

## **Response of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) to the Green Paper 'Promoting the learning mobility of young people'**

With this brief document, the **European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)** would like to respond to the Green Paper 'Promoting the learning mobility of young people'. The document will explain the work of the AEC with regards to mobility and provide some suggestions on the improvement of the current situation based on experiences in the field.



### **The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)**

The AEC is a cultural network of almost 300 institutions for higher music education, which aims at representing the interest of the European higher music education sector and promoting mobility and cooperation at the European level among its members ([www.aecinfo.org](http://www.aecinfo.org)). This is being done through several initiatives and projects, some of which are supported by EU programmes. Most of the activities of the AEC focus on mobility in general and on mobility of young music students in particular, as this is one of the primary target groups of the Association.

This response will not follow all questions as posed in the Green Paper, but address those issues that, according to the longstanding experience of the AEC with European mobility matters, in our opinion need to be addressed.

#### **1.1. Information and Guidance: a Sectoral Approach in the Higher Music Education sector**

Based on our experiences with the promotion of European mobility, we strongly feel that access to the right type of information is essential. Although much information is already available on the internet, it is often not customised and spread over many different websites. The AEC has therefore made significant efforts to publish substantial amounts of information on European mobility and cooperation issues, which is customised for specific target groups in the European higher music education sector. These target groups are primarily a) the international relations coordinators working in higher music education that are responsible for the organisation of mobility (a good example of the “multipliers” mentioned in 3.4 of the Green Paper), b) music students and c) music teachers. These efforts are an excellent example of a sectoral approach to issues of mobility, which means that at a sectoral level information and tools have been developed with the needs and characteristics of the sector in mind to support and promote mobility at the European level.

Examples of these information and support tools are:

1. The DoReMiFaSOCRATES website ([www.doremifasocrates.org](http://www.doremifasocrates.org)), which has been developed with support of the SOCRATES programme. This website provides customised information to international relations coordinators, students and teachers in the higher music education sector. Each target group has its own section with information that is customised specifically for that particular target, including FAQs, short reports of personal experiences of students having been on exchange and information on recognition issues. The site also provides information about the EU programmes, but the information is again customised according to the needs of the target groups, which means that some information has been summarised with hyperlinks for further information. For international relations coordinators there is an extensive login function, which they can use to upload and manage data for their institution and find information provided by other institutions (e.g. ECTS Guides, deadlines, information on academic calendars, etc). The website is being updated regularly.

2. The StudyMusicinEurope website ([www.studymusicineurope.org](http://www.studymusicineurope.org)), which has been developed with support of the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme. This recent website provides information for students interested in studying music in Europe, including information on institutions, national higher education systems, national regulations for visa and other practical issues, scholarship information and FAQs. In a way, this is a sectoral or subject-specific version of the [www.studyineurope.org](http://www.studyineurope.org) website, which has been developed by the Global Promotion Project in the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme. The StudyMusicinEurope website provides some links to the [www.studyineurope.org](http://www.studyineurope.org) website for general national higher education information, but contains additional information specifically for music students, which is another example of a sectoral approach to the enhancement of attractiveness of European higher education. In terms of accessibility, it takes the positive experiences with the abovementioned DoReMiFaSOCRATES website further, as it is available in 5 languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Chinese, which gives the website a truly global dimension. The website is being updated regularly.
3. In addition to these online information and promotion tools, much work has been done by the AEC to support the international relations coordinators in terms of developing expertise and support tools. These international relations coordinators are experts (“multipliers”) dealing with mobility issues in higher music education institutions all over Europe, including the implementation of the EU programmes such as ERASMUS. An example of such tools is the publication of handbooks, e.g. the handbook ‘10 Steps on how to implement your ERASMUS Exchange in Music’ (published in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian), the handbook ‘How to develop a Joint Programme in Music’ (published in English, French, German), and the ‘Code of Good Practice for International Relations Coordinators in Music’. These publications are particularly helpful for institutions or experts in institutions new to the organisation of exchanges. In addition, the higher music sector is one of the few sectors (if not the only one) that has developed standard forms for the organisation of student mobility in ERASMUS: all relevant documents (Application Form, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, Bilateral Agreement Form, ERASMUS Placement Application Form, etc) have been customised to the needs of the sector following an extensive consultation. This greatly facilitates the flow of information between international relations coordinators and has led to a decrease of bureaucracy with regards to the organisation of student mobility in the sector. These documents can be found at [www.doremifasocrates.org/usefulinformation](http://www.doremifasocrates.org/usefulinformation).
4. The AEC also facilitates the personal contacts between the international relations coordinators by organising an Annual Meeting for International Relations Coordinators in a different country every year. This meeting is attended by around 150 international relations coordinators each year, giving these experts excellent opportunities to discuss bilateral and multilateral exchanges.
5. Another interesting recent development in the music sector, is the development of a ‘Mobility Pass’ in the field of music. Such a mobility pass is currently being developed in a project entitled ‘MusXChange’ coordinated by the European Federation of National Youth Orchestras ([www.efnyo.org](http://www.efnyo.org)) and should compile information on mobility activities undertaken by music students during their studies, which will be useful information for future employers.

## **1.2. Promotion and motivation**

In our opinion, the promotion and motivation for students and young people to be mobile would be greatly enhanced through the following measures:

1. Increase individual grants in the ERASMUS programme – financial issues are still a major obstacle to mobility
2. Design a flexible approach to mobility in the EU programmes – there is much need for short-term mobility, both for higher education students as for recently graduated young professionals. Such short-term mobility activities are not provided for in the EU programmes at this moment, with the ERASMUS programmes having a minimum exchange period of 3 months. However, not all students are in the position to go on long exchanges for various reasons and short-term exchanges can also be very effective tools for intercultural dialogue, as well as to assist the integration of professionals in the European labour market.
3. Start early with mobility – give special attention to youth programmes such as COMENIUS, Town Twinning, and YOUTH to be mobile already at early ages.
4. Take into account regional situations and needs – every year, the AEC compiles and publishes a report with mobility flows in ERASMUS. What is in particular noticeable is the lack of reciprocity between East -> West mobility and West -> East mobility, with clearly higher numbers being mobile East -> West. Additional incentives should be provided to counteract this development.

### **1.6. International mobility**

During 2005-2007, the AEC coordinated a project entitled ‘Mundus Musicalis’ ([www.aecinfo.org/mundusmusicalis](http://www.aecinfo.org/mundusmusicalis)) in the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme, which addressed international mobility in the higher music education sector. One of the conclusions of this project was that international mobility is essential to improve the quality of education systems in Europe. It became clear from the collected information in the project this is an issue that needs further understanding and support from policy makers in Europe, as it clearly indicates the need for a ‘two-way traffic’ in international mobility. It was therefore considered vital to avoid any suggestion of ‘re-colonisation’ or a competitive approach towards the global recruitment of students. Instead, an approach based on cooperation and networking was emphasized and the project emphatically saw mobility in the 21st century as two-way traffic. In addition, it was also underlined that any promotion of European higher education could only work when a subject-specific approach was taken, as students are more interested in academic content than in the glossy marketing campaigns for higher education promotion used by certain countries.

Nevertheless, one of the results of the ‘Mundus Musicalis’ project has been the launch of the abovementioned website portal [www.studymusicineurope.org](http://www.studymusicineurope.org) with information on studying music in Europe for music students worldwide. This website portal has been developed in consultation with partners worldwide and includes, in addition to information about studying music in Europe, also information on recognition and other issues related to countries outside Europe to underline the principle of the ‘two-way traffic’ in mobility.

However, in order to facilitate international mobility streams, the European Commission should engage an proactive debate with member states about visa requirements, which are important bureaucratic obstacles for international mobility.

### **1.7 Mobility and Quality Assurance**

A good quality assurance is essential for mobility activities and arrangements. However, in our opinion the European initiatives that have been developed with the aim to address quality assurance in mobility arrangements (such as the European Quality Charter for Mobility) will have a limited effect, as the European Commission has limited means to enforce such initiatives

on institutions that are governed by national legislature, which usually is the case for institutions in education and culture. We would therefore like to suggest to integrate mobility issues in national quality assurance procedures for institutions in education. More specifically in higher education, this could be done through drawing the attention to mobility issues in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, which is already being suggested in the recent European Commission report on the progress in quality assurance in higher education (COM[2009] 487 final).

Another possibility is to promote and support European-level quality assurance and accreditation schemes in higher education, which address issues in relation to mobility. An example of such a scheme is the *AEC Institutional and Programme Review Scheme* ([www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/accreditation)), which is a subject-specific and European-level tools to evaluate and (if done in cooperation with formal national quality assurance schemes) accredit higher music education institution. In this scheme, a set of subject-specific and European-level criteria are being used, including a set of sub-criteria dealing with European mobility issues, which usually are absent in criteria for national quality assurance and accreditation procedures.

## **2.2 Recognition**

It is our experience that recognition is still one of the main obstacles for mobility, both within horizontal mobility (exchanges within programmes) and vertical mobility (consecutive mobility between study cycles), as well as the mobility of professionals. In our opinion, there are issues at stake in relation to recognition:

1. For horizontal mobility in higher education, a further exploration of the ECTS system during the coming years will be essential. Although ECTS has been implemented European-wide, it has been done so with a variety of approaches. This has led to some confusion about the use of ECTS for recognition purposes that will need to be clarified. This can best be done at the sectoral European level, where similar types of institutions further tune and articulate at the European level their use of ECTS with the aim to clarify existing problems.
2. For the vertical mobility and the recognition of qualifications, the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning will obviously be essential. It is much less known that, increasingly, Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks exist that approach the issue of recognition successfully at a European sectoral level through the development of learning outcomes and reference points for the various educational levels. The AEC has developed such a Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Music ([www.bologna-and-music.org/learningoutcomes](http://www.bologna-and-music.org/learningoutcomes)), which could serve as an example to other disciplines in higher education.

## **3.4. Engaging the “multipliers”**

The abovementioned initiatives are good examples of how a specific sector can take effective measures through a proactive approach towards the information and promotion of mobility issues. It is in civil society organisations and the various sectors that “multipliers” for the promotion and support to mobility should be looked for, which implies a continued and strong support by the European Commission to European associations through operational grants, and the development of sectoral approaches to mobility support, recognition, quality assurance and other relevant issues through networks in the various EU programmes (e.g. the ERASMUS Networks).

*For further information about this response, please contact Martin Prchal, AEC Chief Executive, at [aecinfo@aecinfo.org](mailto:aecinfo@aecinfo.org).*