

Neth-ER response to the CULT draft report on Erasmus+

Neth-ER welcomes the draft report by rapporteur Bogdan Zdrojewski and in particular appreciate the emphasis on European values and the European Education Area as well as synergies with other EU programmes, such as the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF). Below, we would like to highlight five key elements of specific interest to the Dutch knowledge sector that we strongly support or that we believe require further attention:

- **The importance of a secured and protected budget for mobility**
- **The value of personal development and soft skills for all students, in addition to professional skills for the labour market**
- **The synergy with other European instruments, such as the ECF, and the possibility to finance actions of the European University Alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) with other European financial instruments**
- **The relevance of the Erasmus+ programme for both the European Education Area and the Union of Skills**
- **Concrete and structural simplification measures within the programme**

The importance of a secured and protected budget for mobility

While the proposed budget increase is good news, the proposed budget of €47,39 billion falls short of the amount needed to cover the expanded objectives introduced in the programme, such as the European Solidarity Corps and strategic scholarships. To ensure quality education and equal opportunities, the Erasmus+ budget must be doubled to at least €60 billion.

Moreover, Neth-ER strongly opposes the proposed decrease of nearly 10%, from 83% in the current programme to 73,4%, of the overall share allocated to Education and Training in the draft report. Given the crucial role of the Union of Skills and the European Education Area in Europe's future competitiveness and resilience, an overall reduction of funds to education and training is a serious setback.

Mobility is the core of the Erasmus+ programme, therefore it remains essential to safeguard 50% of the budget for mobility actions.

The value of personal development and soft skills for all students, in addition to professional skills for the labour market

Neth-ER welcomes the restructuring of the recitals in the draft report, so that the role of EU values and citizenship, participation in democratic life and society are stated first. This reflects calls from the sector to attach more importance to personal development and democratic life, and to acknowledge the programme's mission for quality education, which, in turn includes personal development beyond employability.

In this light, it is striking that the draft report, provides a very narrow definition of 'vocational education', as aiming at developing skills and competences for particular occupations or the labour market (amendment 56). This undermines the threefold statutory role of vocational education in the Netherlands: qualification for a profession, for participation in society (citizenship) and progression to other education tracks. A broader definition of VET is needed to reflect this in the Erasmus+ programme.

The synergy with other European instruments, such as the ECF, and the possibility to finance actions of the European University Alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence with other European financial instruments

Neth-ER welcomes the explicit call of the draft report to actively pursue synergies with other EU funding instruments, including but not limited to the ECF and the European Social Fund. This is a positive development. We likewise support the rapporteur's position that strategic scholarships should be conditional on co-financing from other funding programmes (Amendment 75).

Neth-ER also strongly supports the recognition of the strategic role of the CoVEs through the addition of a dedicated recital (Amendment 31). Moreover, we welcome explicit support for European University Alliances and Centres of Vocational Excellence. We would add that further implementation guidelines are needed in order to render this support structural and sustainable.

The relevance of the Erasmus+ programme for both the European Education Area and the Union of Skills

Neth-ER welcomes the explicit emphasis on the European Education Area alongside the Union of Skills in the draft report. This dual focus reflects a balanced approach to both skills development and broader educational goals, aligning neatly with Neth-ER's calls for a holistic approach to learning and mobility.

Concrete and structural simplification measures within the programme

We strongly support the proposals in Amendments 35 to 39 to simplify and digitalise procedures, making the programme more accessible for newcomers, small organisations, and those with limited administrative capacity. The emphasis on user-friendly IT systems, consistent procedures, and high-quality support is a step in the right direction, and the mentioned 'coherent digital environment for applicants, beneficiaries, and participants' deserves particular endorsement. It remains essential that usability is thoroughly assessed with particular attention to inclusion and accessibility.

Moreover, Neth-ER is concerned that the proposed reduction in budget for National Agencies will undermine these efforts. We therefore reiterate our call to include concrete and structural simplification measures in the final text, backed by sufficient funding.

We call upon members of the CULT Committee to bear in mind for the committee meeting next week:

- 1) The need for a stable and sufficient education and training budget with a minimum of 50% for mobility
- 2) The value of threefold education purposes, not just qualification for professions and the labour market, but also further education pathways and participation in society (citizenship)
- 3) Concrete and structural simplification measures for beneficiaries of the programme with particular attention to inclusion and accessibility