

ACA's contribution to the EC's public consultation on the European Education Area

As an association of national actors supporting internationalisation in higher education (Erasmus+ NAs and similar bodies), ACA strongly supports international cooperation in all ET sectors, the vision of a truly transnational EEA and **strengthening ties between higher education and research**, in support of the latest efforts by the EC. A “borderless” learning area of cooperation, quality and diversity cannot happen without **coordination between EEA and ERA**, to pave the way to **cross-policy and cross-programme thinking and funding** as a new modus operandi at all levels.

Creating deeper synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe requires new cooperation models between DG EAC and RTD (and other relevant agencies) in policy/programme coordination. ACA fully supports the European Universities Initiative, which brings together **inclusion, excellence and international cooperation** - via the types of HEIs in the consortia, geographical coverage, disciplines and activities supported. To modernise curricula and boost innovation, education and research must be on par in the knowledge triangle/diamond. Further actions should build on existing frameworks (EHEA, Erasmus+) and Erasmus+ should be reinforced by and complementary with national initiatives and other EU programmes (Creative Europe, Digital Europe etc.).

ACA encourages using fully the possibilities in Erasmus+ cooperation projects, including systematically extracting and validating their outcomes, to enable deeper engagement of HEIs in international cooperation and foster the quality of education, inclusiveness, excellence and innovation. More focus on challenge-based learning across disciplines and more active involvement of students in research activities to further strengthen links among education, research and innovation. ACA strongly advises building and expanding on existing flagship programmes rather than creating new activities or programmes to implement EEA. The role of Erasmus+ NAs, EURAXESS BHOs, HEIs and other actors responsible for international cooperation is key to achieving a strong **European knowledge area**, based on synergies, complementarity and internationalisation.

In reference to the 2017 “Gothenburg Communication”, ACA strongly supports **physical international mobility** of all individuals in all ET sectors - acknowledging, as shown by the COVID-19 pandemic, that “removing borders” *can* happen in confinement, via **digital technologies**. Digitalisation has served as a useful and necessary tool to link learning

and teaching individuals and organisations despite the temporary “physical immobility”. The next Erasmus+ budget, the digital and green transitions require new modes of learning mobility - linking learners worldwide while improving access to internationalisation and reducing carbon footprint. Although supporting diverse modes of course delivery, ACA calls for **continued support for physical mobility** and opportunities for learners to study abroad and experience in-person intercultural interactions.

In any form, mobility must be **smooth and inclusive**: without obstacles to recognition of credits and diplomas, and accessible to all regardless of background (see **ACA Reflection paper**), including geographically balanced mobility and competitive digital/blended opportunities/systems of internationalisation at home for those unable to participate in physical mobility. Better recognition of diplomas and study periods abroad requires **stronger international partnership-building efforts** to enhance trust and openness of education systems, also by means of digitalisation.

Work towards **digital competences for all** (students, teachers and staff) is thus needed both for quality internationalisation and a resilient lifelong learning area, in view of potential future crises. ACA urges for **continued support for European-level needs-based peer learning for national funding bodies**, HEIs and other relevant stakeholders on new trends, including virtual/blended forms of exchanges.