EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

Youth, Education and Erasmus+
Erasmus+ Coordination

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NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE
ERASMUS+ NA DIRECTORS

Subject: European Student Card initiative – State of play and next steps

Dear colleagues,

The European Student Card Initiative is an important step in achieving the objectives of the European Education Area by 2025, including making student mobility more accessible and as easy as possible for both students and higher education institutions. The European Student Card Initiative will achieve this by digitalising and standardising administrative processes through the Erasmus Without Paper Network and the revamped Erasmus+ App, and allowing mobile students to easily identify and authenticate themselves when using the online services by leveraging the eduGAIN infrastructure.

Digital management of student mobility in the new Erasmus+ programme

As announced in 2019 and confirmed with the new Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) 2021-2027 and its associated implementation guidelines, accredited higher education institutions commit to implement digital management of their student mobility in line with the standards of the European Student Card Initiative.

In line with the objectives of the European Student Card Initiative, the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) Network ensures that any higher education institution can connect to the network and seamlessly share data with their partners to facilitate digital Erasmus+ administrative processes, including signing digital Inter-Institutional Agreements and Online Learning Agreements.

In order to achieve a smooth shift to a fully digital management of Erasmus+ student mobilities, <u>we ask you to convey the following main messages</u> to your higher education institutions:

1. **We expect higher education institutions to be connected to the EWP Network** and to start exchanging digital Erasmus+ agreements (Online Learning Agreements and Inter Institutional Agreements[1]) with their partners through the network **from June 2021.**

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[1] Current Inter-institutional agreements are valid for mobilities taking place in the 2021/2022 academic year. These agreements should be renewed digitally as from June 2021 and at the latest before the start of the first mobilities of the 2022/2023 academic year.

2. In order to achieve a fully digital management of Erasmus+ student mobility, **all higher education institutions need to be connected as soon as possible**. Supporting the HEIs to take this step is crucial, which is why work is in progress to make sure the tools work for all types of higher education institutions and we encourage you to monitor closely the implemention in your HEIs. We understand that a small number of higher education intuitions might need more time to carry out the necessary steps in connecting to the EWP Network. In order to make sure that no one is left behind, the Commission will consider the 2021/2022 academic year as a transitional year. This means that **at the very latest before the start of the academic year 2022/2023, all higher education institutions participating in the Erasmus+ programme must be connected to the EWP Network.** Alternatively, they may lose their accreditation for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

3. For this to work, we need to ensure that digital management of student mobility is efficient and secure and that the system can uniquely identify students and authenticate its users. This is why **higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to join EduGain through their [National Research and Education Network](#)** (**NREN**) **as soon as possible** to allow their students to benefit from using their home university credentials and their European Student Identifier (ESI) to identify themselves. If this is not possible for justifiable reasons, alternative solutions will be put in place for a minority of higher education institutions.

4. On 28 January, the newly revamped Erasmus+ App was officially launched. European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel and Director General Themis Christophidou as well as students and higher education representatives explained its objectives and benefits to the European education community. **As communicated by our Commissioner and our Director General, we encourage you to invite all students to start using the application and populating it with useful information.** In case you have missed the event, already seen by more than 5.000 persons, you can watch it [here](#).

5. **We will continue supporting the higher education community** by putting in place a more sustainable funding and governance for this initiative. Regular meetings of the network of Digital Officers from National Agencies are planned in the course of 2021 in order to ensure a constant flow of information. The next meeting with Digital Officers will take place on Monday, 22 February. In addition, **technical meetings to give more details to higher education institutions will be organised between April and June**.

For more details on each of the presented elements, please see Annex I.

Ute HALLER-BLOCK
Head of Unit

Annex I: Details on latest developments and next steps

Transition towards full digital management of Erasmus+ student mobility

DG EAC has presented and discussed the state of play and planning for the next steps in the following recent consultative meetings:

- Meeting with the **European Student Card Initiative Digital Officers** from National Agencies and National Authorities on 18 November 2020.

- Meeting with **commercial and other third party software providers** that are EWP partners on 4 December 2020.

- Meeting with **higher education institutions** in the process of connecting their own in-house IT system to the Network, nominated to participate in the meeting by the Digital Officers on 8 January 2021.

- Surveys carried it out in many different higher education institutions during one year.

- Official launch of the first release of the Erasmus+ App on 17 January 2021.

The conclusion of this consultation process is that **systems are fit for purpose and the proposed timeline for higher education institutions from June 2021 is feasible** as most institutions should be ready by then to start implementing the digital agreements.

However, as some higher education institutions, in particular those in the process of connecting their own IT system to the EWP Network, may need more time to connect, the Commission will consider the **2021/2022 academic year as a transitional year.** This means that at the very latest for the start of the academic year 2022/2023, all higher education institutions must be connected to the EWP Network and use it exclusively for their Inter-Institutional Agreements and Online Learning Agreements. Compliance with this will be subject to NA monitoring as part of regular ECHE monitoring activities. In this context, we strongly encourage higher education institutions to start as soon as possible the development work to enable their IT systems to connect to EWP Network and be ready to exchange data and use the digital templates for student mobility management as from June 2021 and no later than the start of the 2022/2023 academic year.

To check which institutions have a EWP Dashboard account (available for institutions that do not have their own IT system for managing mobilities), see here (username: national_agency / password: 6mz9FKR3VtWY7NSS) and to check which institutions have a direct connection to the EWP Network here.

Concretely:

For InterInstitutional Agreements, all agreements should be renewed digitally through the EWP Network as from June 2021 and at the latest before the start of the first mobilities of the 2022/2023 academic year. Current Inter-Institutional Agreements are valid for mobilities taking place in the 2021/2022 academic year. This should ensure that every higher education institution will have sufficient time to connect and set up their agreements. Once an agreement has been renewed digitally with a partner, it replaces the currently existing agreement.

- Higher education institutions can renew their agreements either by connecting their own IT system (or via a third party connection) to the EWP Network or via the EWP Dashboard. More information can be found in the Erasmus Without Paper Competence Centre.

- Test agreements created via the Erasmus Without Paper Dashboard will be deleted shortly before the start of the June renewal phase as announced in Note 004 "*Inter-Institutional Agreements for HE mobility projects*" and confirmed in Note 033 *"Updates on Inter-institutional Agreements for HE mobility projects following COVID-19"*

- The system does not support multilateral agreements yet, but like in the current programme, higher education institutions will be able to use the provided template to sign a multilateral agreement on paper.

For Online Learning Agreements, all agreements should be set up and signed digitally through the EWP network for intra- European student mobility for studies as from June 2021 and at the latest before the start of the first mobilities of the 2022/2023 academic year. The technical conditions for this (APIs) are in final stages of preparation. Before higher education institutions set up and digitally sign Online Learning Agreements through the EWP, they are permitted to use their current system for managing learning agreements provided the template used complies with the minimum requirements of the template provided on the Commission website[2].

Online Learning Agreements for traineeships and mobility to partner countries will become available as a second step for future calls. National Agencies will be informed about progress and estimated timeline at a later stage.

Authenticating and identifying Erasmus+ students

In order to ensure that digital management of student mobility is efficient and secure, it is paramount that the system can uniquely identify students and authenticate its users. To solve this, the MyAcademicID project has created the European Student Identifier (ESI) and embedded it in the eduGAIN infrastructure and the student-facing components of Erasmus Without Paper. This allows students to use their home university credentials when interacting with, for example, the Erasmus+ App and the Online Learning Agreement available via the EWP Dashboard. It also allows their home institution to issue the ESI and include it in the exchange of relevant mobility data to uniquely identify the student. Detailed information about this can be found for example in the ESI blueprint.

All higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to join their National Research and Education Network (NREN) as soon as possible to allow their students to benefit from using their home university credentials and their ESI to identify themselves.

The Commission is also working together with project partners involved in the initiative to find an alternative solution for those higher education institutions that are not able to join a NREN. While most universities are already represented in eduGAIN through their NRENs, some smaller higher education institutions in particular may not be able to connect to the NREN.

Two alternative solutions are already provided to reply to the needs of their students. They can either use their national eID or their Google account to access services. The objective is to replace the Google authentication as soon as possible with a more secure and sustainable alternative solution. The Commission and project partners will discuss this specific topic during the next meeting with the Digital Officers on 22 February.

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[2] The OLA template is available on the Commission Erasmus+ website under the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/online-learning-agreements-student-mobility-studies_en

Next steps

A webinar with the Digital Officers is organised for 22 February in order to further discuss student authentication and identification as well to address any questions digital officers might have in relation to the presented timeline.

Between April and June 2021, two technical webinars will be organised for to higher education institutions, in order to explain in detail how to connect, use and manage digital Inter-Institutional Agreements and Online Learning Agreements.