

**EU Balance of Competence Review of education, vocational training and youth**  
**Individual youth stakeholder meeting between Cabinet Office – British Council and**  
**Ecorys as the National Agencies for Erasmus+**

**Meeting note**

Date: 23 June 2014

**Attendees:**

Matt Cresswell – Programme Manager, British Council  
Fumie Izaki, Team Leader, Ecorys  
Annalies Stalpaert, Youth team, Ecorys  
Helen Tabiner – Deputy Director of Youth Policy, Cabinet Office  
Ada Simpson – Policy Adviser, Cabinet Office

Introduction to this note

This note is to capture the main observations and assessments shared by British Council (BC) and Ecorys (E) regarding EU competence in the field of youth at this meeting. The note has been agreed as a record of the meeting and submitted to the Call for Evidence on this Review led by the Department for Education. The points are presented in the order they were raised and discussed during the meeting.

For more information about the Review please visit HM Government website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/education-vocational-training-and-youth-review-of-the-balance-of-competences>.

For more information about the programmes, policy co-ordination and other EU terminology used in this note please visit the European Commission website:

[http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm).

Both National Agencies said they would also be submitting separate responses to the Call for Evidence to provide further detail on some areas, and we welcomed this.

Supporting competence

- BC and E felt the EU had adhered to a supporting competence in the field of youth. They felt the EU had always been very clear that it was down to Member States whether to act on or implement EU ideas and outputs in this area.
- BC and E said they thought the Open Method of Co-ordination was working well in this area and that it provided flexibility for Member States to interpret outputs.

Links with domestic priorities

- BC and E saw a strong link between aims of EU programmes and activities and domestic priorities. They commented that the previous Youth in Action programme and the new Erasmus+ programme delivered on many of the objectives highlighted in HM Government's Positive for Youth document, for instance around developing young people's skills and ambitions.
- Sometimes these links did need to be interpreted or drawn out, especially as EU terminology could differ from that used in the UK. They felt this was easily done though and saw it as the National Agency's role to interpret EU activity to help others understand how it contributed and aligned with UK aims, including those of the Devolved Administrations.

### Youth in Action programme compared to Erasmus+

- BC and E saw the programmes as having had a positive impact in the UK as they believed they had helped the youth sector in the UK access much-needed funding to continue existing activities and to innovate.
- Erasmus+ was still a very new programme so BC and E could only comment on their experience of it thus far, and therefore its potential impact for the sector and young people in the UK could not be known.
- BC and E said significant positive progress had been made in making Erasmus+ a much more flexible programme than Youth in Action (YiA). They highlighted the following as improvements:
  - A less rigid structure than YiA and a consistent and simplified set of application and reporting criteria across the programme
  - Erasmus+ was led by practitioners and young people
  - Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships of Erasmus+ presented an excellent opportunity as it was an open book, providing more freedom to applicants to develop and implement project ideas
- They noted a key difference which could potentially prove to be a limitation of Erasmus+ and a barrier for UK organisations trying to obtain funding, which was the new requirement for all funded activities to be transnational. BC and E noted that this could be detrimental for some organisations which previously had funding under YiA for UK-only activities, or who had used UK-based projects as a springboard to international projects
- The new transnational funding criteria would mean that applicants would need to create a strategic partnership with another organisation or group in another country(-ies) and demonstrate how the activity was carried out transnationally .
- BC and E discussed how they thought this challenge could be overcome. They considered a 'partner finding service' would help UK applicants identify and work with relevant partners in an easy way. This could help reassure and support UK applicants who might otherwise have been put off from applying for funding.

### EU level support for National Agencies

- BC and E spoke very positively about the Training and Cooperation Activities, an initiative funded by the European Commission to support professional development and capacity building within youth work; it also provided support and potential partner-finding opportunities for organisations new to the programme.
- There was also the SALTO network of resource centres, including the Cultural Diversity SALTO hosted by the British Council, which provides themed training opportunities for youth workers and organisations and support to NAs.

### Evaluation of programme outcomes

- BC and E said they considered evaluation of outcomes from Erasmus+ to be vital. They questioned whether it could be done better. They said that currently National Agencies were asked by the EU to focus on financial aspects of funded activities and whether the activities had achieved the aims the applicants set for themselves.
- There was some discussion of how the programme could better measure the skills developed by the young people taking part in the funded activities. BC and E were keen to explore this further and would follow-up with the Cabinet Office Youth Policy team to see how they could do this at national level.
- The UK National Agency was investing heavily in this aspect: they had joined the RAY (Research and Analysis of Youth in Action) network for evaluating impact of non-formal youth work. E was leading on impact evaluation for Erasmus+ across all sectors; BC were to appoint an impact evaluation consultant to work alongside E.

- The Youth Pass and Euro Pass were discussed as two EU tools for evaluation of programme benefits. The Youth Pass measured young peoples' competencies but usage in the UK was low, much lower than in many Member States. BC and E thought this was because the Youth Pass was not seen as necessary or very helpful by people in the UK. Despite this the UK NA, along with all NAs, had been asked to appoint a Youth Pass Officer to increase uptake. They said there had been recognition at EU level that Youth Pass needed review and development.
- BC and E thought that the existence of the Euro Pass to fill a similar function made it confusing for people and that both tools could be made more accessible and useful.

#### Performance of YiA and Erasmus+ across the devolved nations

- BC and E reported that uptake varied across the devolved nations, with Scotland having a lower uptake in proportion to its population of young people and Northern Ireland having higher than proportional uptake.
- BC and E were working hard to ensure a diverse range of organisations in all the devolved nations could access Erasmus+ funding. They were doing this through their offices in each nation to make direct links with potential applicants. They had also launched advisory and consultation groups in each devolved nation and a UK-wide sectoral group.

#### BC and E aim to increase uptake

- BC and E wanted to ensure Erasmus+ was available to as many organisations as possible but they recognised a barrier in the IT. All applicants had to apply to Erasmus+ through a central European portal. Erasmus+ was still new but there had been some technical issues which had made it hard for some to submit applications for funding. They stated this was being rectified actively at EU level but there was not much they could do about this, although the UK NA was part of an IT working group led by the Commission and was contributing expertise.
- BC and E expressed disappointment that delays in the IT tools made it very difficult for National Agencies to use and analyse data in a way which could provide useful indicators on the impact of Erasmus+ so far.

#### Structured Dialogue and youth voice

- BC and E felt that Erasmus+ enabled and encouraged youth-led activities, with all applicants needing to show how the activity they were seeking funding for had been designed by young people.
- Structured Dialogue was supported at programme-level (in addition to Structured Dialogue in EU youth policy co-ordination) through Erasmus+, with Key Action 3 being dedicated to funding Structured Dialogue activities.
- BC and E believed this fitted very well with the UK aim to support and increase youth voice and participation in policy making.

END