Erasmus Impact Study: Key findings

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Enhancing their employability abroad is increasingly important for Erasmus students.

Top motivations to study or train abroad remain the same as in recent years: the opportunity to live abroad and meet new people, foreign language proficiency, develop transversal skills. Just after, for more than 85% of students, comes the wish to enhance employability abroad.

On average, Erasmus students have better employability skills after a stay abroad than 70% of all students. Based on their personality traits, they have a better predisposition for employability even before going abroad. By the time they return they have increased their advantage by 42% on average.

While 81% of Erasmus students perceive an improvement in their transversal skills when they come back, 52% show higher memo© factors. In all cases, they consider the improvement of skills to be greater than they expected before going abroad.

Transversal 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%).

While 64% of employers say international experience is important for recruitment, on average 92% are looking for transversal skills such as openness to and curiosity about new challenges, problem-solving and decision-making skills, confidence, tolerance towards other personal values and behaviours.
What is the objective and methodology of the Erasmus Impact Study?

The Erasmus Impact Study (EIS) aims to answer two major questions. Firstly, it analyses the effects of Erasmus student mobility in relation to studies and placements on individual skills enhancement, employability and institutional development. Secondly, it examines the effects of Erasmus teaching assignments/staff training on individual competences, personality traits and attitudes, as well as the programme's impact on the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

In order to answer the research questions posed, a quantitative and a qualitative study were conducted. To produce sufficient quantitative data, the research team launched five online surveys in 2013, resulting in the participation of 56,733 students (includes mobile students with and without Erasmus experience and non-mobile students), 18,618 alumni (83% mobile with and without Erasmus), 4,986 staff (academic and non-academic, mobile
and non-mobile), 964 higher education institutions and 652 employers (of which 55% were SMEs) across the 34 countries participating in the study. **In total, the sample for the study comprises 78,891 individual responses.**

To measure real developments in the skills of students and staff after their stay abroad, the EIS used six 'memo© factors' which are most closely related to employability: Tolerance of Ambiguity (acceptance of other people’s culture and attitudes and adaptability), Curiosity (openness to new experiences), Confidence (trust in own competence), Serenity (awareness of own strengths and weaknesses), Decisiveness (ability to make decisions) and Vigour (ability to solve problems). These six memo© factors are characteristics of personality traits. In addition, developments perceived by students, staff, higher education institutions and employers were also analysed.

**Why do students take part in Erasmus?**

Over 90% of the mobile students wished to experience living abroad, to develop skills such as adaptability and to improve their language abilities. Just after comes the wish to enhance employability abroad for more than 85%.

Only 14% of non-mobile students did not go abroad because they were not chosen for support by the programme; in other words, Erasmus is a rather non-selective mobility programme. For more than 50% of non-mobile students, the reasons for not going abroad were uncertainty about additional costs, lack of financial resources and personal relationships. 62% of the non-mobile students are from a non-academic family background, while this applies to 46% of Erasmus students.

**How does Erasmus increase employability?**

The share of employers who considered experience abroad to be important for employability has nearly doubled between 2006 and 2013, from 37% to 64%. In addition, 92% of the surveyed employers confirmed the importance of the six personality traits with regard to employability: tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity, confidence, serenity, decisiveness and problem-solving skills.

Having confirmed the relevance of the skills related to employability, EIS analysed the impact of mobility on these skills. Erasmus students showed higher values for the six personality traits than non-mobile students - even before going abroad. After returning from their Erasmus experience, they increased their advantage over the non-mobile students by 42%. Previous research shows that personality traits are generally rather stable and subject to little and slow change. The absolute changes observed for Erasmus students were of the same intensity as other major life events, such as leaving their parents, and in line with changes observed in comparable research.

However, more important than absolute values, the most significant conclusions from such analysis relates to the trends observed when comparing groups before and after mobility. After their stay abroad, the average Erasmus student showed higher memo© values than 70% of all students.

Moreover, 51% of all mobile students and 52% for Erasmus students increased their employability skills as measured by the memo© factors. On the other hand, 81% of Erasmus students felt they had experienced an improvement in relation to these factors. This also shows the value of comparing perceptions with real measurements when analysing the impact of mobility.

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1 memo stands for Monitoring, Exchange, Mobility, Outcomes
The study also observed the impact of mobility on other skills related to employability that could only be analysed based on the statements of respondents. More than 90% of the students reported an improvement in their soft skills, such as knowledge of other countries, their ability to interact and work with individuals from different cultures, adaptability, foreign language proficiency and communication skills. In addition, 99% of Higher Education Institutions reported a substantial improvement in their students’ confidence and adaptability after an Erasmus period abroad.

**How does Erasmus influence a student's future career and social life?**

In addition to skills, the EIS also analysed the impact of mobility on working life and careers. More than one in three students who did an Erasmus work placement was offered a job by their host company. The experience seems to foster entrepreneurship: almost 1 in 10 students on a job placement started their own company, and more than 3 out of 4 plan to, or can envisage doing so.

Mobility also affects employment rates. Former mobile students are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those not going abroad. Even five years after graduation, the unemployment rate of mobile students was 23% lower than for non-mobile students. Of the employers questioned, 64% report that graduates with an international background are given greater professional responsibility more frequently, a proportion that has increased by 51% since 2006. Of the Erasmus alumni surveyed, 77% held positions with leadership components 10 years after graduation, and Erasmus alumni were 44% more likely to hold managerial positions than non-mobile alumni.

Student mobility also promotes job mobility in the future. Of the mobile alumni, 40% had moved country at least once since graduation compared with 23% of non-mobile alumni. In addition, 93% (compared with 73% of the non-mobile students) could envisage living abroad. Former Erasmus students are also more than twice as likely to change their employer as non-mobile alumni. More than 80% of the Erasmus students felt a strong bond with Europe.

**How does Erasmus influence personal relationships?**

At the time of the survey, 33% of the Erasmus alumni had a life partner of a different nationality than their own, nearly three times more than among non-mobile alumni (13%), and 27% of Erasmus alumni had met their current life partner during their stay abroad.

**How does Erasmus benefit staff and higher education institutions?**

In general, a majority of HEIs consider Erasmus to be the most relevant strategic asset of any educational programme offered to students. Of the various Erasmus actions, study mobility is considered the most important in relation to internationalisation by 83% of HEIs and for their international profile (80% of HEIs).

With regard to the impact of staff mobility, mobile staff had statistically significant higher values for five out of the six personality traits than non-mobile staff. More than 70% of the staff agreed that the most important aspect of their mobility was the increase in their knowledge of good practices and skills to the benefit of their home HEI. Of the academic staff, 81% observed beneficial effects on the quality of teaching and on multi-disciplinary and cross-organisational cooperation in teaching.