

THE SOCRATES-ERASMUS PROGRAMME IN POLAND IN 2002/03

The main purpose of this publication is to summarise the results of Polish universities¹ participation in the SOCRATES-Erasmus programme in 2002/2003, with the focus on the mobility of students and academic teachers. The data collected by the National Agency (NA) comes from reports on the student and teaching staff mobility sent to the National Agency by the universities involved in the programme.

Polish participation in the SOCRATES-Erasmus programme dates from 1998/99.

Institutional Contracts

In 2002/03 120 Polish Higher Education Institutions signed Institutional Contracts with the European Commission. Among them, there were:

- 82 state HEIs: 17 universities, 21 technical universities, 5 higher schools of economics, 5 higher schools of agriculture, 4 teacher training higher education institutions, 6 medical academies, 6 academies of physical education, 14 academies of art, drama or music (8 academies of music, 4 academies of art, 2 theatre academies) and 4 higher vocational schools;
- 38 private HEIs.

A detailed list of universities participating in Erasmus is presented in the Annex No 1.

120 Polish HEIs participating in the Erasmus Programme in 2002/03 constitute about 6,5% of all the European universities that took part in Erasmus (1846 Institutional Contracts all over Europe).

The academic year 2002/03 was the last one in which the universities signed Institutional Contracts with the European Commission for the implementation of the so-called „centralised actions”: organisation of mobility, introduction of the ECTS, coordination of the Intensive Programmes and CD projects, as well as preparatory visits. From 2003/04, OM, ECTS and PV are financed within the contracts with the National Agency as „decentralised actions”; the Intensive Programmes, like other multilateral Erasmus projects, are financed in the framework of the contracts with the European Commission.

The tables 2, 3, and 4 summarise the financial data on the implementation of activities within the Institutional Contracts in Poland. The data concerning the utilisation of the grant in 2002/03 comes from final reports submitted by the Polish universities to the European Commission. The data cannot be considered as final, since it does not take into account the evaluation of the final reports and the verification of statements by the Technical Assistance Office in Brussels.

Decentralised actions – student and teaching staff mobility (SM and TS)

118 Polish universities signed contracts with the National Agency for the implementation of SM or TS: 95 universities implemented both student and staff mobility, 20 universities only SM and 3 – only TS. The statistical and financial data related to the implementation of the SOCRATES-Erasmus decentralised actions in Poland from 1998/99 to 2002/03 is presented in the tables No 5 and 6.

POLISH STUDENT MOBILITY IN 2002/03

5.419 Polish students undertook a study period at a partner university in the EU. In relation to 2001/02, the number of flows has increased by 25%. In Poland we have already about 17 671 ex-Erasmus students; within the next few months there will be some 6 – 6,5 thousands more.

The 5.419 students, who participated in the Erasmus exchange in 2002/03, came from 115 universities. The number of persons sent abroad by particular universities varies considerably

¹ University – a higher education institution participating in the SOCRATES-Erasmus programme

(from 1 to 400 persons from a given university); the ranking of universities according to the number of student flows is presented in the Annex No 3.

As regards host countries, Germany (1.682 students), France (745 students), Spain (442 students), Italy (403 students) and Great Britain (314 students) received the greatest number of Polish students (see table No 7 in the Polish language text, see also table No 14 showing the number of outgoing students from each European country).

If we consider the subject areas, the greatest number of Polish students travelling abroad studied business, economics, management, technical sciences, social sciences, languages and natural sciences.

INFORMATION ON THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

Information about the programme is disseminated mainly through Web pages, leaflets and brochures, information tables, meetings, information in local and regional media. The Erasmus Students Network is developing its activity in Poland as well (local sections in 6 cities; see also the ESN web site: www.esn.org).

SELECTION OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITIES

At large universities that send great number of students abroad every year, the selection of candidates is organised at the faculty or institute levels; at smaller universities, the selection is usually organised at the central level.

Generally the selection procedure was based on the analysis of documents submitted by the students and – very often – on an interview with the candidate; sometimes a language examination or test was also organised. The internal regulations and the formal criteria of the students' selection at each university have to be prepared in writing and approved as an official document by the university authorities or an authorised board. Academic performance and language proficiency are obligatory criteria for the selection. Some additional criteria frequently used by the universities include a strong motivation to study abroad, positive opinion of a tutor or dean, scientific achievements, co-operation with IRO, assistance offered to foreign students, as well as active participation in student organisations and commitment to university life.

LANGUAGE PREPARATION

Additional language courses for students have been organised by 33% of Polish universities. However, the courses offered by host universities seem to be more popular with the students. In 2002/03, the Intensive Language Preparation Courses (ILPC) - courses of less widely taught EU languages – have been attended by 74 Polish students.

GRANT DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM AT THE UNIVERSITIES

Each university implementing student mobility receives an overall amount for the mobility grants from the National Agency. The grant is distributed at the university level according to the rules established by the university in line with the contractual obligations and the National Action Plan. The system most frequently applied by the universities (61% of institutions) foresees the payment of an equal sum for each student/month. In some universities the grant for one student/month depended on the costs of living in the host country or town, or on the costs of accommodation offered by host university.

CO-FINANCING OF STUDENT MOBILITY FROM OTHER SOURCES

In 2002/03, 81 universities devoted ca 932.426 EUR from their own resources to increase student grants, which equals ca 18% of the total Erasmus grant for student mobility in Poland.

MAIN PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SM

Generally, the organisation of mobility has improved in comparison with the previous years, however certain problems and difficulties are still observed. Erasmus university co-ordinators pointed out the following issues:

- the low level of grants, financial problems
- complicated and long-lasting visa procedures
- communication with partner universities
- problems with establishing *Learning Agreements* due to late or no response of host university prior to students' departure
- finding accommodation in host countries
- long delays in receiving *Transcripts of Records* or other documents confirming the study period abroad
- procedures linked with the residence permit.

STUDY PERIOD ABROAD IN THE OPINION OF STUDENTS

The main conclusion that may be drawn from questionnaires completed by the students is that they have a very positive opinion on the study period in the EU.

Motivation

Erasmus students decided to study abroad in order to: acquire new, European experience, improve academic knowledge and learn more about other countries and cultures, better prepare themselves for the future professional carrier and test themselves in new environments and situations.

Positive aspects of study period abroad in the opinion of Erasmus students were as follows:

- mastering of foreign languages, possibility to study in a foreign language
- direct contact with the new culture, people, country
- new international friendships, opening to the world
- possibility to get acquainted with another system of study, other methods of teaching,
- academic and educational aspects: broadening of knowledge, new approaches to a given area
- important experience for the future professional career, interesting opportunities for practical placements
- opportunity to become more self-dependent, self-confident.
- wide access to libraries, teaching materials, modern equipment, advanced technologies
- possibility to continue studies at a foreign university
- wider knowledge about the EU.

Problems

- finding accommodation abroad
- heavy and complicated visa formalities, residence permit procedures
- the low level of grants
- bureaucracy in host countries (including universities)
- insufficient support from the host university;
- recognition of the study period by the home university
- poor communication with the Erasmus co-ordinator at host university
- difficulty with obtaining the transcripts of records from the host university
- establishing of a study programme acceptable by all three parties involved (home and host university, student), due to substantial differences in study programmes between home and host university
- difficult integration with local students.

THE EU ERASMUS STUDENTS IN POLAND

In 2002/03, 1054 EU students came to Poland in the framework of the Erasmus Programme. In comparison with 2001/02, this number has increased by 40%. The EU students studied at 76 Polish universities. The major obstacle in increasing the number of incoming students is an insufficient offer of courses taught in foreign languages at the Polish universities.

In September 2002, 63 EU students were offered special intensive Polish language courses (*Intensive Language Preparation Courses*) organized at the University of Łódź and the Silesian University in Katowice.

TEACHING STAFF MOBILITY IN 2002/03

The teaching staff visits to partner universities to deliver lectures, seminars or other teaching activities to local students are an important element of teaching staff development at Polish universities. In 2002/03 884 Polish university teachers went abroad in order to teach at partner universities. Most of them visited Germany, France and Great Britain (see Table No 15 in the Polish language text, presenting the number of outgoing teachers from Poland by countries of destination). Technical sciences, foreign languages, business and management, social sciences were the most often represented subject areas in Polish staff mobility to the EU.

In the case of 68 universities, Erasmus teaching staff visits were co-financed from other sources, mainly from the university/faculty budgets. The amount of additional funds (ca 223.000 euro) equalled 48% of the overall Erasmus grant spent on TS mobility.

The TS visits bring many additional benefits to the universities and teachers themselves, e.g. improvement of inter-university co-operation, undertaking of joint initiatives - conferences, publications, projects, establishment of new contacts (with faculties, institutes, lecturers).

THE EU ACADEMIC TEACHERS IN POLAND

In 2002/03, 640 EU academic teachers visited Polish universities in the framework of the Erasmus programme. The highest number of teachers came from Germany (185), France (136) and Great Britain (65). Detailed data concerning the incoming academic teachers is available in the table 17.

Student and teaching staff mobility are the most popular Erasmus activities in Poland, but it is also worth mentioning that many Polish universities participate in centralised actions of the Erasmus Programme such as Curriculum Development Projects, Intensive Programmes and Thematic Networks. The Annex No 12 contains the list of Polish universities, which participated or coordinated CD and IP projects in the academic year 2002/03. The list of Thematic Network projects implemented in 2002/03 with participation by the Polish institutions is presented in the Annex No 13.