

# **WS vertical mobility**

## **Report by Susanna and Nikki**

### The Degree Structure and Recognition Challenges

In this part of the workshop we looked into the degree structures and mechanisms and their impact on vertical mobility, namely from the perspective of a bachelor-master structure that was agreed to have a significant impact on the vertical mobility. We also discussed the recognition challenges particular to the degree structures and vertical mobility.

The workshop felt that currently the main focus of programs is on the horizontal mobility, however, the new degree structures were seen to promote vertical mobility at the expense of horizontal mobility. Some felt it was natural to shift emphasis from the horizontal mobility more towards the vertical mobility because of this trend.

‘It is important to have more possibilities to study and to choose from, the new BA/MA structure already makes it more complicated to go to a shorter exchange period so it is important to emphasize the vertical mobility too.’

On the other hand, it was also argued that since the new structure of BA/MA already pushes a lot towards the vertical mobility, forcing it to happen it could perhaps be unwise to emphasise vertical mobility too much.

The workshop discussed at length the comparability of degrees in order to pursue for further studies abroad. Vertical mobility should be taken account in already in the early stage of education and it was also emphasised that it could be a natural part of earlier cycles to plan further studies abroad. It was pointed out, however, integration is more than just economic integration, for real open area vertical mobility should be fully promoted in order to people to feel it is natural to be mobile and study in different countries.

However, as there already are a lot of choices a student has to take during the first year of study, it is important to pay attention to having some extra guidance in planning the next cycle education. It was also pointed out that going abroad should not form a must, but should be based on a voluntary decision by an individual, without outside pressure.

To tackle the problem of comparing of degrees and the fact that for example bachelors defer in content quite a bit from country to country, it was suggested that extra courses should be available to students to fill in the ‘blanks’ of their bachelor. The workshop felt very strongly about refusing admittance to master studies on the basis that a student lacks some bachelor courses that the local students have taken. However as to what extend a student should be able to take supplement courses in order to be eligible to study for a master, was not agreed upon.

It was also emphasised that rather than having similar degrees all over Europe, it would be better to allow diversity and tackle problems through allowing flexibility in the content and supplementary courses.

### 2. Joint/ double degrees and Vertical Mobility

The workshop discussed about the joint/ double degrees and their relation with vertical mobility as well as compared horizontal and vertical mobility.

Participants found it difficult and even unnecessary to find an order of importance in the different forms of mobility, however, it was seen that the different forms of mobility have different objectives and serve different purposes, even though very much also depends on the individual. Even though it was established that vertical mobility can be seen as more academic than horizontal mobility that often concentrates on language skills and cultural experiences, whereas vertical mobility emphasises studies and reaching a degree, it was also pointed out that the participating student is the one that finally decides the nature of the mobility in his or her part.

Horizontal mobility was also seen as a form of mobility that is easier accessible to all and involves a much larger group of students than vertical mobility.

Joint degrees involve horizontal mobility and as such can be also viewed as competing or complementary forms of mobility in respect to vertical mobility. It was also pointed out that the existence of joint/ double degree programmes also contributes to vertical mobility through links and contacts in between the universities and individuals and makes the obtaining of information easier. On the other hand, joint/ double degree programmes can appear more appealing than vertical mobility as they involve the 'home' institution and can thus appear more accessible, less risky but still international. These programmes can also be seen as something that possibly compete with master's programmes.

It was also debated whether the existence of institutionalised programmes like joint degrees makes it more difficult for free movers. It was agreed that these programmes generally stimulate mobility in general but might make it more difficult for free movers too and sometimes discouraged. They may also enhance inequalities in between countries who are actively involved in these programmes and those that are less so.

### 3. masters' programmes and Vertical mobility

The workshop spent quite some time discussing the new popular trend of creating European master's and masters' programmes. It was debated with students in general should be encouraged to favour these set programs that are ready constructed, balanced, and designed for vertical mobility instead of venturing to go abroad on their own. It was agreed that these programmes do tackle many of the mobility obstacles well enough and make mobility easier. However, the workshop felt very strongly that students should have free choice of participating ready programmes or going abroad to study on a free mover basis. It was even emphasised that the masters' programmes should not threaten this possibility that mobility is ultimately about complete freedom.

The workshop then collected pro's and con's, problems and potentials of masters' programmes:

pro's

-access to vertical mobility is easier

-selection of students can be easier when there are set targets

-easier recognition, especially with European master's which is a well-known concept

-it can also promote internationalisation at home, especially if when the student participating vertical mobility study together with local students (although a language barrier can be a problem)

Con's:

- funding, as always is a problem from the students perspective
- lack of information: institutions and local authorities should be involved in the promotion and informing.
- contributes to brain drain.
- inequal possibilities, depending on geographical, economic and social background.
- possibly losing of contact with (namely) the job market in ones own country.

Although more con's than pro's were identified, vertical mobility was still viewed as important and well worth working on.

The workshop also worked an outline of an ideal masters' programme

There would be 3 categories of different masters according to their nature and aim:

- research oriented
- educational oriented
- practical oriented

The structure and content of the master depends very much on the content and structure of the bachelor. Also the content, duration and structure of the master should be depended on these.

For recognition of former degrees there would also be a need for an independent, quality assurance system to ensure the quality of the masters programmes as well as tackle recognition problems.

Selection in the master programmes should be more based on the skills and knowledge obtained in the bachelor and not on (name of) degree. In general it was felt that each case should be studied individually, and eventually the possible supplementary courses (discussed earlier) would also be based on this.

Promotion of study abroad should not only be based on the topic of studies but also on the differences in teaching methods and focus, cultural differences etc.

Students should also be an active part of the creation and evaluation of the programs, they have specific knowledge about how education works from the inside and what students want to learn.

The workshop also tackled to some extent the financial and social aspects of vertical mobility. The workshop felt that there is a risk that an elite group, social and economical but also an academic elite, could be formed through the masters' programmes. There is a tendency for universities attempting to select the best of the best to their programmes and keep the selection very strict. In some countries tuition fees for masters's programmes are higher, and in some countries there is a tendency to introduce tuition fees to international masters' programmes only.

Joint degrees and master programmes vs. vertical mobility as such (doing a degree in a foreign country outside a special programme) are different in nature. Potentially the two former are more 'international' oriented and they are designed for international students. However, it also depends on the student's own expectations and the role he/she takes as regards to the international element of studies.

Master's programmes can also end up taking up proportionally a large share of the universities resources at the expense of other courses.

#### 4. Structures and preconditions for vertical mobility

The workshop debated on whether there should be a similar scheme for vertical mobility as Erasmus is for horizontal mobility. It was felt that it could be a good way to reach more people, disperse information and encourage more students to go on vertical mobility as well as help create institutional framework for vertical mobility. However, it was also pointed out that already Erasmus often reaches only a small number of better-off students and therefore such a scheme might not benefit all students equally. A better alternative for funding and solving of the financial obstacles is still the transferable grants from the home country.

The workshop discussed the language problem of vertical mobility, however, agreeing to a large extent to the ESIB's policy paper on languages. English as the main language of tuition was objected, however, it was admitted that especially small countries or countries with an rare or a difficult language could not attract foreign students without giving courses in e.g. English. The role and importance of teaching the language of the country to the students, even if the master's programmes was in English, was however seen as important.

##### Admission mechanisms

In the discussion about admission procedures for students from abroad into a further cycle, the workshop first of all stressed former degrees should be evaluated by workload, which should be done via a system of credit points like ECTS.

It was noticed that an evaluation of the acquired former content knowledge of students and selection is done in different way in different countries. Difficult and unclear selection schemes in foreign universities can be an incentive for students to stay in the own university for a next degree, since there they often are better aware expected from you, how to come through the selection.

Also differences in studycosts like tuition fees can be selective. The occurrence of strict selection depends a lot on availability and scarcity of masters, in which a striking difference seems to exist between the north-west and the south and east of Europe.

The participants of the workshop agreed that the focus in evaluation of student's should be on their knowledge and skills, necessary as a starting point for the new program. The starting point should be the skills and knowledge essential for starting a new degree programme. Possible solutions suggested were the efficient use of ECTS and especially the diploma supplement. Even though entrance examinations were not widely supported, language testing was seen as necessary in some cases.

##### The Why and What of Vertical Mobility

Finally the workshop had a brainstorm on the vertical mobility from the perspective of the participating individual, institutions and finally from the perspective of the countries and of Europe as a whole.

*Why vertical mobility could be interesting important or motivating for an individual student:*

- Experience from other cultures
- Good and interesting experiences in general
- Accessing courses or education not available in the own country
- experiencing another university culture
- making new contacts and also new friends
- interaction of science
- social skills
- improves the employability
- a need to get international perspective
- mobility is freedom of movement, also intellectual freedom.
- enhances tolerance and understanding.
- get in contact with different (academic) points of view and ways of thinking
- exchange of ideas, research.

*For institutions.*

- attracting of best students who can contribute to their research
- attract more students in general
- benefits the local students (internationalisation at home)
- can be seen as improvement of competitiveness towards other universities.
- can be beneficial for the internationalisation of the whole community: universities contributing to the society
- internationalisation of teachers, improving their international skills
- good for the image of university, promotion
- new ideas and approaches
- creates future (scientific) contacts for future co-operation and lobby opportunities.
- international understanding
- increasing of human resources

*for the country/ Europe*

- brings new knowledge into country with incoming as well as outgoing foreign students.
- vertical mobility increases possibilities for internationalisation, satisfies a growing need for international experiences
- a traditional way of freedom of movement in Europe
- international cooperation
- demographic movement within Europe
- raises quality of education
- raises national as well as European identity and international respect and understanding.
- promotes the idea of equality between different countries.
- promotes dialogue between countries
- improves the quality of education
- raises the profile of the countries, markets their education to abroad
- better connections and cooperation in between countries, can lead to better economic cooperation also
- more diverse populations

*Negative aspects of for individual students or institutes, countries:*

- leaving of friends, family
- leave things behind without knowing what to expect.

- can be confronted with discrimination and prejudice, feeling of being unequal
- social security and social benefits not always transferable, citizens rights not always transferable
- lack of information and counseling which causes uncertainty. 'They don't know what they get, but do know what they have.'
- recognition problems
- takes a lot of courage to go on a vertical mobility
- can be better for a student's future to stay at home
- can become an obligation to go abroad, which is not desirable
- English language can become too dominant. This may endanger country's identity.
- Costs a lot of money and which mostly has to be covered by the student
- expensive and may not be a worthy investment
- universities are not always ready to cater for foreign students or be interested to develop support measures for foreign students
- universities and countries can lose their best students and academics. Can give incentive for government to reduce funding higher education and can result in more commodification of education.
- benefits for students are always not clear
- lot of competition for only a few grants and places

### *Conclusions*

Vertical mobility is growing in importance and becoming more popular through the two-tier degree system. It is also stimulated by the development of European masters and master's programmes. Vertical mobility shares many problems and obstacles common to horizontal mobility; especially funding, information distribution and recognition were seen as barriers to mobility. However, often the problems to vertical mobility appear harder to overcome than those of the horizontal mobility, often due to the fact that vertical mobility is about an entire degree and of a longer duration and carries greater implications for the individual as well as for the participating institutions. Diploma Supplement emerged as an important tool to overcome the recognition problems together with the ECTS system. Vertical mobility was also seen as something quite different from horizontal mobility, it may for example be seen as more academically focused, however, also a lot depends on the participating students personal aims and priorities.

Vertical mobility comprises of free mobility and of different types of mobility programmes such as the European masters and these two forms of vertical mobility can be seen to differ in nature and aims. More programmes would be welcomed to facilitate vertical mobility; however, the workshop expressed a strong wish to keep the free mover based option for vertical mobility available and accessible to all. The masters's programmes were also feared to develop into elite programmes (social and economical, academic elites) accessible to only few.

Vertical mobility was seen as an important and necessary form of mobility and more emphasis on this development and improvement as well as more resources would be needed. There are also special questions and problems involved to especially the vertical mobility programmes that need to be tackled with.

## Annex 1.

### *'In my country' info-exchange*

#### Group 1.

##### Fryslan (The place where blond Dutch come from)

- 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle not yet in function, but when implemented will promote vertical mobility
- Universities are not promoting it: universities using student pricing
- Grants are transferable abroad when enrolled in a NL-HEI – so not for vertical mobility

##### Czech Republic

- No BA-MA cycle structure which is an obstacle
- Grants are not transferable abroad
- Erasmus grants are not sufficient for going to most EU-countries study

##### Texas/ US

- Vertical mobility is very easy inside the US, a cultural thing – academically bad to have all degrees in one university
- Vertical mobility very encouraged
- Cultural exchanges abroad (language skills)
- “Out of state” HEI’s ask higher tuition fees
- There’s a federal grant (mostly a loan) that can be transferred overseas

##### Denmark

- 4 years transferable grants
- Lisbon has been ratified
- Problems in labour market recognition
- Students are lazy, uninterested, uninformed and think that ‘home is best’

##### Macedonia

- Obtaining Visas a problem
- No programmes – only bilateral agreements for mobility
- Universities have a credit transfer system in the thematic networks, they are few and not so good
- Grants available from the state
- FARE/ TEMPUS

#### Group 2.

##### Italy

There are many problems concerning vertical mobility: financial, cultural the cultural background doesn’t support vertical mobility), lack of information, poor recognition

##### Portugal

The same as Italy

Israel

The same as Italy (speciality however the military service)

Finland

There are many problems: lack of information and recognition

Denmark

The same as Finland.

Interesting/ Controversial topics

- Lack of information: the economic facilities given by public institutions to informing about vertical mobility, not enough information on what you can find from abroad
- Risk of systems becoming more and more similar and the loss of diversity within education through the loss of national characteristics
- Recognition: institutions and labour market don't always regard studies abroad as something positive
- Financial: state grants linked to the national study programmes, studying abroad is also a way to promote yourself

*Netherlands (Helmer)*

### **Financing.**

- The government pay only the public schools, 4/ 5 of the cost of every students....
- Institution gets financed for 1,35 years....normally it takes 4 years.... if the student completes in 4 years the government, pays it all.
- The faster you finish - the student costs less
- 1300 euros public tuition – all student get a fee on a monthly base.....third option can get a loan from the state.....211 euros per month...which is a gift.....it depends on how much parents earn how much you get more from the government
- 200 – 250 for rent – so the gift from state is just for rent.....

How does it influence mobility?

- Even if students from Netherlands go abroad – they get those money from the government....and take it abroad.....but exchange students which come to Netherlands do not get this finance....

They have bachelors and masters degrees.....

If students from Netherlands finish bachelor in Netherlands.....they can go to a master in foreign country....total mobility to other institutions in Netherlands.....

Alot of concenstration on practical experiment in Netherlands.....

Problem to come to Netherlands? – quality is not a problem (comming in and going out),  
.....more getting funding, get into program, to be able to take your own financing with  
you.....

Problem to come to Netherlands ? – pay college fee, housing is a problem, increasingly teaching  
both in english and dutch....problem is the professor

## **Iibera – Albania.....**

### **Finance..**

Bachelors / masters..

- Three label
- Masters, - two types
- 1- 3 years....bachelors...usually for 4 years..
- Medicine can go up to 6 years...
- Phd is generally for 4 years..

Mobility inside Albania..

- Mobility with neighbour countries..
- Even the program is public, there are alot of problems...
- Student visa.....not a big problem...

Very few people coming to Albania..

People from Albania go mostly abroad to study towards masters or phd .... USA, Italy and all over....

Credited transfer system.....easy to go to your director at your department to get your

Tution fees are common.....for Albanians....alot of countries give students though grants .....and many get them....

Quality is good and students often get grants and do well in foreign countries...

Does not make any difference between european countries....when you come back...

- The programs are not comperable to other contries.....
- Bachelors and masters.....

Are many students going abroad from Albania to study abroad?

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## **Iceland – Sigthor**

### **Competition...**

Private Institutions have been coming up in the last few years. Competition between private and public institutions is a big issue, since the government pays the same amount for students going to either kind of institution. (new contracts - agreements every year)

### **Tuition...**

Private institutions also take tuition fees. Where is the difference between private and public institutions. Private institutions do not offer MA-programs so far.

Most students take governmental loans for their studies, since living expenses are quite expensive. (bank loans are another yet more expensive possibility)

### **MSc and Bachelors....**

For Masters, students usually go abroad. However, it is expensive to go abroad, so students will need more loans, which they have to pay back at the end.

It is very common to work besides the studies, since the loans are far from being sufficient. (students also work June, July, August) Working besides is not that difficult, schedules are "flexible".

Masters might be prolonged for half a year, if students change subjects.

### **Government...**

The government is not concerned enough about quality, many and academic career issues.

### **Mobility...**

Horizontal mobility is very well organised between the islandic institutions. Students are used to vertical mobility with institutions from abroad, since they have gone abroad for the last 700 centuries already... (at least that is what we believe now...)

Within the institutions (interdisciplinary studies) are not that well organised.

**eLearning and eMobility**  
**chaired by Johan Almqvist**  
**co-chaired by Terhi Nokkala**

Topic of the workshop

Elearning was defined as a form of formal or non-formal education aimed at attaining set learning goals, in which direct interaction between teachers and students as well as among student groups is facilitated by information and communication technology.

Elearning is a multifaceted issue appearing both as parts of mixed mode education (provided partly as traditional learning, partly as online education), as well as completely on-line courses or degrees and both by higher education institutions operating under the public regulations framework either individually or in co-operation with other universities as well as by commercial providers. Elearning courses are provided both locally and nationally as well as on the global market. The scope of elearning initiatives varies greatly among European countries at the moment both in terms of infrastructural as well as content issues.

**Questions raised**

The workshop addresses the following questions: What problem does elearning solve, what are the challenges related to elearning? What are the specific requirements in terms of access, quality assurance, recognition, pedagogical aspects and student support and guidance systems? What are the responsibilities of different actors in terms of assuring that all necessary prerequisites for beneficial elearning and emobility to happen are in place.

**Main lines of discussion**

The positive aspects of elearning were discussed: elearning was seen as a flexible way for widening access for non-traditional learners and contributing to life long learning. It was seen as solving the problems related to distance between home and the learning institution, limited time resources, combining work and study etc. Also the physical boundaries, such as physical disability of the students as well as the physical limitations of working space, such as class room size can be overcome by using elearning. Elearning was seen as potentially diversifying the student body and thus contributing to more diversified learning experience for all participants as well as making internationalisation of individual studies easier to accomplish by networking individual students and researchers in the virtual, international higher education community. Interuniversity partnerships both domestically as well as internationally and sharing of courses between universities was seen as benefiting from the e-networking approach and thus contributing to the efficient use of scarce resources. Elearning was also seen as conferring ICT skills needed in the modern labour market as well as reflecting the modern society of which technology is a big part.

The problems caused by elearning were seen as being especially related to the social aspects, such as the socialisation process and fostering critical reflection among students, which were seen as important aims in education. The lack of face to face communication among students as well as between students and teachers were seen as making it more difficult for the students to get feedback of their studies and to establish a student community or to integrate into the larger higher education community. A strong emphasis was placed on assuring adequate student counselling, guidance and information systems, as well the need to

establish student representation systems. Also the issues related to adequate technological infrastructure and technical support were raised in the workshop. It was noted that the lacking or inadequate infrastructure is a barrier to access especially among students coming from less developed countries or from less privileged backgrounds. Elearning courses are sometimes also constructed as inflexible packages within which the student has little freedom for choice. Elearning might also result in inadequately developed oral presentation skills as face to face interaction is limited or missing. The financial issues related to the costs of elearning need to be resolved and the increasing elearning might lead to rising tuition fees due to capital-intensive investment in elearning infrastructure. The pedagogical aspects of elearning are still in many cases undeveloped, and placing course material into the web is still often considered as constituting elearning, although it does not take advantage of any of the pedagogical opportunities presented by ICT. Future technological development may however present answers to some of these shortcomings.

The suitability of elearning as a learning method for different disciplines was discussed extensively. There were different opinions among the group on whether elearning could be used in all fields of study or whether it is only suited for certain disciplines. It was noted that in fields requiring extensive practical training such as medicine, psychology, teacher training and certain natural sciences the elearning approach is considerably more difficult to use. Elearning was seen as supplementing traditional learning and in certain fields possibly substituting it in the future. However, it was established that at present both the technological and pedagogical requirements are not yet met for the elearning to be the sole method of learning. A note was also made on the problems related to privacy protection in the current elearning systems.

The issue of mobility was discussed extensively in the workshop and eventually it was concluded that no real mobility exists, as it is the education rather than the student that is moving. Instead, there can be elearning with more or less international orientation and interaction. Benefits of international interaction can to a certain extent be conferred also by elearning, although the cultural experiences related to everyday life in a foreign culture are missing. However, interaction among people coming from different cultural backgrounds can create an international experience also in a virtual setting. International networks among universities in providing education can help to make as efficient use of resources as possible. Recognition issues related to elearning need to be solved, both in terms of courses provided by single providers existing in other countries, as in between higher education providers providing courses either within one single country or degrees consisting of courses provided by HEI's from different countries. Some of the provisions from physical mobility programmes, such as learning agreements, may be of use here.

Pedagogical aspects related to elearning were also discussed in the workshop. It was concluded that same pedagogical goals exist both in traditional and virtual learning, but the pedagogical and didactical means are different. Elearning invites a change in the way that the roles of students and teachers are perceived and if implemented properly, may lead to enhanced learning experience. Elearning is not a way for reducing costs of tuition, as in order to provide a meaningful learning experience certain requirements need to be met. The learning groups need to be small enough, and the students need to have access to tutoring in smaller groups. Adequate pedagogical and technical support for the teachers need to be in place. Elearning courses should be designed by groups consisting of people with expertise in all the different aspects of elearning. Teachers need training in general ICT skills as well as

online tutoring and also for the students there should be adequate support in “learning to learn virtually”.

Governments and multinational bodies, such as European Union should help HEI’s build technology infrastructure. The costs of elearning should not fall upon a student e.g. in terms on raised tuition fees.

Student representation was discussed actively in the workshops and there were certain differences in opinion among the participants. The student unions both in sending as well as receiving countries were respectively seen as being responsible for representing elearning students. Also the possibility and legitimacy of the existing unions to represent students studying in purely virtual, commercial universities was discussed but no consensus was reached. The higher education institutions, local student unions and national student unions were called to co-operate in solving the problems related to student representation. The requirement of student representation as a legal prerequisite for accreditation was seen as one possible solution.

### **Unresolved questions**

The need to establish adequate quality assurance and recognition structures was seen as an important prerequisite for development of elearning, but no concrete conclusions on how to achieve this were reached. Organisation of student representation and ways for existing student bodies to reach students studying on online courses both in tradition as well as virtual universities were seen as important but again no conclusions were reached. Bridging the technological gap between developed and less developed countries remains a great challenge for the future. Also many of the pedagogical issues related to elearning are yet to be solved.

### **Conclusions**

#### *Definition:*

Elearning was defined as a form of formal or non-formal education aimed at attaining set learning goals, in which direct interaction between teachers and students as well as among student groups is facilitated by information and communication technology.

Elearning was seen as a possible, partial solution to geographical, physical or time-related barriers to accessing higher education.

Elearning will give learners ICT skills necessary in the information society.

However, other vital *social* skills may not be acquired if students are limited entirely to interaction within elearning systems.

Technological infrastructure is not available at a degree that would guarantee equal access to elearning for all.

Elearning offers must include counselling, guidance, information as well as individual tutoring and feedback on study progress.

Pedagogical shortcomings of elearning are widespread, and need to be addressed urgently.

In general, elearning was seen as a complement, and not a substitute, to traditional higher education. Specifically, some very hand-on courses will never be taught on-line.

Virtual mobility does not exist. However, taking cross-border elearning courses does have an added value of internationalisation.

As for physical mobility, elearning recognition issues must be addressed for students who want to use a course from one HEI for a degree at another HEI.

Similarly, recognition of full degrees awarded for elearning studies must be resolved.

Teachers need training in general ICT skills as well as online tutoring and also for the students there should be adequate support in “learning to learn virtually”.

Investment in elearning should not be made at the expense of students, neither through tuition fees nor through lowered quality.

The higher education institutions, local student unions and national student unions were called to co-operate in solving the problems related to student representation.

## ***ACCESS TO MOBILITY***

### *Introduction to the topic*

The workshop focused on different categories of obstacles in mobility (see below).

In addition, the existence of free movers and obstacles they face was discussed, as well as the problem with experience mobility leading to brain drain. At the end, the workshop evaluated the Erasmus World programme and put forward the key principles on which any future cooperation should be based upon.

For every obstacle special attention was put on the problem of countries with low student mobility (e.g. SEE or some Eastern European countries).

### *Questions*

1. For each of the following categories of obstacles to mobility, participants were asked to list the most common obstacles, to see which HE actors are responsible for removing these and what can be demanded/proposed/done by the specific HE actor to remove the specific obstacle.
  - a. Financial and administrative obstacles
  - b. Academic obstacles
  - c. Language and culture
  - d. Lack of information
  - e. Obstacles faces by students with special needs
2. Free movers
  - a. the reasons why students choose spontaneous mobility?
  - b. what are the specific obstacles that free movers are faced with?
  - c. relationship between free movers and high brain drain rates?
3. Cooperation with the so called third world countries
  - a. What are the main principles for this cooperation?
  - b. Is the Erasmus World a good tool for this?

### Discussion points and arguments

1. Obstacles to mobility
  - a. Lack of information

Lack of information was seen as the obstacle affecting all other issues surrounding access to mobility. Therefore, participants listed all types of information they found necessary when applying for a mobility programme or exploring spontaneous mobility possibilities. These are:

    - academic information – courses available, language of courses, application procedures, necessary study materials which should be provided by the host and the home HEIs (at the home HEI) and QA and recognition information which should be provided by QAA, ENIC/NARICs and HEIs together.
    - student welfare information – accommodation, food, health, discounts, approx. expenses per week, tuition fee arrangements etc. which should be provided by HEI, student unions and specialised information centers in cooperation.
    - social life and cultural information – student unions or individual students should be the main source.
  - b. Financial and administrative obstacles

ESIB believes that education should be free, however in cases where there are tuition fees – foreign and domestic students must be treated equally. Moreover, additional grants should be provided to students coming from poorer countries. Furthermore, special grants should be available to students who want to go to a country of higher living costs than their country of origin. Any kind of study grant (public or private) must be fully transferable. All necessary equipment (books, other studying material) must be available so that even students who can not afford this would be able to participate in a mobility programme.

Students should not be forced to work while abroad to support themselves in cases where working permit is necessary (exchange programme includes some working practice) these procedures should be simplified for students. The same applies for visas, residence permits and health insurance. The procedures must be simplified and less bureaucratic. It would be preferred that students have special treatment when dealing with these administrative issues.

c. Academic obstacles

Academic obstacles are primarily reflected in the limited variety of courses offered, limited information available on the content and quality of the course and problems with recognition of the exchange study period by the home institution. Limited variety of courses offered within mobility programs increases the number of free movers. However, even with potential free movers there is a possibility that the specific course is not open for foreign students. Higher education institution should open all of their courses to foreign students and governments should provide additional financial support for this. Transparent information on quality of the host institution and recognition procedures should be available already at the home institution. Both the home and the host institution are responsible for providing these information and the support of national QA agencies and ENIC/NARICs is essential.

d. Language and cultural obstacles

There is a need for more investment and a greater variety of language courses in non commonly spoken languages (commonly spoken languages – e.g. English, French, German etc.) both in the home country and abroad. To increase the access and participation in mobility programmes to certain countries where “incoming mobility” is low it is necessary to have preparatory language courses already at the home country. In addition, a part of the solution might be that these countries (with a very low number of incoming students) offer courses in commonly spoken languages. Since some countries require language proficiency tests which tend to be quite expensive, participants believed that these tests should be free of charge and provided by the home institution.

Fear of a culture shock was not seen as one of the main obstacles, especially since it is caused by lack of information. The same applies for racism, xenophobia, homophobia etc. This is more connected with the social conditions of studying abroad and is not influencing access to mobility as such.

e. Students with special needs

The level of participation of students with disabilities in mobility programmes is very low. Very rarely these students dare to go abroad, since they do not have enough information on the special support services for students abroad. Their choice is often limited to a small number of adequately equipped HEI.

There is a special role for unions of disabled students in this process since they are the best informed group on possible problems a disabled student may face.

2. Free movers

The existence of free movers might be, but is not limited to, an indicator of how students are solving the problem of restricted access to mobility programmes.

Reasons for spontaneous mobility are:

- complicated applications procedures for a mobility programme,
- organised mobility more connected to horizontal mobility while spontaneous mobility is more connected to vertical mobility so students interested in obtaining a full degree abroad are more likely to be free movers,
- choosing an institution that is not a part of a mobility programme
- limited places for students in programmes,
- the course one wants is not available or not of sufficient quality at the HEI that is a part of the mobility programme.

When discussing countries affected by high brain drain rates, in most cases these high brain drain rates are reflecting a substantial number of free movers from these countries. Participants believed that there should not be any specific restrictions in mobility to prevent

brain drain but that this problem should be solved on a larger scale by working towards more equal social conditions. The choice whether or not to leave one's own country should remain in the hands of the individual, therefore no specific restrictions should be allowed.

3. Cooperation with the so called third world countries

Participants were not very much in favour of the Erasmus World proposal since they thought it is highly selective, one way oriented (non European students coming to Europe and not the other way around) and limited to master programmes. It was suggested that programme for cooperation with third world countries should go in line with the present TEMPUS guidelines – stressing institutional cooperation and infrastructural support and afterwards going to Erasmus guidelines and including student and teacher TWO WAY mobility.

Erasmus World was seen as potentially increasing the brain drain from the third world countries.

### Unresolved questions

There was no specific solutions for the brain drain issue. A rather general demand was given – to provide equal social conditions for all students.

### Solutions, proposals, agreed points, demands

#### *Lack of information*

All the information has to be easily accessible and understandable to every student. It is a recommendation to provide students with extensive guidebooks on mobility possibilities by country **and** by specific field of study. Actors responsible for this vary from HEIs and QAA+ENICs (for academic issues) to student unions and special information centers for student welfare issues.

#### *Financial and administrative obstacles*

- Equal treatment of foreign and domestic students regarding tuition fees
- All grants must be fully transferable
- Visa, working permits and health insurance procedures must be significantly simplified. This goes especially for non-candidate countries (SEE and CIS) since these students have to go through a very complicated and sometimes even humiliating visa procedures. Even though open borders for all citizens are far from reality for many reasons, there must be a significant decrease in administrative and political barriers for students.

#### *Academic obstacles*

- HEIs must open all their courses to foreign students
- Transparent information on QA and recognition procedures must be provided

#### *Language and culture*

Promoting the whole regions and not individual countries is a recommendation, even mobility 'tours' can be organised (one semester in one country, another in the next with same/similar language). Governments are responsible for providing financial support for this promotion, while HEIs and NUSs are the ones who should coordinate the campaigns and provide information. The cooperation may not be strong if it is left only to the governments. This is of special importance for the low mobility regions like SEE and CIS.

There should be more investment and greater variety in language courses.

#### *Students with special needs*

There should be special financial schemes for students with disabilities within existing programmes since the financial obstacles they face are much higher than for students without disabilities. There should be a coordination of national policies (e.g. subsection in Erasmus), and special funds should be allocated to the HEIs willing to offer courses to students with disabilities. In addition to this, it is necessary to progressively improve conditions at all HEIs so all of them would be accessible to all students. Participants were strongly opposing separate programmes designed only for students with disabilities since this is not a good way to integrate them fully into the HE community.

Students with families should either be offered integrated short studying programmes (so they do not have to be away from their families for a long period in time) or sufficient support services (childcare, schooling, accommodation, etc.) must be in place.

#### *Free movers*

Free movers are sometimes not able to use all of the resources available to the «organised mobility» participants (access to certain courses is restricted, they can not attend language courses or face problems with accommodation etc.). HEIs must offer the same opportunities for all mobility student but not at the expense of the foreign degree students.

#### *Cooperation with so called third world countries*

Main principles for any kind of mobility cooperation with the third world countries are:

- solidarity and reciprocity – mobility programmes should be based on cooperation and they should always allow mobility in both directions
- limiting or decreasing the brain drain (explained above).

**Workshop report**  
**Horizontal mobility**  
Chair: David Galea  
Helper: Inka Leisma

### **Topic of the workshop**

*“Horizontal mobility (hm) in this ws is treated as meaning mostly exchange studies abroad. Little less importance was put into treating hm as mobility between one’s own university or universities in one’s country. We discuss both outgoing and incoming students, clearly separated.”*

Method: bring out the problems, prioritise, discuss prioritised problems, bring out the main points create a vision of a better system for hm.

### **Questions raised**

#### **Session I**

After a small icebreaker we gave the participants 5-10 minutes to write down approximately 5 biggest and prioritised problems or challenges to hm from their perspective. They were asked to make divisions between incoming and outgoing students, if possible. The problems were written to the flip-chart, in a prioritised order.

In the end, participants were also asked what would be the obstacle that would prevent them from spending time abroad as a student. The most scaring obstacles mentioned: recognition, finances, language, (instability, political movements), social aspects: families, disabilities etc., nothing scary, language barriers.

### **Main discussion points and lines of discussion (arguments raised)**

#### **Session II**

#### **Primary concerns:**

##### **\*Recognition of courses + qualifications**

Recognition, not only a matter of national credit system not having a curricula

Recognition, depending on your institution

candidate country, problems in recognition od courses, al new problems arise from this

recognition of degrees, not a problem for a very long time

Transferability, grades and credits not fully accepted, recognised as such

Implementation of ECTS

Recognition of studies and work you do abroad

Recognition of studies you’re taking: lack of information, lack of mutual confidence, lack of information in general

Recognition of courses or diplomas in spite of ds, the quality cannot be ensured

##### **\*Info: classes or courses in receiving countries (6 month minimum of exchange) quality approach, making the east more attractive**

Stadardised model of descriptions

Info before you leave  
Cultural preparations  
The language of the info  
Making the east more attractive

**\*Language barriers**

Teaching in english, one general language?  
Language courses before you go/ when you arrive?  
If not passing the course, departure refused  
Hosting institution, expenses from providing the courses?  
Too much work to provide engl courses if already paid little  
Integration of foreigners in hosting institution/ study community

**\*Quality of receiving institutions**

Quality assurance and accreditation system trustworthy?  
European quality standards or national accreditation

**\*Degree system losing structure**

Personal degrees get built up when people go abroad, degree system loses structure  
Mix and match, course contents differ  
Working level, are there problems when people have different kind/ level of skills

**\*No stimulation of hm by authorities, together with the lack of motivation**

Incentives for number of students sent/ received

**Unresolved questions**

**Secondary concerns:**

Fees and grants  
Defining credits  
Conversion + transferability of grades  
Length of stays  
Limitations in fields of study  
Differing course contents, syllab  
Keeping each country's educational systems/ traits

**Solutions/proposals/agreed points/demands**

**Recognition of Courses and Quailifications**

*Problems*

Due to lack of recognition there have been situations where all courses had to be taken again after erasmus period especially in cases where ectis is not applicable.  
In certain specific fields of studied (e.g. law) courses are not recognised due to the fact that matching credits is problematic.  
Some study structures in some fields are extremely rigid not allopwing any flexibility. Flexible study structures would be preferable.

Though significant progress has been made through ECTS, there are still several problems.

Amongst these problems we find:

ECTS is not always being promoted as a common tool including adequate information.

The size of the workload is still an unresolved issue.

There aren't particular persons coordinating ECTS at different administrative levels (e.g. central administration, faculty, departments etc.)

### *Recommendations*

Horizontal Mobility opportunities should be available at all levels (Bachelor and Master levels). One possibility especially with regards to rigidly structured courses would be the introduction of mobility windows enabling planning and practise. A certain element of choice should be allowed, especially in rigid structures in order to allow more Horizontal Mobility opportunities.

Institutions should be the ones responsible of quality assurance of their particular institutions and partners. Information sharing between institutions, and trust are very important elements in moving towards full recognition.

The guarantees offered by the Institutional Commitment are needed beyond the Socrates structures.

## **Information**

### *Problem*

There is no sufficient, understandable information available to students, making short term horizontal mobility planning much more difficult.

### *Recommendations*

It is the institution's job and responsibility to provide information in order to attract people from abroad. Although information might be available in different forms (brochures, websites etc.) for the sake of transparency, a standardised form of course description could be introduced in the same spirit with the Diploma Supplement.

A Student perspective should be taken into consideration regarding the information made available and methods used to spread such information.

## **Language Barriers**

### *Problems*

Unless a student has some basic knowledge of the language in the host country, integration with local students will be very difficult to achieve.

In short term periods of horizontal mobility, the national language cannot be learned, and there is a danger of solely attending local language courses rather than courses in the 'degree' field of study.

### *Recommendations*

The provision of language courses should take into consideration the difference between the academic nature of the language used in class and its use on a daily basis whether the courses are provided at the sending or the receiving institution.

The attainment of different academic skills, language skills and cultural experiences are all equally important in horizontal mobility, and a balance must be drawn between the provision of classes in national/ international languages

Governmental support should ensure that incoming students learn the basics of the local language in order to enhance their mobility experience.

## **Different Degree Structures**

### *Recommendations*

Degree structures should be flexible enough to encompass different skills learnt through different methods as long as they are relevant to the field of study.

Degrees in different countries should have similar basic elements, thus containing a small degree of uniformity while giving ample space to flexibility and individuality. By bringing new theories new knowledge back home, by asking questions we are also giving input to the subject

## **Lack of Stimulation and Motivation for Horizontal Mobility**

### *Recommendations*

Seminars should be organised by the Institutions (keeping in mind the student perspective) in order to spread information about exchanges.

Positive peer pressure can motivate students to involve themselves in activities related to Horizontal Mobility

Eastern countries should promote themselves more through the provision of information and providing a positive image of the country.

## **Future Possibilities**

It may be envisaged that mobility will become so structured that “mobility packages” will be offered to students in order to facilitate their horizontal mobility periods. Although avoiding several of the above mentioned problems, students will also be faced with less options and less flexibility.

In order to guarantee more effective mobility, cooperation, communication and trust need to be strengthened. Mobility is becoming all the more essential in today’s globalised society. Since the general feeling is that the numbers of students actively mobile will rise (even if slowly) it is essential that such systems be improved in the upcoming future and within the established timeframes.

## *Social and Economic Aspects of Mobility*

### *Questions raised*

***Concerning the financial and economic aspects of mobility the following questions were raised:***

- What kind of situations of (unexpected) financial trouble can arouse for mobile students and are possible solutions for this kind of situations?
- Which systems of (general) financial support can be imposed to support mobile students?
- What are positive and negative aspects of a mobile student who works next to their study abroad? Which support is needed for finding a job by mobile students?
- What are the incentives of nation states and the European institutions to support mobility?
- What are the worst practices on the topic of the financial/economical situation of students?

An other question that was dealt with was the question on the social services for mobile students.

- What are the most important social services?
  - Why should these services especially exist for mobile students?
  - Are there good practices?
  - Is there any need for pilot schemes/projects?
  - Is there a role to play by student unions?
  - Who should provide/pay and rule the services?

Representation of students abroad was also raised as a question.

- How can foreign students participate in representative bodies/organizations?

Integration can ensure representation. But how do you integrate students in a foreign country/culture?

### *Conclusions*

Mobility enriches the knowledge and skills of every student who does a period of his/her study abroad. The benefits for Europe as a whole are obvious. Knowing the European cultures by endorsing European citizenship spreads cultures and strengthens social, cultural and economical integration. Languages are learnt and the scientific knowledge available in Europe is shared.

The provision of social and economic support and a system taking into account the special needs of mobile, international students is more than a question of welfare: supportive and integrative measures are very preconditions of successful studies and a positive and successful mobility experience for all parties concerned.

In order to be able to focus on the studies, the ideal system is that of (inter-) governmental, sufficient support for mobile students covering the basic financial means of students

(accommodation, food, literature, cultural and social participation etc.) as well as extra-costs caused by mobility (e.g. transportation). Whilst loans provide some relief to students who do not receive any form of governmental support, they still act as a barrier for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and pose special problems for students from economically weaker states, they are a problem for an equality of chances and for equal participation in mobility. Thus sufficient (mobility) grants available for all need to be introduced. Being a “concrete utopia”, this goal will not be reached in a few days. An important measure that has to be implemented by all European countries with grant/loan-schemes is the ability for students to take their grants and/or loans abroad. Where (European) laws restrict this they should be reviewed. Working next to studying should nevertheless be a free choice and not necessary. All mobile students should be given the same working rights as domestic students have can ease financial barriers immediately. Student unions, HEI’s or other institutions concerned can help mobile students with finding jobs as well as offering counseling and advice on job possibilities, legal rights and duties. Having a (qualified) job during a period of studying abroad can also have some other benefits then generating needed income. It may integrate the student in the local environment and can increase the knowledge of cultural differences. For unexpected financial troubles, support schemes (funds) must be available since mobile students generally have no chance of getting private help in foreign countries.

It’s crucial that other measures to enhance integration are taken. Social integration can be reached through measures like counseling, peer mentoring or organizing (social) events. These events can be organized by the HEI, student unions or other student organizations. A multi language student handbook published on the internet helps new students (foreign or not) to find their way into the HEI. Such a handbook could be produced by the student unions in close corporation with the HEI. The knowledge of a language is one of the key-factors for integration. The HEI’s together with existing schemes, like Erasmus, are responsible for the availability or possibility of following cost-free language courses (covering also cultural information) for foreign students; this is not only a prerequisite for outgoing, but also for incoming students. Integration can be hampered by a lack of respect of other cultures or worse racism and xenophobia. The stronger the measures HEI’s and student unions take to create a tolerant and inclusive academic community the better. Ways of dealing with cases of discrimination must be communicated within the community of the HEI. On the personal it’s important that people are encouraged to report discrimination and that they get proper counseling.

A prerequisite for successful studying are functioning social services taking into account the special needs of mobile students. These include accommodation, health care, psychological help and advice, food, and kindergartens for students with children, to name just a few. Information and counseling on social services is needed especially for mobile students; social service centres in this respect are good practice.

There is no mobility without accommodation. As long as not all students can be provided with quality low cost accommodation, every effort has to be made by the receiving country and the student that the accommodation in the host city is secured before the start of the study period. Enlarging the amount of available student housing must not lead to ‘Gettoisation’. Foreign students will integrate better when they live among national (student) residents. Sufficient health care should be available for all and be improved esp. for non-EU-member students.

There cannot be integration of mobile students and a functioning internationalisation of HEI’s if mobile students are not considered full members of the higher education community. Measures must be taken to ensure the participation of foreign students and participation in

decision-making. An exchange of best practice and setting up of pilot projects with governmental financial aid can help to improve the still insufficient political rights and de-facto-possibilities of mobile students.