

# FINAL REPORT

## ERASMUS REPORT

LANGUAGE STUDIES IN THE ERASMUS INTER-UNIVERSITY COOPERATION PROGRAMMES (ICP)

A survey of the ERASMUS coordinators' annual reports and of statistical analysis

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The following ERASMUS Report was first presented orally at the ERASMUS Evaluation Conference in Stockholm. It is based on a more comprehensive report compiled by Christine Marlot, a junior researcher attached to the Scientific Committee. Christine Marlot was charged with evaluating the annual reports on activities in the area of Languages submitted by the ICP co-ordinators. In addition, she was advised to evaluate the self-assessment forms which the programme coordinators and directors whose ICPs were entering the final year of the first triennial funding cycle had to complete and submit alongside their reports for 1992-93. In addition, she had access to a host of statistics lodged in the ERASMUS Bureau.

In her analysis Marlot was faced with a number of difficulties.

(1) Languages is the largest subject area in European inter-university co-operation to date. In addition to the ICPs listed in the ERASMUS subject area **09 - Languages and Philological Sciences**, there are all the ICPs in LINGUA Action II. The statistics for 1993-94 list a total of 457 ICPs for Languages - that is 19,2 % of all ICPs, compared with 313 ICPs for the second largest area, Engineering, and 28 ICPs for the smallest area, Communication/Information. Because of this, Marlot had to be selective. She decided to concentrate on the year 1993-94 and ignore the reports for the other years.

(2) In addition to her native French, Marlot knows English and Spanish. This allowed her to read reports submitted in one of the three languages mentioned, but limited the analysis of reports written in other languages to the multiple choice sections of the reports. The linguistic challenge posed by the self-assessment statements was less ardent, as most of them were written in either English or French, with German being the only other language allowed.

(3) It is not the case that the 457 ICPs mentioned above were all potentially relevant to Modern Language Studies, nor is it true that all the relevant ICPs were in ERASMUS 09 and LINGUA Action II. The ERASMUS subject area **09 - Languages and Philological Sciences** contains nine sub-areas, ranging from Modern EC Languages (41 % of all ICPs requested for 1993-94) to Classical Philology (6 %). While the latter can certainly be ignored outright, ICPs in areas like "Linguistics" (9 %) and "General and Comparative Literature" (18 %) may or may not be relevant, depending on the degree programmes covered by them. At the same time, it is also true that a large number of ICPs in other subject areas have a marked language orientation - notably in **14 Social Sciences** (cf. 14.6 International Relations, European Studies, Area Studies), in **04 Business Studies, Management Science** (cf. 04.1 Business Studies with Languages) and in **10 Law** (cf. 10.1 Comparative Law, Law with Languages).

In the event, Marlot did the following. She ignored the sub-areas 09.2 General and Comparative Literature, 09.5 Classical Philology and 09.9 Others (some 25 % of the subject area 09). She evaluated

a total of 60 ERASMUS reports from 09 and 90 LINGUA reports as well as 1,200 self-assessment forms from both subject areas. In addition, she also sampled a number of reports from 04.1 Business Studies with Languages.

In view of all these limiting factors, it would seem that the quantitative and qualitative evaluation presented in this report has to be taken as a "best estimate" of numbers and trends. It must be assumed that well above 20 % of all ICPs and of all students taking part in student mobility have to do with modern languages in one way or another. Also, it is quite likely that there have been new developments relevant to Language Studies outside ERASMUS 09 and LINGUA Action II, which could be relevant to projects in the area of Language Studies.

It is probably also true to say that the subject area and sub-area codes used by the ERASMUS Bureau for identifying ICPs suggest the existence of clear-cut distinctions between ICPs that in many cases did not and do not exist. This is probably particularly true for the complex area of Languages. It is often the case that within a given ICP students from rather different course backgrounds are exchanged, just as it is often the case that a particular department sends the same type of student abroad through ICPs listed under different subject area or sub-area categories. While this is an indication of the flexibility of the ERASMUS Programme and of those actively involved in it, it probably also explains why a large number of ICPs never attempted to move beyond ensuring social and academic integration and why attempts to jointly develop teaching materials or modules sometimes did not get beyond the discussion stage.

The following analysis of statistics, of co-ordinator's reports and of self-assessments is mainly guided by the following three questions: To what extent were the aims and objectives of the ERASMUS programme fulfilled in the area of Language Studies? To what extent did ERASMUS succeed in implementing the Community's policies on languages in Europe? What developments, measures and activities in Language Studies were stimulated by ERASMUS that can be regarded as responses to new needs and requirements?

## **2. STUDENT MOBILITY**

### **2.1 Mobility seen in relation to specific countries**

96.5 % of the 457 Language ICPs approved for 1993-94 had a student mobility component, 26.9 % also had Teaching Staff Mobility, while only 4.4 % had Curriculum Development and 3.3 % Intensive Programmes. These figures alone are a clear indication of where the main thrust of ERASMUS has been: toward Student Mobility. Indeed, the quantitative achievement in this area is remarkable. From a modest beginning in 1987-88 of 631 students, the number of student flows rose to 12,132 in 1993-94. The average length of the study period abroad was 7 months -- the same as the average for student mobility in general. These figures alone are ample proof of the fact that ERASMUS has had a tremendous positive impact on Language Studies in Europe.

It is only when we look at the flows relating to and between individual countries that we notice some developments that may provide food for thought.

The United Kingdom, France and Germany head the list of institutions involved and of students moved, with Spain and Italy as runners up. (To be more precise, Italy ranks before Spain with regard to the number of institutions involved.) Denmark and Greece come bottom of the list. (The former

EFTA countries are being ignored for the moment, because they were not eligible for LINGUA Action II.)

**Table 1:**

Member State	1993-1994	
	Students received	Students sent
UK	3,809	3,664
FR	3,451	3,225
DE	2,929	2,966
PT	542	608
DK	425	483
GR	291	350

The following conclusions can be drawn from these figures.

- There is overwhelming interest in English, a point that is underlined by the fact that another 486 students went to Ireland.
- The "received" figures for France and French are further boosted by the interest in Belgium and Switzerland, just as for German we also have to look at Austria and Switzerland.
- Both the United Kingdom and France received more students than they sent.
- The opposite was true for Portugal, Denmark and Greece, which sent more students than they received.

The above figures are further underlined by the fact that one third of all the students sent by the United Kingdom went to France (1230 out of 3451) and over 35 % of all the students sent by France went to the United Kingdom (1157 out of 3255).

It would appear that the drive towards promoting the less widely taught and used languages has not been a complete success. This is further underlined by the relatively small number of student flows between Denmark, Greece and Portugal.

**Table 2:**

Home/host	DE	FR	UK	DK	GR	PT
DK	117	74	91		11	9
GR	70	74	72	11		16
PT	131	142	111	10	12	

As for the host country of the Conference, Sweden, the pattern is repeated.

**Table 3:**

	DE	FR	UK	DK	GR	PT
S to	27	28	36	1	0	1
To S	24	22	23	2	1	1

Of course, some of the figures are partly explained by the fact that in countries like Denmark, Greece and Portugal there are fewer institutions of higher education than in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, but there can be no doubt that other factors had a decisive influence on the trends observed.

## **2.2. Disparity between approved and actual mobility**

Another quantifiable area is that of the take-up rate. The European Commission has always been interested in having as many students as possible take part in mobility, and the question of a possible disparity between "anticipated" and "actual" levels of student mobility was the first of three questions asked in the self-assessment form.

The take-up rate in languages is 66 %; it is above average, which can certainly be explained by the fact that in the case of language students there is complete agreement on the desirability of study abroad. Still, the fact that only two thirds of the approved flows were actually realized needs some explaining, especially since quite a number of co-ordinators reported a growing interest in ERASMUS among students to the extent that demand sometimes outstripped the number of places available.

The explanation most frequently offered has to do with money. The grants were not big enough, and students offered an ERASMUS grant often felt unable to accept it because they would not know how to support themselves while abroad. In the case of Languages, there seems to be an additional factor. In a number of countries students can choose between a language teaching assistantship and an ERASMUS grant, and very often they decide in favour of the assistantship simply because there is more money involved. It would appear that this trend has become even more marked since 1993/94 because of a further reduction in the per capita ERASMUS grant and a harsher economic climate.

Another reason mentioned by co-ordinators and directors is "inadequate linguistic competence". In other words, even in Languages it was quite often the case that there were not enough students whose command of the foreign language was such as to allow them to study abroad. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the case of the less widely taught languages, but by no means limited to these languages. The aspect of inadequate linguistics competence is underlined by the fact that in many cases both home and host institutions found it necessary to provide linguistic preparation even for students of the language concerned -- and this in spite of the fact that under LINGUA Action II funding of linguistic preparation was explicitly excluded.

Two further developments are worth mentioning in this context.

In a number of cases increased interest in English has been accompanied by a declining interest in other languages, even in French. In the United Kingdom and Ireland the overwhelming interest of students from the Continent in English has forced a number of English Departments to operate a rather strict entry policy to the extent that a number of flows to the UK and Ireland were not realised because ERASMUS students were not admitted to English courses.

## **2.3 At what stage did students take up their studies abroad?**

The reports are not particularly informative on this point. There are, however, indications that students normally went during the second half of their undergraduate course and that relatively few post-graduates participated in student mobility. Here it has to be borne in mind that mobility of post-graduate students was not particularly encouraged by the ERASMUS Programme.

## 2.4 Assessment, Recognition and Integration

By assessment ERASMUS meant the "information provided by the host institution to the home institution on students' achievements." Answers were by multiple choice, with the possibility of multiple replies, whereby it has to be borne in mind that different practices may have been in place within one and the same ICP.

Christine Marlot checked a total of 240 reports. This is what she found:

- 191 transcript of records or similar document containing information on each course which the students have attended, including detailed grades/marks
- 119 general statement of courses attended and overall assessment of the students' performance
- 100 information on the type of examinations/tests which the students have taken
- 51 degree or diploma certificate
- 39 transcript of records or similar document containing information on each course which the students attended, but without grades/marks
- 6 a certificate based on ECTS

As for the transfer of grades or marks, most ICPs seem to have developed their own conversion tables. In this context, a number of coordinators commented on the fact that marks achieved at the host institution had been upgraded by the home institution so as not to put ERASMUS students at a disadvantage in comparison with their peers who had stayed at home. Also, in a number of cases, students who had failed exams at their host universities were allowed to resit them at their home universities.

**Recognition** refers to the formal written certification awarded to students by their home institutions for their studies abroad. Again, answers were by multiple choice. Christine Marlot sampled 210 reports. These are her findings.

- 167 attestation of study abroad in a transcript of records annexed to or separate from the degree certificate
- 48 attestation of study abroad delivered with the degree certificate of the home institution
- 12 a joint certificate, issued by both the home and host institutions
- 11 double degree, issued by both the home and host institutions

The questions in the report form evaded the question of the extent of recognition. That there were problems with recognition is admitted by quite a number of coordinators. How complex an issue recognition is was explained by Maiworm et al. in their study *Experiences of ERASMUS Students 1990-91*, which was based on questionnaires completed by ERASMUS students. Among other things, Maiworm et al. were interested in the extent to which the academic study abroad was recognized and in the extent to which the total duration of studies was likely to be prolonged due to the study period abroad.

As for the degree of recognition, Maiworm found that in Languages 69 % of the studies undertaken abroad were recognized, compared with an average of 74 %. Among the 16 subject areas listed, Languages ranks - together with Geography - fourth from bottom. As for prolongation of studies, Languages occupies a medial position. Still, it must be regarded as unsatisfactory that on average students who had spent a full academic year abroad apparently expected that their studies would be prolonged by one semester. It would certainly be wrong to read too much into these figures; also, things may have improved over the past four years. It seems to be the case, however, that in Languages - perhaps more than in most other subject areas - there is a danger that home institutions as well as the students themselves view study abroad primarily as a vehicle for language improvement and increased cultural awareness. (The comparatively low recognition rate contrasts with the students' own assessment of their academic progress during study abroad; Maiworm et al. found that 85 % of all language students rated their academic progress abroad, compared with what they would have expected in a corresponding period at their home university, "much better", "better" or "same" -- far more than in any other subject area.)

The point made, it is important to note that in the overwhelming number of all cases students had the opportunity to follow courses within the regular programmes offered by their host universities; in only a few cases did students follow courses put on specifically for foreign students.

### **3. TEACHING STAFF MOBILITY**

As was explained earlier, some 27 % of all ICPs in Languages had a Teaching Staff Mobility component. Christine Marlot found no information on how many members of staff took part in these programmes nor what the take-up rate was. The following points seem to stand out:

- In the ICPs sampled, some 80 % of the courses taught by visiting staff were compulsory, another 10 % were optional with participating students receiving credit for attendance, and only 10 % were tailor-made courses which constituted a complement to the regular courses at the home institution. From this it would follow that visiting teaching staff were successfully integrated into the host institutions' teaching programmes (answers by multiple choice).
- The great majority of the teaching provided by visiting staff was for third/fourth/fifth/sixth year students; courses for younger students and post-graduates were less frequent (answers by multiple choice).
- The reports confirm the well-known fact that fewer visits took place than had been anticipated in the applications and that the visits were on the whole shorter than originally planned. The reasons given by the coordinators would seem to apply to staff mobility in general and need not be discussed in this context. (The average length of the teaching visits analysed by Marlot was 4.8 weeks.) One factor which apparently was not mentioned by coordinators should be further investigated. Bilateral relations in Language Studies often involve four different departments -- one sending and one receiving department at each end. This is known to have, on occasion, complicated student mobility; it would not be surprising if the same were to be true for teaching staff mobility.
- The coordinators are at great pains to emphasise the importance of the visits that did take place.
  - Visiting staff provided valuable inputs to teaching and research in the host institutions. The visits created opportunities for discussions with colleagues and in a

number of cases led to the joint production of teaching materials and to the introduction of new language teaching methods at the host institutions. It would seem, however, that many of the opportunities inherent in staff mobility were only scratched.

- In a number of cases visiting staff taught minority language courses not normally available at the host institutions, thereby opening up students flows which had previously remained barren.
- Visiting staff obtained a clearer understanding of the education systems of the countries visited. As a result, they gained a much clearer idea of the educational background of the ERASMUS students sent to their institutions.

Although the organisational difficulties are only too apparent, it is equally clear that staff mobility in the area of Languages has had positive effects both on student mobility and on curriculum and course development and that these opportunities need to be further exploited.

#### **4. CURRICULUM AND COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES -- NEW DEVELOPMENTS, MEASURES AND ACTIVITIES TRIGGERED BY ICPs IN LANGUAGES**

At the beginning of this survey, it was pointed out that in 1993-94 only a very small percentage of ICPs in Languages had Curriculum Development or Intensive Programme components - 4.4 % and 3.3 % respectively. The following points would seem to be relevant in this context.

- Only a small amount of ERASMUS money was earmarked for these activities and, in any case, LINGUA Action II explicitly excluded Curriculum Development and Intensive Programmes.
- In order to stand a chance of approval, applicants had to provide a detailed outline of what they intended to do; in other words, they had to invest time and effort in drafting their application.
- Particularly in arts subjects, joint curriculum development faces tremendous difficulties in the form of structural differences and barriers.
- Plans for new, jointly developed curricula and courses, let alone the curricula and courses themselves, have to be accepted by colleagues, by institutions and sometimes even by external authorities.

In spite of all these impediments, a number of interesting curriculum and course development projects received funding. For example, Christine Marlot came across two projects concerned with the development of courses for the training of conference interpreters and of translators respectively. Another project that sounded interesting was for a programme called "Langues et internationalisation des PME"; its aim was to equip students with the linguistic and extra-linguistic competences needed in small and medium-sized businesses and the methods applied included linguistic and cultural immersion through mobility.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that new developments at curriculum and course level were not limited to the projects directly funded by ERASMUS. In fact, the majority of new developments seem to have been spin-offs from student and staff mobility programmes.

Here are a few examples.

- One way of promoting a minority language is shown by a huge ICP which was specifically set up to boost the learning of Dutch. Student and teaching staff mobility were supplemented by working groups on various aspects of Dutch as a foreign language.
- One ICP tried to combine the advantages of study abroad and assistantship by giving visiting students the opportunity to teach their mother tongue both inside and outside the partner institutions.
- Many institutions seem to have recognised the new linguistic requirements and challenges created by increased student mobility under ERASMUS. The practical language components in language degree programmes were strengthened; additional languages - particularly minority languages - were raised to the level of degree programmes.
- In a number of cases, the opportunities offered by ERASMUS led to study abroad becoming a compulsory rather than an optional component of a course programme.
- Contacts through ERASMUS seem to have encouraged the setting up of new courses combining applied language studies and cultural studies.
- The arrival of students of Applied Languages in institutions where courses of this type had hitherto been unknown led, in some of the host institutions, to changes in existing programmes and the introduction of new programmes of a similar kind.
- In a number of cases, contact with more professionally minded partner institutions through ERASMUS brought about a shake-up in the training of translators and interpreters.
- ICPs have also provided a framework for research projects relevant to the teaching and learning of foreign languages.
- ERASMUS in general and ECTS in particular have had a profound impact on programmes in Business Studies and Management Science. New courses with an international slant were set up; existing courses were made more international. Language modules are offered as compulsory or optional components; courses are taught through foreign languages; study abroad is encouraged or forms a compulsory part of a given course. The languages most prominent in these courses are English, French, German and Spanish, but opportunities for learning Greek, Dutch, Danish, Catalan and Japanese are also provided.

These and similar developments and projects are a clear indication that inter-university co-operation is a rich potential source of innovation -- be it at the level of the individual institution, be it an international level. However, the fact that these developments often failed to have a wider impact points to the limitations of the ERASMUS ICP as an instrument of innovation and change.

## **5. SUMMARY**

(1) Student mobility under ERASMUS/LINGUA Action II has had an extremely positive effect on the quality of Language Studies in higher education.

(2) Fresh attempts have to be made to promote the teaching and learning of the less widely taught and used languages in Europe.

(3) In the future, greater attention will have to be paid to the involvement of post-graduates in inter-university co-operation activities. To this end, greater support will be needed for curriculum development and intensive programmes.

(4) Without any doubt, the insistence of ERASMUS on academic recognition and integration has fundamentally changed the way study abroad is perceived by both students and staff in modern languages. However, further improvements in the area of recognition and integration are called for.

(5) In spite of various organisational difficulties, staff mobility in the area of Languages has had positive effects both on student mobility and on curriculum and course development. These opportunities need to be further exploited.

(6) Student mobility and teaching staff mobility in the area of Languages and the co-operation of staff and departments connected with these activities have had important spin-offs at the level of curriculum and course development. This is proof of a widespread readiness in institutions of higher education to respond to new needs and requirements.

(7) Positive developments at curriculum and course level have often been accidental and have usually been limited to individual institutions or ICPs. Also, new developments have been hampered by lack of acceptance among colleagues, institutions and external authorities. This is where SOCRATES can and should provide new orientation: by proposing concrete measures and by insisting on greater institutional responsibility in inter-university co-operation.