



EU Insight - Weighing the Benefits of International Student Mobility on Future Employability

Understanding the role of education and its influence on skills development and their ties to future job attainment and socioeconomic prosperity is an important question for Europe. Isolating the specific factors which contribute to this process is equally important. International student mobility is one such factor, and the main subject of the recently published report [The Erasmus Impact Study: Effects of Mobility on the Skills and Employability of Students and the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions](#) (EIS), commissioned by the European Commission. Conducted and written by a panel of independent researchers, the EIS yields interesting findings about the benefits of going abroad.

The Report

The EIS is the end result of the largest single study ever conducted on the effects of international mobility on students and higher education institutes (roughly 76,000 respondents). It is also in response to the European Commission's efforts to improve students' career options and combat high youth unemployment "through study or training abroad".¹ As the premier programme within Europe supporting international mobility amongst students and higher education employees, Erasmus serves as a perfect case study for exploring the question of mobility's effect on one's future job prospects and the impact of such mobility on one's place of work.

Designed to "go beyond perception studies...to measure real effects and outcomes",² the EIS used a mixed methods approach to "identify the effects of the Erasmus mobility programme on the employability, skills enhancement and institutional development on student's future employability", while also "examin[ing] the impact of Erasmus staff and teaching mobility"³ to reach the conclusion that mobility is **good for employment**.

¹ Erasmus Impact Study confirms EU student exchange scheme boosts employability and job mobility [Press release]. European Commission, (2014); http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_en.htm

² *The Erasmus Impact Study: Effects of Mobility on the Skills and Employability of Students and the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions*. European Union (2014): 22.

³ Lee, Petra. "Employment Prospects Rosier for Erasmus Graduates". *University World News*, 336, 24 September 2014.



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EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT
ERASMUS STUDENTS



Groups targeted by the study included: students and staff (academic and non-academic) of higher education institutions, programme alumni, higher education institutions and employers. The study included online surveys that covered 34 countries – EU member states as well as Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.⁴ The qualitative study focused on eight countries that are diverse in size and location – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom – and included site visits, interviews, focus groups and institutional workshops.⁵

Besides study abroad, work placements and trainings engaged in abroad were also factored into the study’s scope. These international work experiences were also found to have a profound impact on an individual’s future career options.

The Findings

Additional key findings of the report include:

- The Erasmus programme is as inclusive as other mobility programmes;
- **64% of employers consider an international experience important for recruitment** (up from 37% in 2006), with such hires given more responsibility earlier;
- **More than 1 in 3** Erasmus trainees were offered a position at their host company;
- Young people trained abroad are **50% less likely** to experience long-term unemployment;
- Almost **1 in 10 Erasmus trainees** who did work placements have started their own company, **3 out of 4** envisage doing so;
- Transversal (transferable) skills important to employers are also the skills improved during an Erasmus period abroad;
- **On average, 92% of employers are looking for transversal skills**, on top of knowledge in their field (91%) and relevant work experience (78%)

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.



Room for Improvement

It is interesting to note that many of the positive outcomes listed above occur as a result of working, and not just studying, abroad. This distinction is something strongly emphasized in an article by Hans de Wit, one of the external advisors associated with the study, as receiving insufficient attention in the report.⁶ Also questioned is the fact that the study does not provide much insight into the actual motivations respondents have for going abroad for work or study. Understanding these factors, especially how international of a home life one has or how international of a curriculum one experiences prior to going abroad, and how these things influence motivation to be mobile or not, is noted as a necessary next step if the goal of mobility for all young people is truly to be achieved.

⁶ de Wit, Hans. "Erasmus Report Fuels Internationalisation Debate". *University World News*, 336, 10 October 2014.