Erasmus+ as a vehicle for global cooperation: Radboud University’s recommendations for the Erasmus+ mid-term review

International cooperation is part of Radboud University’s DNA. The Erasmus+ programme stands at the centre of our international activities: the key actions provide staff and students with a means to be mobile, allow for increasingly close collaboration with the partners of our European University NeurotechEU and offer opportunities to establish sustainable global collaborations in such countries as Indonesia and Tanzania, as well as in the Eastern Balkans. In other words, Erasmus+ activities help us to maintain the international focus that is a core part of our university. With this position paper, we would like to express our gratitude and offer reflections and recommendations on how the Erasmus+ programme could evolve in a sustainable way. This position paper is complementary to those of the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and Neth-ER.

Recommendation 1: A flexible approach to joint education
Erasmus+ offers great opportunities for setting up cooperative educational activities. The joint Master’s programme, collaborative online international learning (COIL) and the blended intensive programmes (BIP) have enabled us to advance our collaboration with partner universities a step further. These activities are also having a significant impact on both staff and students. In light of current digital developments, it would be valuable to open the funding to fuller digital collaboration in the form of joint modules, seminars or programmes. This could allow universities outside EU to be partners and eliminate the need for students to travel. In addition, shorter programmes could be an interesting alternative to Erasmus Mundus Master’s programme. These programmes or activities could span several weeks, and they should be applicable to both Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes. Such ‘modules’ would offer diverse possibilities for the international classroom and other forms of learning (e.g. in joint research projects, student think tanks or discussion groups). Because there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to joint education, the funding should be flexible and accommodate a variety of activities with EU and global partners.

Recommendation 2: Focus on equitable, sustainable and long-term collaborations within a modern global setting
Radboud University aims to be a university with a global focus. Erasmus+ mobility actions outside Europe help to build the relationships that have been inspiring colleagues and students over the past decades. Currently, many challenges to society have been identified, and the only way to make progress towards meeting them is to work together globally. Erasmus+ should continue to fund the exchange between universities within and outside the EU and offer provisions for ensuring continuity. We cannot make a change unless we are invested for the long-term.

To make global cooperation easier and more sustainable, Erasmus+ could fund new types of digital joint education and consider restructuring the various regions. The current structure is quite outdated. The regions are so large that they no longer do justice to the many progressive developments that are taking place around the world with regard to higher education. For example, in Region 9 (Sub-Saharan Africa), universities are often in competition with themselves, as multiple initiatives address different countries within the same region. This poses an impediment to stability and sustainability. More specifically, such competition can prevent newer initiatives from flourishing.

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1 For an example of virtual international collaboration from the Netherlands, see (in Dutch): https://www.dus-i.nl/subsidies/virtuele-internationale-samenwerkingsprojecten?
or lead to the downgrading of existing activities. It would be helpful for the regions to be subdivided into groups of no more than 10 countries.

In addition, better reciprocity between incoming and outgoing mobility flows would allow for more equitable partnerships. As currently applied, the capacity-building narrative is too narrow, and it does not contribute to creation of equal and sustainable relationships with partners in the global south.

**Recommendation 3: Balance digitalisation activities**
The digitalisation of the Erasmus+ programme is having a substantial impact on the organisational workload. It would therefore be highly desirable to increase the OS budget. With the implementation of Erasmus Without Paper, Radboud’s digital support teams are making sure that the new tools are operational and integrated into the university systems. This process does not go without a hitch. Piloting and testing are essential in order to limit the number of issues that may arise. Institutions are currently serving as test users, increasing the workload of the support staff and placing pressure on the university’s digital infrastructure.

We request that new tools be introduced later, after they have been tested extensively, so that their implementation at the institutional level will proceed more smoothly. Furthermore, the introduction of new tools should be paced to ensure that one tool functions properly before a new tool is added. The proper implementation of EWP+ is crucial, and it is therefore of paramount importance to take the time to do it right.