



Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Erasmus+: Prospective Initiatives, Policy Networks, Programme and Linguistic Support

EMREX Partnership

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Reference: 388499-EPP-1-2014-2-FI-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY - 2014- 3656

Approval of the Progress report and Notification of 2nd Pre-financing Payment

Dear Mr Koski,

The Agency received your Progress technical report referring to the above-mentioned grant Agreement on 12/02/2016.

Following an analysis of your above referenced report I herewith would like to inform you that the Agency has accepted it and the second pre-financing payment for your project has been launched. This payment will be made in accordance with article II.24.3 of the General Conditions of the Grant Agreement.

Enclosed you will find the Agency's comments and recommendations following this assessment. Please use them as guidelines for the implementation of your project as they will be taken into account when assessing the Final Report of your project.

Please be aware that the second pre-financing payment should not be considered as an approval of the reported expenses. All expenses, including those already reported at the Progress technical report stage, will be checked and the final grant will be awarded only at the Final Report stage.

Please note that the Erasmus+ logo, recognition of Community funding and official disclaimer should be included in all project products and outcomes, including the different project websites. Failure to add these elements could result in the Agency being unable to accept the results of the project at Final Report stage and have an impact on the payment of the last instalment of your project's EU Grant.

The Erasmus+ logo and a translation of the funding disclaimer in the official EU languages can be found on the following website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/logos_en.htm.

Please keep us informed of any possible changes that you may decide to introduce during the implementation.

Please do not hesitate to contact Erik Ballhausen (erik.ballhausen@ec.europa.eu – Tel.: 00/32/2/299 17 30) should you have any further enquiries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mónica HOLIK', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mónica HOLIK
Head of Unit

Annex: Agency's Comments and Recommendations

Contact: Erik Ballhausen (erik.ballhausen@ec.europa.eu – Tel.: 00/32/2/299 17 30)

Erasmus+ KA3 Policy Experimentations Progress Report - Assessment Sheet

Contract: 2014-3656
Project number: 388499-EPP-1-2014-2-FI-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY

Project title:
Field Trial on the Impact of Enabling Easy Mobility on
Recognition of External Studies - EMREX

1. Relevance of the proposal

	Score /20
<p><i>Have there already been any valuable results/products achieved at Progress Report stage in relation to the European/national priorities? Is there evidence of the public authorities' involvement in the evaluation of policy impact? Have the project's activities been in accordance with its aims and objectives as declared in the original application or as officially amended?</i></p>	15
<p>EMREX develops a solution for the electronic transfer of student records between higher education institutions in Europe. The transfer is envisaged to cover: the sending, the hosting organisation, national grant awarding and candidate selecting bodies (National Mobility Agencies) and the decision taking level such as Educational Agencies and Ministries. In this respect the project addresses the Bologna Process and ET 2020 target that 20% of students within the European Higher Education Area should be mobile. In this respect, the aim of the project to provide quality and reliable information about student mobility records and their automated recognition of the learning outcomes is highly relevant.</p> <p>So far the EMREX field trials, looking into new ways to make the administration of student mobility easier and thus promoting a higher attainment level of student mobility in higher education and also encouraging more effective recognition of prior learning have been undertaken in the four Nordic partners (FI, DK, NO & SE) and Italy. The report mentions delays in their execution for some parts but in particular for Italy. Given that digitalisation is particularly advanced in the Nordic countries, the participation and data collection of the Italian partner is of particular importance. Being less familiar with EMREX digital process, which is at the heart of EMREX, they are an ideal test case to verify if the EMREX approach can be upscaled to other countries and/or regions of Europe. Given that they are new to the EMREX approach their success rate will also play an important role in convincing other HEI and Ministries (beyond the project) that the system is user friendly, can be adopted easily to other (national) context and is secure and reliable. This important aspect can and should be reflected in the dissemination of the project results.</p> <p>One of the main project results will be the EMREX platform. This solution will be available through</p>	

free sharing of the source code. Standardized components developed in the project will also be made available to interested HEIs and administrative bodies. The problems now encountered by the partnership in the first roll-out and usage by intuitions of the platform need to be closely monitored and analysed to make sure that the upscaling of the platform will be possible to assure wider up-take. In this respect, the data collection as foreseen in the application is crucial, as it will provide the quantitative evidence base.

The project's evidence and recommendations will be crucial to the Ministries involved in the project. Their dedicated involvement in the project shows their interest in and need of the project results. The better the quality of the results the more useful they will be in the policy development process. First findings from the qualitative study have shown that the participating institutions tend to focus on the improvement of the administrative process rather than the recognition process or the mobility level. Obviously the data volume and quality is likely to increase if the administrative process is smoothened. However, for the automation process, recognition and mobility level data are essential too.

2. Quality of the project design and implementation

	Score /30
<p>Experimentation methodology and protocol <i>Has the experimentation method including the evaluation strategy been clearly defined and put in place? Are the field trials addressing specific groups, specific contexts or geographic areas? Have all key actors (public authorities, researchers, target groups) been involved in the experimentation? If there have been changes in the protocol, have they been addressed correctly? Have the public authorities acted actively to contribute to reach the stakeholders and target groups? How well has the project's strategy for evaluation/quality measures been implemented so far?</i></p> <p>Project and financial management <i>Have the planned activities been implemented in accordance with the project's work plan as declared in the original application, or as officially amended, and have any variations been adequately justified? Are the expenditures made so far appropriate and in line with the approved Work Plan? Are the expenditures made so far appropriate with the project's activities as described in the Interim Report? Are the expenditures made so far in line with the level of project's implementation ('best value for money' principle, i.e. the best price-quality ratio)?</i></p>	12
<p>The project is rather doing is an evaluation then an experiment, based on empirical data (field testing) of the EMREX mobility platform that has been developed. The evaluation is based on a survey methodology and not a counterfactual methodology. It is true that the project partners expose the sample (students) to a certain measure - interaction with the platform - before taking the survey, but the environment is not controlled in order to be able to make causal inferences. The report mentions that the administrative data collected at institutional level is very individual. Hence there is a risk that the data will not be compatible across the partnership, which could make a comprehensive comparison across the partnership difficult. The report for instance mentions, that at this stage, important elements such as grades obtained and ECTS credits awarded cannot be analysed because the volume and quality of data is not sufficient. The project needs to address this problem, in order to find an acceptable solution.</p> <p>The research methodology that was proposed in the application included the development and setting-up of the EMREX platform, using the platform by the selected groups of students and gathering data from interviews, surveys as well as from university registries. At the progress report stage, the platform is developed and ready for field testing. The tools to measure the students' opinion were developed also, comprising of online long and short surveys. It is noted that there are some delays in running the field</p>	

trials in the partner countries. According to the application surveys and registry data should have been collected also before the system was deployed so as to have a baseline evaluation. The report explains the difficulty of obtaining this pre-trial data, which is was to be collected from the institutions' administrations.

The progress report mentions that efforts will be made to collect further survey data but this will then be after the initial system deployment. A lack of pre-trial registry and survey data will limit the capacity to draw conclusions regarding the causes of the observed behaviours or opinions. So it is important to assure that this will happen.

The long and short questionnaire, which have been elaborated and developed by the evaluation body have been published both on the project website and the project wiki and on its basis, the survey will reveal some tendencies for a broad evaluation of the EMREX platform. It is noted though that through the lack of a counterfactual approach the actual impact evaluation will be limited.

The coordinator has been in contact with the Agency concerning several financial issues. The agreement reached in particular as concerns time recording and particular staff costs (for the PL partner specifically) have to be implemented as agreed. Should further question arise the coordinator should raise these with the Agency.

3. Quality of the partnership and the cooperation arrangements

	Score /20
<p><i>Is there sufficient evidence that the partnership is working effectively? Are there clear evidence of a real and effective involvement of the partners and staff? Are there significant changes in the partnership compared to the application? If so, have these changes had any impact on the partnership and the implementation of the project? Is the project well-coordinated overall? Have the working tools and communication methods used by the consortium members allowed coordinating effectively the arrangements? To what extent were appropriate decisions made to support effective implementation and problem resolution? Have any deviations/changes been satisfactorily justified?</i></p>	16
<p>The partners in the EMREX-Project are from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Italy and Poland. The set-up of the project has been very well designed with clear task divisions amongst the partners. Whereas partners work relatively autonomously, being in charge of the national coordination of the participating HEIs in their countries, there is a clear structure governing the overall management. All processes and deliverables have been formalised by means of partnership agreements which should form a good basis of cooperation.</p> <p>Taking a look at the EMREX wiki one can see that the chosen approach seems to work well, the information available is complete and regularly up-dated. There are even minutes of the regularly held Telco's, so that each partner can easily see what is happening in each participating country in a very detailed manner. Similarly the project website is well structured, one can easily find information and it is up-to-date.</p> <p>The project has two high level functions: The steering committee through which the high level authorities seem to be well informed and consulted on project proceedings and the stakeholders' forum which brings together high level decision takes and personnel from HEI recognition and quality assurance bodies.</p>	

The project's research methodology and the field trials as well as the impact on enabling and facilitating mobility are evaluated by University of Warsaw. The evaluation will include surveys and interviews with students, mobility coordinators and the administrations concerned. They have also conducted software evaluation to assure coherence of the cods, accessibility to and from other systems (pug-ins) and very important tools have been developed which allow the swift testing and checking of software developed by partners. Clearly this will allow guaranteeing an overall quality of the EMREX platform and making sure that it functions well in each country.

Data from three different sources will be brought together or collected centrally: HEI level existing data (it can be extracted from existing national or institutional data bases. At local, meaning institutional level students will input their data when applying (individual student level) which they can submit to the central tool. Indeed an important aspect is that in EMREX they are the owner of their data. In this respect it is good to see that data protection was put in place to make sure that users control their core data-set, which in due time and as their mobility advances will be completed by data submitted by the sending and hosting organisations. At this stage the initial data protection provisions might need to be reviewed to cover the then widened context of the project. It is positive to see that next to the data protection work effectuated, a dedicated workshop looked into legal issues which as of yet has not identified any 'show stoppers'. The contribution of the ministries directly involved seems to have facilitated the work and should be continued.

4. Impact, dissemination and sustainability

	Score /30
<p><i>Could the initial results led to a potential systemic impact on systems and policies? How does the project develop communication, visibility, and the dissemination of its activities and results as outlined in the original application? With reference to the original application, to what extent have the target groups been reached and involved in the exploitation of the project activities/results during the project up to date? Is the project's website attractive, user friendly and of good quality? Has a project proposed a strategy for a long-term monitoring beyond the end of project and a possibility for a peer-learning and contribution to the TE2020 and EU youth Strategy</i></p>	25
<p>It is a strong point for the project that both educational Ministries of Denmark and Norway have decided to implement the EMREX approach and its platform as the national standard for their counties. The partnership should see how this fact can be used to reach a wider impact which encompasses the remaining partner countries (FI, IT, SE) and develop a strategy for the longer term for upscaling beyond the project. Furthermore it is noted that Norway will extend EMREX to their national admission process as well. In terms of sustainability it might be useful to look into possible collaboration and/or synergies with the two related KA3 projects with which initial talks have been reported, namely Erasmus without Paper and the FAIR project.</p> <p>Both the website and the Confluence wiki are clearly structured and well managed with regular updates. Whereas the wiki is a work in progress presentation of the activities and results the website is based a communication approach providing project information to a wider public. It is therefore important that key documents which are already and will be even of more of interest to wider public are readily available on the website, which is currently not the case.</p> <p>It is very promising that the project has already been presented widely at key events such as EUNIS 2015, Groningen Group Conference 2015; the ENIC/NARIC meeting in Austria 2015, Erasmus with Paper Kick-off 2015 all of which have a large number of stakeholders from other EU member states.</p>	

This is a very positive development and the project should build on this momentum and use it for future dissemination activities.

Is the visual identity of the ERASMUS+ program appropriately used and displayed (logo and disclaimer)?

Yes

Overall evaluation

Strong points

The project had a good start in particular in regard to the development and first deployment of the EMREX platform. The first trial results show that the admission process can be improved through the use of the platform in the following areas:

- Easier & faster administration
- Less Paper (modernised approach)
- Higher recognition rate studies abroad
- More transparent mobility
- Better service for students
- Better quality of available information (about students records)
- More efficiency of file treatment

The first survey has shown that most of the interview institutions feel that the EMREX approach actually helps consolidating the overall administrative processing of recognition. In turn more data becomes available to more people who need to work with or on it. Institutions feel that this also supports them in providing more transparency across what they perceive to be a very complicated process. They state that this is mainly due to the fact that the currently in place mainly paper validation workflow is drastically simplified.

This is indeed a very positive process which has led Denmark and Norway to decide to use the EMREX approach and platform as their national student mobility recognition system.

Weak points

Unfortunately some set-backs have occurred:

- The randomised attribution (control group) was dropped because of a fear by partners that there would not be enough participating students to have two groups (the experimentation and the control group) data overall.
- Partners have underestimated the difficulty of finding participating sending and hosting HEIs which declare an interest to participate in this two-group approach.
- They acknowledged that it is easier to manage such an approach when working with predefined test environment, but that it is much more difficult to realise when one has to really rely on students who participate on a voluntary basis.

- The field trial in Italy has been delayed considerably. It is likely that it will only start by the time most other partners will have finished theirs.
- There is a lack of coherence of the data being collected at institutional level. This in turn makes it difficult to reach agreement on a coherent set of data which is being collected by all using the system. Finally this will make the comparison of data across the countries difficult and less meaningful. Already key data like ECTS credits and grades are not sufficiently input to reach pertinent data sets for these two measures.
- Norway seems to be taking a lead in the implementation of the EMREX approach and the usage of the platform, while other partners are falling behind the schedule as was set out in the application.

Challenges and Recommendations

The project seems to be progressing well and major achievements have been realised.

Yet problems in the project implementation have been reported as delays have occurred. The report also describes deviations in the experimentation set-up and the execution thereof.

However, the report states unequivocally, that "no major obstacles found so far, just normal project activities and challenges". It is therefore assumed that the problems as identified above will be addressed by the project and that they will be brought under control by the partnership. It is assumed that the partnership will:

- Assure that the data sets will be collected and analysed as is foreseen in application. That these sets will be coherent and of the quantity & quality as is to be expected.
- Make sure that the country specific system for Italy will be implemented as soon as possible and is fully operational. The coordinator might want to monitor this more closely and try to support the Italian partner so that the delays can be reduced as Italy needs to fall into line with the original planning otherwise there is a real risk that their data will not be in time for the country overarching analysis which will be undertaken by the Polish evaluation body partner.
- Risk of unbalanced implementation with Norway clearly in the lead (lead by example approach has to be visible)
- The work on the common glossary needs to be closely monitored as the switch from a self-made glossary to using already existing standards, which will lead to extra comparative work, will not guarantee a qualitative and for the EMREX context relevant result.
- The work group on dissemination might look into the above made observations on the wiki and the website, to see if improvements can already be implemented now.

Summary scoring sheet for Interim Report

Criterion	Score (points)
1. Relevance of the project	15/ 20
2. Quality of the project design and implementation	12/ 30
3. Quality of the partnership and the cooperation arrangements	16/ 20
4. Impact, dissemination and sustainability	25/ 30
Your global score is:	68 / 100