

# Interim Evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013)

## Executive summary

### Introduction

The 2009-2013 Erasmus Mundus programme was established by Decision (No 1298/2008/EC) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 with the aim to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures through cooperation with third countries as well as to promote external policy objectives and the sustainable development of third countries in the field of higher education.

The interim evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus programme was launched by the European Commission following the requirements of the Erasmus Mundus Decision. This evaluation covered all three actions (Action 1, Action 2 and Action 3) over the implementation period of 2009-2011.

The Report was prepared under the Specific Contract No. EAC-2011-0255 "Interim evaluation of Erasmus Mundus II (2009-2013)". The evaluation was carried out by the Public Policy and Management Institute (Lithuania) and steered by the Steering Group involving the Directorate-Generals of the European Commission (Education and Culture; Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid; Enlargement and the European External Action Service) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

### Programme description

#### Objectives of the programme

The programme's aim is to promote European higher education, to help improve and enhance the career prospects of students and to promote intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries, in accordance with EU external policy objectives in order to contribute to the sustainable development of third countries in the field of higher education.

#### Financial scope of the programme

Erasmus Mundus has a budget of over €950 million, with €493.69 million allocated to Actions 1 and 3 from the EU's education budget and €460 million allotted to Action 2 from a number of different funding instruments.

#### Structure of the programme

Erasmus Mundus 2009-2013 was implemented through the following actions:

- Action 1:** Erasmus Mundus joint programmes of outstanding quality at masters and doctoral levels including scholarships/fellowships to participate in these programmes;
- **Action 2:** Erasmus Mundus partnerships between European and third-country higher education institutions including scholarships and fellowships for mobility at all academic levels;
- **Action 3:** Promotion of European higher education through projects to enhance the attractiveness of Europe as an educational destination and a centre of excellence at world level.

#### Novelties of phase II

Under Phase II the scope of the Erasmus Mundus programme was extended by incorporating the following key new dimensions:

- Extending joint programmes to the doctoral level;
  - Offering scholarships for European students;
  - Integrating the "External Cooperation Window" scheme into the Erasmus Mundus programme as Action 2 and widening its scope;
- Allowing third-country higher education institutions to participate in the Erasmus Mundus joint programmes.

**Management structure of the programme** The Erasmus Mundus programme is coordinated by the European Commission, while the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency is responsible for its implementation. Other institutional bodies engaged in the programme implementation are the Erasmus Mundus Committee and other Committees dealing with the respective financial instruments, the National Structures, the national Tempus offices and the EU Delegations.

## Purpose and methodology of the evaluation

**Purpose of the interim evaluation** The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the results achieved and the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the programme implementation, providing the input for the Commission's Interim Evaluation Report. The evaluation emphasised the novelties introduced in phase II of the programme. The scope of this interim evaluation included the whole programme, covering all actions and geographical areas. The evaluation answered four sets of evaluation questions according to the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency.

**Framework for analysis** The intervention logic of the Erasmus Mundus programme covers four levels of objectives: global objectives, intermediate objectives, specific objectives and operational objectives of Action 1, 2 and 3. All specific objectives of the programme were grouped into three broad sets of specific objectives referring to the level at which the results are likely to occur: individual, institutional (or inter-institutional), system levels. The hierarchy of objectives of the Erasmus Mundus programme is described in the Report.

**Evaluation methods** The interim evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus programme was a mixed methods evaluation, employing both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. Evaluation data were collected and analysed using the following methods: desk research (literature review and analysis of the monitoring data), interviews at the EU and national level, EU-level and project-based case studies, surveys of the individual and organisational beneficiaries as well as the National Structures and the EU Delegations, as well as other methods of policy analysis. The application of all evaluation methods and their triangulation is described in the Report and its annexes.

## Main conclusions

### Relevance

#### *General conclusions*

**Relevance of programme objectives** While the needs and challenges faced by the target groups and stakeholders were quite diverse, the objectives of Erasmus Mundus II remained highly relevant. Both joint programmes (Action 1) and mobilities (Action 2) contribute significantly to promoting excellence, building capacity and developing international co-operation.

**Developmental needs of third countries** Cooperation between the EU and third countries met the needs of, and had considerable benefits for all partners. The beneficiaries from third countries emphasised the potential of the programme to contribute to the capacity building of their higher education institutions. The risk of "brain drain" from third countries remained, but stakeholders from third countries also suggested that the developmental element could be strengthened by ensuring more balanced and reciprocal relationships between participants from the EU and third countries.

**Links with other EU programme** Erasmus Mundus II was closely linked to and complemented the other EU programmes, particularly the Lifelong Learning Programme, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the "People" specific programme (Marie Curie Actions). However, there was a risk of overlaps. The support of Erasmus Mundus II for curricular development and scholarships for European students overlapped with the activities funded by the Erasmus programme. There were also potential overlaps between Erasmus Mundus II and Marie Curie Actions. Both programmes sought to attract researchers to Europe from third countries by providing fellowships to doctoral students and exchange of staff with third countries. Lastly, there was a risk of overlaps between Erasmus Mundus II and Tempus.

### Synergies between the programme actions

The complementarities between the different actions of Erasmus Mundus II were limited. There were synergies between Action 3 and the other actions of the programme. However, the synergies between Actions 1 and 2 were quite limited. This could be explained by a few factors. First, there was a weakness in the strategic coordination of the programme, which stemmed from the division of responsibilities between the Directorate-General for Education and Culture and the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation. Second, Actions 1 and 2 had rather different focuses: Action 1 emphasised academic excellence, while Action 2 (Strand 1) focused on cooperation and mobility.

### European added value of joint programmes

The joint masters and doctoral programmes funded by Action 1 had considerable added value by facilitating the success of graduates when looking for work and/or further research positions. International experiences and intercultural competence could be regarded as the most important assets that distinguished Erasmus Mundus students from other graduates. Inclusion of doctoral and post-doctoral co-operation within Erasmus Mundus II has been one of the most successful innovations of phase II, attracting many very prestigious higher education institutions to participate.

#### *Conclusions concerning specific Actions of the programme*

The Action 1 beneficiaries argued that excellence of their institutions in teaching and research was the ultimate objective of their projects. Mobilities, partnerships and cooperation were seen as instruments to achieve excellence. Better career opportunities for students, development of capacities in third countries and increased visibility of European higher education were the intended long-term effects of these projects. The beneficiaries of Strand 1 of Action 2 emphasised cooperation, mobility, implementation of Bologna instruments and capacity building. The target groups of Strand 2 of Action 2 suggested that academic excellence was the central motivation of the individuals and institutions involved.

### **Effectiveness**

#### *General conclusions*

### Links with the EU priorities and contribution to the Bologna process

The objectives of Erasmus Mundus II were strongly in line with the new EU policy initiatives and political priorities. In the future EM II could further strengthen its focus on the employability of young people, which is particularly emphasised in Europe 2020. Although the programme contributed to EU strategic policies, its impact on the Bologna process was mixed and varied across different countries. The contribution was very significant in some third countries, particularly in Neighbourhood countries, and particularly in the field of legislation necessary for the recognition of joint degrees and credit recognition mechanisms.

### Progress towards the targets and geographical coverage

During the period of 2009-2011, Erasmus Mundus II was on track to reach its targets. However, funds for scholarships for European students were taken up to a considerably lesser extent. The success of higher education institutions in the application process depended on their experience and the resources they were able to invest in building partnerships and developing curricula. Therefore, the programme tended to favour institutions from well-established academic systems, whereas EU12 countries remained underrepresented. On the other hand, they were gradually developing capacities by being included as partners.

### Academic excellence and development

Institutions participating in the programme proved to be academically outstanding, but the most prestigious institutions in Europe were only interested in some activities of the programme (doctoral and post-doctoral horizontal exchange and Strand 2). Action 1 and Action 2 still differed in their selection methods and the level of excellence, as perceived by target groups, but the evaluation showed that the development objective was not in conflict with excellence, and the impact of the programme on activities with a development focus was even stronger (including labour market outcomes of individual beneficiaries and exploitation of results).

### Employability and brain drain

The programme provides valuable skills for graduate careers. Actual employability was uneven across regions and subject areas. Action 1 beneficiaries, who were more academically oriented,

did not necessarily have opportunities to apply their skills in their home countries, yet the availability of jobs was often better at home than in the EU, where labour markets are highly competitive and visas are difficult to obtain. Decisions about relocation were related to multiple factors, not only financial. Employability and brain drain were addressed in a number of Action 3 projects, but it did not appear that beneficiaries of other actions were aware of the results and tools of Action 3.

The main barriers to the programme implementation resulted from lack of legislation, differences in higher education systems (particularly tuition fees) and limited alignment of visa and scholarship policies. Doctoral education appeared to be difficult to standardise. Co-financing was another burden faced by universities. Finding students from vulnerable groups proved to be a challenge, but most consortia did not face problems in balancing student cohorts by gender, and student mobility was balanced at the programme level, with scholar mobility catching up. Demands for more flexibility in scholar mobility were voiced by target groups.

#### *Conclusions concerning specific Actions of the programme*

A positive influence on legislation was attributable principally to Action 1. Action 1 also contributed to the growing awareness of outstanding European education beyond the most prestigious institutions. Action 1 joint courses produced ambitious graduates, satisfied with their experience and strongly identifying with the Erasmus Mundus brand. Yet one risk results from their inclination towards academic jobs, which have become vulnerable in the context of the economic downturn. Some Action 1 consortia developed extensive accessibility measures for students with special needs, but such good practices are still to become the norm. The Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association proved to be a valuable instrument for promoting the programme and disseminating good practice, but it only included Action 1.

Action 2 has contributed to mutual recognition of credits and qualifications, exchange of practices and research cooperation beyond the EU borders. Since many Action 2 beneficiaries outside the EU had more limited opportunities for international cooperation than those participating in Action 1, the influence is more profound and visible: the participants internationalised their teaching, and improved their institutional capacities. The partnerships were responsive to development needs and key economic sectors of the participating countries. This is likely to have influenced the employability of Action 2 beneficiaries.

Action 2 achieved important results in mainstreaming equal opportunities. Unlike in Action 1, scholar mobility was also gender-balanced at the programme level. Special measures were developed to facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups (including special Target Group 3 scholarships), such as dissemination campaigns and discussions with various stakeholders. The diversity of vulnerable groups indicates the importance of mapping and cataloguing good practices for future beneficiaries and for defining vulnerable groups according to a regional context.

Participants were very satisfied with the academic quality of their mobility, but they often wished to have longer and/or more flexible mobility periods. Some experienced visa-related delays and other burdens resulting from less flexible timing of student intakes. Non-degree mobility was also not always considered rewarding. For these and other reasons, there is a need to strengthen Action 2 and make it an integral part of a more cohesive Erasmus Mundus programme.

Action 3 results were known to policy-makers and the National Structures due to the limited number of projects and close contacts. However, in the future they could be better mainstreamed to the EU Delegations and institutional beneficiaries implementing joint courses and partnerships. The dissemination of Action 3 results to other beneficiaries should be facilitated.

## Sustainability

### *General conclusions*

#### Diversification of funding

The participating institutions were typically highly internationalised and had staff members responsible for international project management, but nearly half of the beneficiaries reported lacking human resources to cope with the workload. The participating institutions were generally prepared for the phasing out of EU funding, but they hoped it would be gradual. The Erasmus Mundus label allowed institutions, which are outstanding in their field but not internationally prestigious, to access external funding and gain easier recognition of their courses. Allowing previous beneficiaries to retain the label would increase the sustainability of their courses.

#### Sustainable cooperation

The quantitative and qualitative sources strongly support the conclusion that cooperation mechanisms will be sustainable, but only to a limited extent (lower intensity or dropping the individual mobility component and focusing on research). The participating institutions were very interested in continuing research cooperation, but undergraduate and graduate mobility was likely to be reduced in the future. The evaluation showed that most beneficiaries look to other EU instruments rather than private funds to ensure sustainable cooperation in research and education. Some innovative mechanisms such as online teaching modules were being developed to prepare for reductions in funding.

#### Cooperation with non-education institutions

Inclusion of non-educational institutions was more widespread in Action 2 than in Action 1 and did not depend on subject areas. Placements were the most typical way of involving them, but in some cases they also participated in curriculum development, monitoring and funding. Funding from these institutions (particularly in the form of scholarships) will not necessarily be sustainable – some of them are public authorities, facing austerity-related cuts, others are small companies and non-governmental organisations struggling with the economic downturn. The inclusion of non-educational institutions was likely to continue depending on existing relations with them.

#### Dissemination and exploitation

The evaluation found that students were highly motivated to promote the programme, and the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association was actively involved in facilitating this promotion. Yet this Association did not include Action 2 beneficiaries. Dissemination and exploitation was widespread, but there was still room for improvement in dissemination and good practice sharing among the beneficiaries.

### *Conclusions concerning specific Actions of the programme*

Due to the large workload related to participation in the programme, administration of the partnerships was typically centralised in the applicant institution. This proved to be effective, but it may limit capacity development in other institutions. Fee-paying students, reducing class size, offering Erasmus Mundus courses to regular students and raising other funds were the main responses to the reduction of scholarships in renewed courses. Allowing previously-funded consortia to keep the Erasmus Mundus label was considered a good practice by policy-makers and target groups. Exchange and mutual development in capacity was strongly emphasised in Action 3 partnerships. Sustainability plans, however, are likely to be affected by the continuing economic downturn and budget cuts for academic institutions.

Having to reapply each year posed a significant threat to the sustainability of Action 2 partnerships. In relation to that, Action 2 networks looked for ways to structure their partnerships in alternative ways, by applying for research funding or expecting to move on to joint courses in the future. Cooperation in research was particularly likely to be sustainable.

## Efficiency

### *General conclusions*

#### High cost-effectiveness of the programme

The evaluation found that the programme was being implemented efficiently. First, most of the

planned outputs of the programme were likely to be achieved by 2013 with lower costs than initially anticipated. Second, outputs of the programme were being produced with analogous or even lower costs than those of scholarship schemes pursuing the same goal (particularly German Academic Exchange Service and Fulbright). Third, relevant instruments ensuring low administrative costs, such as large size consortia and partnerships or calculation of incurred costs on the basis of lump sum amounts, were in place. Fourth, a significant number of institutional beneficiaries of the programme reported that their participation in Erasmus Mundus was a financial burden. Therefore, achievement of the same results with less funding would hardly have been possible.

#### Insufficient size of category B scholarships

Although the programme was successful in increasing the involvement of European students, the introduction of scholarships for European students under Action 1 did not attract as much attention as expected. According to the results of a comparative analysis, the stipend and other scholarship benefits of category B scholarships were lower than those offered by other scholarship schemes. As a result, scholarships for European students were not competitive enough and did not encourage their active participation in the programme.

#### Programme promotion and support services

The interim evaluation found that the general division of tasks among the Executive Agency, the National Structures, the National TEMPUS Offices and the EU Delegations involved in the programme promotion and provision of support services was clear. The beneficiaries were satisfied with the services of the Executive Agency, while information and guidance provided by the National Structures, the national TEMPUS offices or the EU Delegations was positively perceived. Although the mechanisms for project selection were efficient, low success rates for some Actions and strands reduced the trust of the target groups in the transparency of project selection.

#### Project monitoring and evaluation

The programme beneficiaries assessed the preparation and implementation of Erasmus Mundus projects positively, except for the extensive administrative workload. Although the number of activity reports was reduced during the programme implementation, further simplifications were possible, including replacement of the annual reapplication approach. Although project monitoring and evaluation was primarily quantitative, one could exploit the potential of the Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment project to better assess the quality of joint programmes with the involvement of field experts.

#### Monitoring of individual beneficiaries

The monitoring of individual beneficiary selection and participation was carried out to some extent, with the universities collecting information about applicants, drop-outs and beneficiaries. However, it could be standardised and more aligned with graduate tracking. Comparable information on candidate nationality, gender, ranking in pre-selection and selection, mobility track and duration, and results achieved (if applicable) would be useful for gathering data about the programme in the future.

#### *Conclusions concerning Action 1, 2 and 3 of the programme*

Action 1 projects were characterised by high academic excellence and elaborate joint governance arrangements in comparison to Action 2 projects. The introduction of joint doctorates was the most successful novelty in phase 2. Although the introduction of scholarships for European students increased their participation in the programme, category B scholarships remained insufficiently competitive. Allowing third-country institutions to become full partners in joint courses was successful, but incomplete. Mobility of third-country nationals faced some constraints, especially with regard to visas and residence permits.

Action 2 was geographically targeted and less competitive and was characterised by a more equal representation of third-country partner institutions. Also, the involvement of non-educational institutions was more widespread under Action 2 projects compared to Action 1 projects. The integration of Action 2 was rather successful and considered important, but it remains incomplete. For instance, Action 2 was not promoted in the same way as the other actions, and its graduates did not join Erasmus Mundus alumni networks.

## Recommendations

The Final Report offers general and Action-specific recommendations for the European Commission regarding the continued implementation of the current programme in the 2012-2013 period. In addition, on the basis of the evaluation results, a number of recommendations concerning the preparation of the future Programme for the post-2013 period were included in the Report. All recommendations are further structured according to the evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and efficiency).

### General recommendations

#### *Relevance*

1. Mobility, partnerships and policy dialogue should be further promoted by the next generation of the programme. The future generation of the programme should further aim at balancing academic excellence, development of capacity in higher education institutions and geographical distribution of funded activities and beneficiaries.
2. Strengthen the links between external EU programmes and between external and internal EU programmes in the field of higher education. Integration of Erasmus Mundus, Lifelong Learning Programme, Tempus, Alfa and Edulink into a single programme should create critical mass and reduce the overlaps between the current programmes.
3. There is a need to appoint a single committee (including representatives from various Directorates-General and Services of the European Commission, especially Education and Culture; Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid; Enlargement and European External Action Service) for steering the post-2013 programme. Practical steps in this respect could include:
  - provision of incentives for the Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association to embrace Action 2 individual beneficiaries;
  - provision of support for platforms aimed at dissemination and mainstreaming of good practices developed by Action 1 and 2 projects;
  - organisation of joint information and dissemination events.

#### *Effectiveness*

4. In the light of employability-related goals of the programme, its activities could be more open to international mobility and cooperation in the field of vocational education and training provided by higher education institutions to highly qualified professionals. As employability of skilled graduates remains a concern, cooperation between the relevant actors in education/training and the labour market (e.g. enterprises, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and associations) should be strengthened, including through allowing apprenticeships to be among eligible activities of the projects at all levels of higher education. Representatives of the labour market should also be encouraged to be more actively involved in the curriculum development of the joint programmes.
5. Retain and strengthen the balance between excellence, development of capacity and geographical representation. Incentives should be provided to include a wider range of institutions from candidate and potential candidate countries and strengthen their capacities, in order to ensure balanced mobility. Further promoting outreach activities and widening the participation base of the programme is crucial.
6. Good practices for involving employers should be mainstreamed, and outreach activities in candidate and potential candidate countries are needed. In countries where labour markets are unable to absorb highly-skilled graduates it is recommended to reconsider the brain drain mitigation strategy and promote ways in which graduates can contribute to the development of their countries – not necessarily by returning to their labour market, which may be unable to absorb their skills.
7. Since the main barriers are related to administrative issues, it is important that the Commission continues facilitating the visa process for the beneficiaries of European mobility programmes – possibly in the form of Directives. In the current programme, contacts between the beneficiaries, the National Structures and relevant authorities should be

facilitated – some beneficiaries found the National Structures not well aware of what to do in difficult situations.

8. Good practices should be better mapped and mainstreamed to applicants and beneficiaries. There is a need for more cooperation with the National Structures and the EU Delegations in order to identify nationally or regionally specific vulnerable groups in order to address the most pressing issues in access to higher education. Special calls for infrastructural adaptation and innovative projects for the inclusion of persons with disabilities should be considered in the future programme.

#### *Sustainability*

9. EU funding to higher education institutions should be streamlined. While there is a risk of dependence on EU funding, it is also true that application for funding from other instruments requires deepening and expanding academic networks and thus helps excellent courses and partnerships to mature.
10. It is important to share good practices to help partners strengthen their recognition mechanisms and save resources spent on their development. Further integration of the programme would contribute to aligning mobility, capacity building and research.

#### *Efficiency*

11. Reconsider the balance among various actions and their strands in the post-2013 programme in order to increase success rates.
12. Improve the monitoring and evaluation of future projects by better balancing quantitative and qualitative assessment and by involving field experts in the monitoring visits and project evaluation. Continue the Erasmus Mundus Quality Assessment Project and better link it to project monitoring. In order to simplify the programme implementation, modify the annual re-application approach in the next implementation period by managing re-application for the joint programmes and partnerships on a multi-annual basis (with the involvement of field experts in project monitoring) or by applying the principles of the Erasmus programme for the management of mobility flows (bilateral exchanges between European and non-European universities).
13. Streamline programme promotion across different Actions under the post-2013 programme, while maintaining the current institutional framework that involves the Executive Agency, the National Structures and the EU Delegations. Strengthen the capacities of the National Structures and the EU Delegations to promote the programme and support applicants and beneficiaries through the allocation of additional resources, the provision of training and other capacity-building actions and the exchange of good practices. Also, the cooperation between the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency and the National Structures could be improved through the exchange of information about the results of project selection. Better exploit the existing academic, student and alumni networks in the programme promotion and strengthen promotional activities targeted at employers.

### **Recommendations concerning Actions 1 and 3 of the Erasmus Mundus II programme**

#### *Relevance*

1. Since the inclusion of doctoral education within Erasmus Mundus II was one of the most successful innovations, it is important to retain doctoral and post-doctoral cooperation within the post-2013 programmes in the area of higher education and research.
2. Overlaps in funding doctoral training and mobilities of academic staff should be reconsidered when designing the new programmes of Erasmus for All and Horizon 2020.

#### *Effectiveness*

3. Disseminate good practices in liaising with relevant authorities regarding degree recognition. Involve relevant stakeholders and authorities in transferring good practices, including the help of Action 3, strengthen the Bologna process.

4. Good practices should be mapped, catalogued and mainstreamed including short-term mobility recognition (e.g. credits for intensive courses, summer and winter schools).
5. It is important to collect and generalise the results of Action 3 projects, provide them in a user-friendly database and streamline their dissemination and exploitation to authorities and institutional beneficiaries of other actions.
6. There is a need for practical experience to be more embedded. Student placements under the programme should be strengthened and good practices mainstreamed. There is a need for more research on the regional imbalances in graduate employability.
7. As tuition fee differences continue to be a burden, two types of action could be taken: either the consortia should reconsider their tuition fee policies, make exceptions for Erasmus Mundus students, or different rules, more in line with tuition fee trends in Europe, should apply at the programme level.

#### *Sustainability*

8. During the economic downturn, which strongly affected academic institutions and their potential donors, it is important to sustain the EU commitment to support excellent research and education. On the other hand, sustainability plans should be more strongly emphasised and take not only the form of tapping other resources, but also optimising costs and developing innovative cost-saving solutions (such as online modules).
9. Compiling catalogues of the best practices and most important Action 3 results would help other beneficiaries to save resources spent on developing brain drain mitigation, special needs education and other strategies.
10. Action 3 results should be more directly linked to the issues faced by the beneficiaries of other actions, and findings of Action 3 surveys and consultations, including tools and handbooks, should be disseminated already at the application stage.

#### *Efficiency*

11. The size of the EU grant should be increased. In particular, the increment should result in a higher monthly allowance for living costs and larger fixed contribution to travel, installation and other types of costs when Erasmus Mundus masters courses include a mobility to a third-country partner/associated member (to encourage more balanced mobility).
12. Funding could be redistributed between Erasmus Mundus masters courses and Erasmus Mundus joint doctorates. The gap between Category A and Category B grants should be narrowed down to increase the participation of European students.

### **Recommendations concerning Action 2 of the Erasmus Mundus II programme**

#### *Effectiveness*

1. Disseminate good practices and ensure institutional support for beneficiaries in liaising with relevant authorities regarding qualification and degree recognition.
2. Promote the transfer of good practice to Action 2 beneficiaries – among other ways, by exploiting Action 3 results and encouraging exchange of information between the National Structures and Action 2 beneficiaries. A gradual move towards joint degrees (where appropriate) and full recognition of study periods abroad (so that students do not have to repeat a year) should be encouraged, while retaining the regional lots and equal access policies in order to ensure balance and commitment to shared higher education development with a wide range of third countries.

#### *Sustainability*

3. Capacity building should be further promoted and improved in the partnerships in order to enable partner institutions to gain capacities to apply for funding and implement partnerships when Erasmus Mundus funding phases out. Beneficiaries could receive assistance in optimising the costs of running their courses and partnerships after EU funding

phases out, if it is not possible to retain the same intensity of the course/partnership with other sources of funding.

4. Action 2 students and scholars should be given access to the Erasmus Mundus Association, in order to give them proper status as Erasmus Mundus participants and open up greatly enhanced networking possibilities for both Action 1 and Action 2 participants.
5. Removing the need to reapply annually would enhance the sustainability of Action 2, allowing European mobility in all regional lots and further integration of the programme.

#### *Efficiency*

6. Action 2 should be further integrated into the programme as a vital element for promoting excellence, developmental capacity and joint research activity with higher education institutions outside the EU.