



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

## FEEDBACK ON ERASMUS+

Adult education and learning is vital for a properly functioning and democratic society. The European Association for the Education of Adults has recently issued a 'Manifesto on Adult Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', drawing attention to a whole range of ways in which adult learning contributes to meeting the policy challenges facing European societies today:

### *Active citizenship, democracy and participation*

Participants in adult education have more trust in the political system and participate more actively in society, by voting, by volunteering and through a wide range of roles in the community.

### *Life skills for individuals*

Adult learners feel healthier, lead healthier lifestyles, build new social networks and experience a greater sense of well-being than non-participants.

### *Social cohesion, equity and equality*

Adult education provides a wealth of second chance opportunities and contributes strongly to creating a fairer and more equal society for all.

### *Employment and digitalization*

Workplace learning is a key driver for adults' participation in lifelong learning, and adult learning a key contributor to generating greater economic growth. At the cusp of enormous digital changes, adult education can help in closing the digital gap.

### *Migration and demographic change*

Civic education and intercultural learning help create a mind-set of active citizenship and hospitality conducive to an integration-friendly culture. Language and basic skills training enable migrants to become active citizens in their new home countries. Learning seniors are healthier, more active, volunteer more and work longer.

### *Sustainability*

From environmentally friendly consumption and transport to energy efficiency, European citizens need a wealth of information and innovative spaces to develop new sustainable lifestyles, projects and approaches. Adult education can help provide the information, the spaces for debate and nurture the creativity.

### *European policies*

Adult education contributes to frontline European strategies in fields such as growth, employment, innovation, equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, poverty reduction, climate change, internal market, migration, peace and many more.



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Despite the ever more apparent importance of adult education for a thriving society, the sector is still grossly under-valued and consequently under-funded compared with the other main parts of the education and training system. This is true at the level of the individual Member States, and it is no less true at the level of the EU. In the *Erasmus+* Programme, under 4% of the total budget is assigned to adult learning, compared with 12%, 17% and 33% for schools, vocational training and higher education respectively.

Furthermore, the tiny overall budget allocation, combined with the new procedure for allocating funds for projects and the new formula for distributing funding across Member States, has led to a dramatic fall in the number of transnational cooperation projects ("Strategic Partnerships") supported in the field of adult education. Taking into account the fact that only one grant per project is now awarded (to the coordinating partner), the number of partnership projects supported in the first two years of *Erasmus+* has fallen in real terms by around 55% compared with the last two years of the LLP (Grundtvig). In other words, less than half as many projects are now being supported than before. Furthermore, the method of distributing the budget has disproportionately penalised the smaller countries. In 2015, only six of the 28 Member States were able to support 10 projects or more with the budget allocated.

In the same period, the rejection rate during selection has vastly increased, only one project in five now being accepted. This is beginning to give rise to widespread disenchantment of the adult education community. It is therefore absolutely essential to increase the funds available to the adult education part of *Erasmus+*.

The *Erasmus+* programme is a key European tool for adult learning to flourish. The following feedback is based on a survey among EAEA members.

## KA1 – Mobilities

The fact that individual trainers cannot apply for a mobility remains a problem, especially in countries that work with **freelancers**. Due to the lack of resources, there are often two or three organisations that bundle all the mobilities of a country. This system works more effectively in countries where trainers and staff have regular contracts and representation (i.e. the Nordic countries).

Additionally, we were told at the beginning of *Erasmus+* that **umbrella organisations** would be able to apply on behalf of their member organisations and then administer the individual mobilities. Some of our members were told that they could only apply on behalf of a limited number of member organisations. As one of our members said, 'It is not possible for us to apply for some of our members only. Either we apply for all of them or none.'

It is also regrettable that the method of approving **in-service trainings** and then presenting them in a **Catalogue** has disappeared. Many courses have disappeared or had to be cancelled due to a lack of



participants. The school sector has reintroduced the Catalogue, and the same should be done for adult education.

Another key issue concerns deadlines. The general consensus is that there should be **two deadlines per year** for mobilities; one is not sufficient and puts small organisations at a disadvantage.

Finally, some concerns were raised over the circulating information. Some of our members were informed by their NAs that conferences are covered by mobility grants, others were not. **EAEA therefore proposes that conferences are seen as learning activities and can be part of mobilities across Europe.**

## KA2 – Strategic Partnerships

Interestingly enough, the fact that adult education has been forced into a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the programme (aka ‘simplification’) has led to a lose-lose situation for applicants. The application guidelines and **forms are too complicated** for newcomers and inevitably lead to irrelevant questions. Simplification in this sense has not happened. Last year’s results showed that almost no small partnerships/projects managed to be approved. So in 2015, it seems that many of the bigger projects that were approved received cuts in their budgets, some of them up to 50%. Despite the cuts, partnerships are still expected to do the full work plan. We have received a lot of feedback on this and a number of organisations have now given up on KA2 as a result. There is considerable anger and frustration in the adult education community. Learning partnerships have disappeared (and they were perfect for smaller organisations and partnerships), and now also larger projects are suffering. **A lot of grassroots cooperation across Europe is now disappearing.**

The fact that all projects are now approved and administered at the national level has led to **the perception that there is less money available** for adult education than before, especially in **smaller countries**. Additionally, there is now no more possibility to check the topics and approaches across Europe, so we assume that there is a considerable amount of parallel and overlapping work being done without the option to coordinate it.

The list of approved projects reveals a large range of topics and organisations, many of them coming from the vocational sector. As the funds in adult education are very limited, especially in comparison to Leonardo which has a much higher budget for strategic partnerships, a clear priority needs to be given to **non-vocational priorities, topics and providers**.

The fact that **European organisations** have to apply on the national level continues to pose problems for everyone concerned – another lose-lose situation that Erasmus+ has created. National evaluators tend to have little understanding for the work of European associations and some of the evaluations reflect that. National Agencies (mainly in Belgium, but also other countries) have to shoulder projects that would best be run at the European level, and European associations have to compete for very scarce resources not only with each other, but also with national organisations. The issue of competition with Belgian projects and with



other EU-wide networks remains unchanged. **EAEA therefore proposes to increase the operating grant for European associations so that there is less pressure to apply for projects and to establish a separate pot to be administered by the EACEA which European associations only can apply to.**

National agencies interpret the administrative rules very differently, and therefore there is considerable confusion over the actual rules. **A cohesive approach with the same rules applying to all European countries would be highly welcome.**

The **management fee** continues to be huge problem – it is difficult to comprehend how 500 euros are supposed to ensure the same quality of management and dissemination across Europe; from Turkey to Finland. Dissemination in particular needs to be included in a separate funding pot, as it is very different from the management fee.

Another problem involves **intellectual outputs**. As they are understood differently between agencies, applicants and external experts, it is very difficult to write an application. The application in general has now become more complicated with the “one size fit all” approach, which is a step back. The same goes for “extraordinary costs” that are not defined in a clear way. Concerning travel costs, distances under 100km are not covered when they obviously also include costs that have no reason to be excluded.

It is also a pity that the participation of Partner Countries has been severely limited. Our non-EU members are very keen to participate and contribute but this programme excludes them. Especially organisations from the European Neighbourhood countries should have the opportunity to participate.

National Agencies also have the role to support applicant organisations, informing them about Erasmus+ opportunities and helping them to submit project proposals. This should especially be the case in countries with low participation rate in Erasmus+, where targeted information campaigns about its possibilities would be needed. The disappearance of **preparatory visits** is also a clear step back. These were the occasions when partners could get to know each other better, work out how to work together and how to best structure the project. This undermines the opportunity for smaller or less experienced organisations to apply for projects.

#### *More information:*

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*[The European Association for the Education of Adults \(EAEA\)](#) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with 137 member organisations in 44 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide.*