sources

AEF Europe. (2018). *Erasmus+ Action clé 1 Projet de mobilité dans l'enseignement supérieur entre Pays « Programme »: Bilan de l'année académique 2015-2016 en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles.*

EPOS. (2020). *Jaarboek 2019.*

European Commission. (2020a). *Erasmus + Annual Report 2019.*

European Commission. (2020b). *Erasmus + Annual Report 2019 - Statistical Annex.*

About Erasmus Student Network Belgium

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Belgium is a non-profit organisation with the mission to foster student mobility in Higher Education in Belgium and provide opportunities to students for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of Students Helping Students. ESN Belgium currently consists of 18 sections in 11 cities and is part of ESN International, the biggest student association in Europe, with more than 15,000 volunteers.

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