

ERACON & CAREER-EU ONLINE Congress 2020

The European Association of Erasmus Co-ordinators 2020 conference was held virtually, on-line for the first time on 19th and 20th of November. Co-ordinated through the President of the Association based in Cyprus.

I was delighted to have the opportunity to advertise the work of ADEE, in particular, through a celebration of 10 years on from undertaking the Erasmus *DentCPD* project. My presentation centred on the additional research and publications produced over subsequent years, demonstrating the sustainability of the project well beyond its duration. I also highlighted the recent update of the DentCPD.org website.

The plenary sessions on the first day concentrated on developments for Erasmus+ 2021-27. The need to promote 'blending programmes' in which higher education institutions (HEI) have an important role to play; support social inclusion of disadvantaged individuals and the bridging across different education programmes – widening access were highlighted, by the Rector of Varma University, Bulgaria (the original site for the conference and who will host ERACON in 2021).

There was reference to the all-round challenges from increased enquiries from Erasmus students and their increasing support needs as a result of the present pandemic. The new Erasmus+ programme will encourage innovative blended mobility programmes (virtual and physical components). There will be an increased 'digital focus' by building on lessons learnt and sharing of educational research strategies to promote the Digital Educational Action Plan. Whilst there can be more opportunities for digital approaches in learning and teaching, it was stressed that physical approaches still remain the core of education and training. The Commissioner for Innovation, Research Culture Education and Youth, listed the key priorities for the 2021-27 programme: Skills agenda; European Educational Area; Digital Educational Action Plan; and European Research Area.

My impression was that the conference centred on the roles of HEIs in the future developments of Erasmus+, through what was termed the transformation of higher education. The priorities were identified as, the need for interconnection between HEIs, being innovative and inclusive to promote mobility of staff and students and the strengthening of digital skills. The latter being linked to the European Student Card. In addition, there are three key actions for Erasmus + 2021-27, which will in turn pave the way for the European Educational Area and the increasing development of 'European Universities':

Key Action 1 – mobility of students

Key Action 2 – Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practice

Key Action 3 – support for policy reform

The European Educational Area involves connection to the European Card Initiative; flexible mobility formats through blended mobility; and automatic recognition. Blended mobility was defined as having innovative teaching and learning formats, reaching all students, and comprised of collaborative, international on-line learning. Another initiative is to strengthen the European Student Card to simplify and facilitate mobility.

A further plenary session was delivered on how to produce a good application for funding where the speaker provided an excellent overview of the funding application evaluation process. When

describing the 'relevance' applications should be based on a genuine and adequate needs analysis, using the grid provided when writing one's text. The objectives should be clearly defined, realistic and address the relevance of the project. Examples of innovation through complimentary initiatives that the partners are or have been involved in should be included and describing the added value of the partners from across multiple countries. The speaker provided some 'tips' for strengthening a project application:

- Build on lifelong learning projects that comply with the missions and visions of the organisations involved.
- Ensure the goals are smart and innovative.
- Share the benefits of disseminations and impact – sustainability beyond the project duration
- Need to have a devoted team: proposal leader with budgetary knowledge; working group to write the proposal; admin officer; independent expert to evaluate the proposal.
- Aim for 'excellence' not 'just good' – beware of compromising what you aim to achieve
- Keep up to date: including on EU policies
- 'Mistakes' are a 'learning opportunity'

I should add that up until now the majority of the Erasmus budget has gone to Education and Training (around 70%) and its anticipated that that will be the case going forward. The budget for Erasmus 2021-27 is still under discussion. There has been a delay.

Many of the short presentations highlighted the need for internationalisation of HEIs and promoting mobility. The pandemic has escalated the need to identify innovative ways of providing education, especially through digital approaches. However, the importance of 'Face to Face' contact is recognised and the need to find ways to ensure this continues should be found. Given that the students of today are from 'generation Z' - technological and digital natives - there is a need for HEIs and similar organisations to adapt their strategies to cater for the needs of these students and provide training for their staff to facilitate this. A presentation on 'European Universities' – 'Super Erasmus', highlighted what one might expect from such co-operations: inter-university campuses; shared innovative teaching; sharing of technology; and common degrees. Perhaps, in relation to 'Dental Education and Training', ADEE could strengthen its role as a conduit in supporting the co-operation between dental schools across European Universities and beyond, to promote the European Universities and European Student Card initiatives.

My understanding is that all the presentations will be available in the near future and I can forward on some of those that would expand on my brief summary

Professor Jonathan Cowpe