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Improving participation of Irish students in Erasmus:

barriers and benefits, potential and policy

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Abstract

This study investigates financial and other possible barriers that might hinder Irish student participation in Erasmus, and to draw conclusions about ways to improve participation in Ireland.

The research is designed to complement a European Parliament study of seven EU countries (Vossensteyn *et al.*, 2010) and examines the benefits and barriers to Erasmus participation from an Irish perspective. Using a predominantly quantitative internet-based research approach, the study gathers data from 1,055 students, providing a significant insight into the Irish experience of Erasmus.

For Irish students, the most valued benefit to participation in the Erasmus programme is the possibility of enhancing future employment opportunities. The greatest barrier to participation for Irish students is represented by personal and family relationships, and not finance which is most important across the countries surveyed in the (Vossensteyn *et al.*, 2010) study. Issues such as lack of information about the Erasmus programme, uncertainty about the education system abroad, and difficulties with administration are also cited as barriers.

The findings of the research make it clear that the full potential of Erasmus is not being met, and offer a meaningful contribution to the discourse on Erasmus mobility, and particularly to the argument that development of national policy in this area is highly desirable.

1. Introduction

Since the foundation of the European Union (EU) in 1957, its legislative competence in the area of education policy has been very limited (Alexiadou, 2007). Indeed, Pépin (2007) claims that for the first 20 years, education remained a 'taboo' subject within the EU. However, at the heart of the EU project was the desire to facilitate EU citizens in having direct experiences of the social and economic aspects of life in other Member States. This was in order to create 'the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level' (CEC, 1989: 1-2), and mobility through education was seen as an important vehicle for its realisation. One way in which the vision was made manifest was in the establishment of education policy in relation to student mobility: the ERASMUS programme (European Regional Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students).

Launched in 1987, the Erasmus programme marked a significant education policy development; indeed, it has been referred to as the Union's most successful social policy to date (Papatsiba, 2006; Recchi, 2006), having funded the participation of approximately three million students to carry out a period of study in another European country. The benefits of such participation are well documented (Bracht, 2006; Teichler & Janson, 2007; Keogh & Russel-Roberts, 2008); yet, it has also been

strongly argued that the programme is not being availed of to the fullest of its potential (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Brooks & Waters, 2011).

In order to address the situation, a major study was commissioned by the European Parliament (Vossensteyn, Beerkens, Cremonini, Huisman, Souto-Otero, Bresancon, Focken, Leurs, McCoshan, & Mozuraityte, 2010). This study, entitled 'Improving the participation in the Erasmus programme' was carried out in relation to seven EU countries; the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Its purpose was to investigate 'financial and other possible barriers that might hinder student participation in Erasmus, and to draw conclusions about ways to improve participation' (p. 9).

1.i. Aim of the research

This research project aims to complement the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study on participation in the ERASMUS programme, by examining the situation in Ireland in relation to the same. Its purpose therefore echoes that of the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study, and is articulated using the same language:

> *To investigate financial and other possible barriers that might hinder Irish student participation in Erasmus, and to draw conclusions about ways to improve participation in Ireland.*

In order to meet this aim, the following main questions - which have been adapted from those of the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study - are addressed in this research:

1. What is the current situation regarding Erasmus mobility and participation with a focus on Ireland?

2. What are the perceived benefits of participation in the Erasmus programme?

3. What are the perceived financial and other barriers to students' participation in the Erasmus programme?

4. Does Ireland need a national mobility policy to support participation in the Erasmus programme?

The research seeks to contribute to the improvement of participation by Irish students in the Erasmus programme, to examine perceived benefits and barriers, to evaluate the extent to which the full potential of the programme is being experienced in Ireland, and to consider the implications of the findings in relation to policy.

2. Literature review

2. i. Introduction

The literature available on international student mobility is almost exclusively focused on student mobility, and there is a distinct lack of information available on the perspective of those students who does not avail of mobility opportunities. Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, Tait, McKenzie & Loorparg (2009) refer to several international studies of students who participated in study-abroad programmes including: Souto-Otero & McCoshan, 2006; the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST); and the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, 2004. With regard to Ireland, the only data available is that which forms part of EU reports and, as far as can be ascertained, there is no published literature which pertains exclusively to Ireland.

The section is structured under the following themes:

- Erasmus mobility and participation in Ireland
- Perceived benefits of participation in the Erasmus programme
- Perceived barriers to participation in the Erasmus programme
- National mobility policy.

2.ii. Situational analysis: Erasmus mobility and participation in Ireland

Irish higher education (HE) institutions have been involved in the Erasmus programme since its inception in 1987. The programme is administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the statutory planning and policy development body for HE and research in Ireland. Twenty seven state institutions operate the programme: the fourteen Institutes of Technology, the National College of Art and Design, the six teacher training colleges and seven universities. (See appendix 1).

Within the Irish HE institutions there has traditionally been an imbalance in the number of students who come to Ireland on inward Erasmus academic mobility placement when compared to the number of students who avail of outward mobility. The statistics in Figure 2 indicate that, on average, Ireland receives more than twice the number of students it sends abroad on Erasmus each year; this is not in keeping with the principle of reciprocity on which the programme is based.

	OUT	IN
2000-2001	1648	3166
2001-2002	1707	3232
2002-2003	1627	3473
2003-2004	1705	3584
2004-2005	1572	3649

2005-2006	1567	3871
2006-2007	1524	4012
2007-2008	1514	3877
2008-2009	1421	4051
2009-2010	1600	3958
2010-2011	1858	4103
2011-2012	1963	4275
Total	**19706**	**45261**

Table 1: Total number of Erasmus students on academic placement in and out of Ireland 2000-2012

Source: European Commission, 2013

Despite this imbalance in inward and outward Erasmus mobility, there appears to be little political will in Ireland to address the matter. This lack of priority is particularly evidenced in the Irish government's first strategy in the area of international education launched in 2010 entitled, 'Investing in Global Relationships: Ireland's International Education Strategy 2010 - 2015'. An eighty page document, the strategy focuses on the recruitment of full-fee paying non-EU students, devoting just one and a half pages to outward mobility. There is an acknowledgement that 'outward mobility is a key component of internationalisation' and some guidelines are put forward for increasing mobility 'to meet the Bologna target that at least 20% of those graduating in 2020 should have had a study or training period abroad' (Report of the High-Level Group on International Education to the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, 2010: 62). Nonetheless, despite the positive rhetoric, there has been no attempt to date to develop these ideas and no effort has been made to formulate a national policy to support outward mobility for students in Irish HE.

2. iii. Perceived benefits of participation in the Erasmus programme

Student mobility is a complex matter and understanding student choice when deciding whether or not to study abroad has many variables. Papatsiba (2005) has highlighted the importance of the professional value of Erasmus. This theme has recurred in several other interesting studies, such as those that have explained the students decision making process in relation to Bourdieu's theory of 'Cultural capital' (1986). Brooks & Waters (2011) argue 'that the accrual of 'capital' may be a significant driver of mobility' (p. 83). Such capital, represented by formal academic qualifications, in this case obtained abroad, and known as 'institutional cultural capital', is seen as a clear link to a successful career (Brooks *et al.*, 2011: 61). Brooks *et al.,* (2012) further claim that 'employers viewed any graduate with overseas experience as more employable' (p. 284), a theme further echoed by Relyea, Cocchiara & Studdard (2008); Wiers-Jenssen (2011). Murphy-Lejeune concurs, arguing that mobile European students seek a 'qualitative investment in their futures' (2002: 100). Improved career and

employment opportunities are also cited by others as important motivating factors in student choice to study abroad (Findlay, King, Stam, & Ruiz-Gelices, 2006; Messer & Wolter, 2007; Brooks & Waters, 2009 & 2012; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011).

Further benefits to students who spend time on Erasmus are identified by Janson, Schomburg & Teichler (2009) in Figure 1, which provides an insight into how students develop in relation to transferable skills such as academic performance, language skills and intercultural competence. In all areas the former Erasmus students are deemed to have significantly higher levels of competence than their fellow students who did not spend a period of study abroad indicating the clear 'value added' of the Erasmus placement.
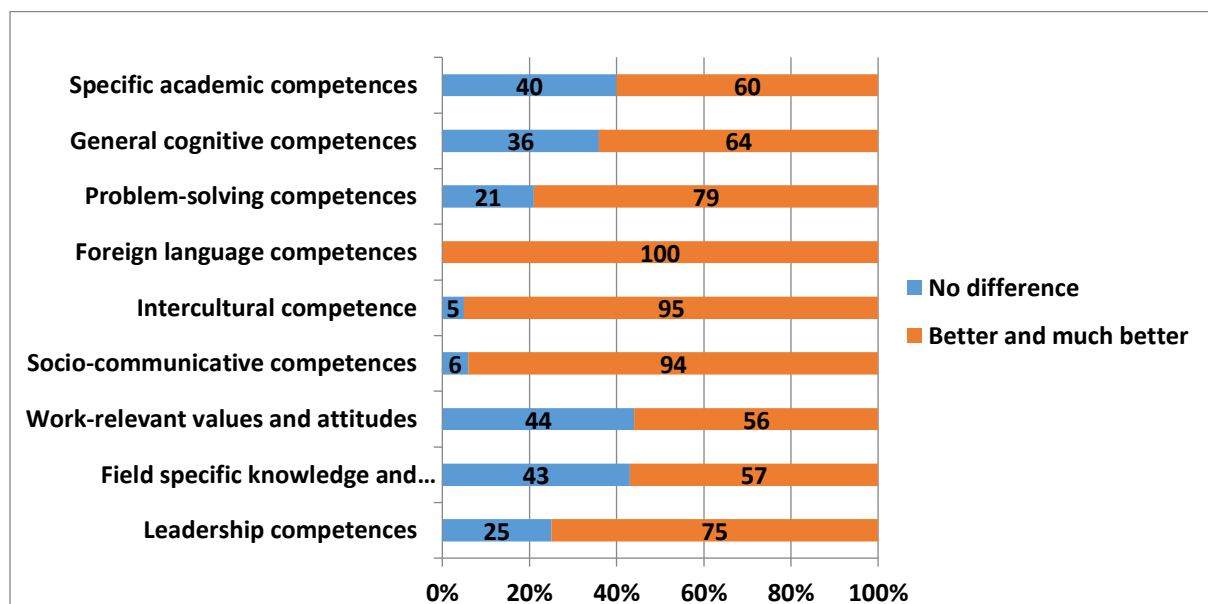
Figure 1: Competences of former Erasmus students upon graduation as compared to those of non-mobile students in the view of Erasmus experts

Source: University of Kassel, 2005 in 'The professional value of Erasmus mobility', Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler (2009: 36)

Janson *et al*'s (2009) findings are corroborated in the broader literature. Firstly, there is widespread agreement that students who have spent time on an Erasmus academic placement have improved language skills (Meara, 1994; Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Souto-Otero, 2008; Fombona, Rodríguez & Sevillano, 2013). Teichler & Janson report that 'former Erasmus students felt 3 times as strong in foreign language proficiency as did formerly non-mobile students' (2007: 490). Souto-Otero (2008) reports that 'the command of languages in which students had some level of proficiency increased substantially during the Erasmus period' (p.143). He claims that 'about 25% more students were fluent in their second language at the end of their Erasmus period than at the start' (*ibid.*)

In addition to linguistic mastery, research shows that Erasmus students are more likely to achieve enhanced degree results and improved academic performance than non-mobile students (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Deakin, 2012). Findlay *et al., (ibid)* claim that 'Erasmus students were more likely to obtain first-class degrees (12%) or 'good degrees' (73%) than non-Erasmus graduates (10% and 61% respectively) (p. 301). A similar profile of degree results is presented in the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) report, which claims that 75% of students who have spent an Erasmus period abroad obtain a first or an upper second-class degree compared to 60% of other final year students (4: 2009).

Further evidence of enhanced academic performance is proffered in a European Commission White Paper on the Learning Society which claims that mobility 'broadens the individual's horizon, stimulates intellectual agility and raises the general level of learning (European Commission, 1995: 34). In addition, Papatsiba (2005), Stronkhorst (2005) and Souto-Otero, (2008) all report on the opportunities for personal development and independence to be gained from participation in the Erasmus programme. Souto-Otero in particular describes the learning as more related to citizenship issues than those of the labour market. He contends that the 'period has a profound impact on students values towards learning and towards other people' (p.149). Over 92% of participating students, he claims, reported that they 'had changed their understanding of people from another cultural or ethnic background' (p. 142).

2. iv. Perceived barriers to participation in the Erasmus programme

Whilst there are many arguments that support participating in the Erasmus programme as worthwhile, uptake of mobility opportunities nonetheless remains low. On average, fewer than 4% of eligible students take part each year in the EU as a whole, and this rate falls to less than 2% in Ireland. The target of 20% mobility by 2020, as set out in the EU's 2012 Bucharest Communiqué is therefore far from being realised.

In order then to identify reasons why students are reluctant to participate in the Erasmus programme, the survey of Erasmus and non-Erasmus students by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) listed over 20 potential individual barriers to participation (Figure 2).

Uncertainty about the benefits of the Erasmus period abroad
Lack of information about Erasmus programme and how it works
Difficulties with any other administrative requirements (in home institution or abroad)
High competition to obtain an Erasmus grant
Uncertainty about the costs of the study abroad
Uncertainty about the Erasmus grant level
Erasmus grant levels are low
Lack of other financial resources needed to study abroad (e.g. because I needed to leave a job, difference in costs between city where I was living and abroad, need to take-up accommodation outside parental home, etc.)
I could not select a higher education institution of my choosing to study abroad (only one with which my higher education had an Erasmus agreement)
Difficulties to find appropriate institution and/or study programme abroad Uncertainty about education quality abroad
Uncertainty about education system abroad (e.g. examinations)
The study period abroad was too long
The study period abroad was too short
Expected difficulties with the recognition of credits in my home institution
Lack of integration/continuity between study subjects at home and abroad
Incompatibility of academic calendar year between my home country of study and abroad
Insufficient knowledge of the language of tuition abroad (in your country of destination)
Lack of study programmes in English in hosting institution (abroad)
Plan to study for a full qualification abroad in the future anyway
Lack of support to find accommodation or in other student services abroad
Family reasons or personal relationships
Work responsibilities in my home country of study

Figure 2: Potential barriers to participation in Erasmus (Erasmus and non-Erasmus students)

Source: Improving the participation in the Erasmus programme, European Parliament, 2010.

Based on this list of potential barriers, Souto-Otero *et al.*, (2013: 72) identify five broad types of barriers to Erasmus participation which vary to a greater or lesser extent depending on the students' country of origin. These factors, illustrated in Figure 3 are:

1. Financial barriers
2. Barriers related to higher education system compatibility

3. Personal background
4. Social background
5. Lack of awareness.
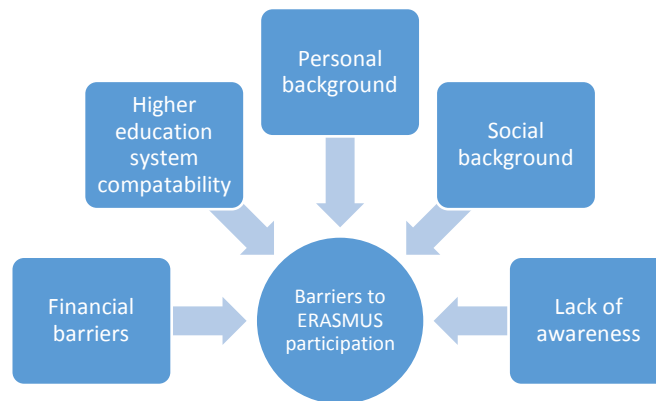
Figure 3: Barriers to Erasmus participation

Of all of these barriers, the literature highlights lack of finance as the main obstacle to participation in the Erasmus programme (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Souto-Otero & McCoshan, 2006; Souto-Otero, 2008; Doyle *et al.*, 2010; EURYDICE, 2010:41; Deacon, 2011, Ferencz & Wächter, 2012). This is further corroborated by Souto-Otero (2008) who claims that 'over half of the Erasmus students who participated in the programme in 2004/2005 knew other students who had been deterred from participating in the programme mainly due to financial reasons' (p. 150).

Other barriers include higher education system compatibility which refers to programme structures, and to whether a placement abroad can be integrated into a programme of study in which the student is engaged at home. Factors such as credit recognition and an institution's academic calendar are also crucial to the smooth running of the exchange process (Van Damme, 2001; Teichler, 2003; Ferencz & Wächter, 2012).

Aspects of a student's personal background such as inability to speak a foreign language can limit a student's options of host institution and so represent a further barrier to mobility (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Rodríguez González, Bustillo Mesanza, & Mariel*,* 2010; Deacon, 2011) According to Teichler (1996) 'British and Irish students face more than average language problems' when on Erasmus placement (p. 164). Furthermore, a student's social background such as, family circumstances and relationships can also impact on their flexibility to study abroad (Souto-Otero *et al.,* 2013). Deacon (2011) concurs stating that many students show 'an unwillingness or inability to leave family, friends and partners' (p. 12).

Finally, Varbanova (2008) contends that 'there is a lack of awareness of the advantages of having a mobility experience' as 'promoters of mobility lack both the

knowledge and incentives to do so' (p. 14). Fielden, Middlehurst and Woodfield (2007) also claim that the benefits of studying abroad were not being adequately portrayed to students. Moreover, Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) report that 53% of respondents to their survey indicated that 'more information would have compelled them to participate' (p. 91).

2. v. Mobility policy in Europe

From an EU policy perspective, Papatsiba (2006: 99) argues that there are two fundamental justifications for European Commission support of the Erasmus programme:

1. An economic and professional rationale of student mobility. It is seen as a means to promote the European labour market. It would predispose individuals to cross borders more easily during their professional lives.

2. A civic rationale of student mobility in the light of creating European citizens. Student mobility would forge European consciousness and would be a means to real international understanding.

King suggests that the programme is 'a catalyst for the formation of a European identity necessary for the legitimation of European institutions and for the overall project of European integration' (2003: 172-173). Maiworm also sees 'Erasmus as going beyond a mere educational programme by producing a pool of graduates with experience of regional cooperation thus strengthening the concept integration and of a 'People's Europe' (2001: 459).

Notwithstanding these strong justifications for support of the Erasmus programme, policy formation in education has always been a particularly sensitive area with national governments historically jealous of their monopoly policy and any perception that young citizens were to be steered in a pro-European direction being controversial (Corbett, 2005 in Wilson 2011: 1117). Any attempts therefore to formulate policy at a European level can be an arduous task.

Kingdon (2002: ch.6) expresses this well, explaining that 'objectives often emerge from a rather chaotic environment' which he calls 'the policy primordial soup', an echo of Alexander Oparin's (1924) theory that the origin of life on Earth came about in a pond due to a combination of chemical reactions. Kingdon (2002) contends that, in relation to policy, this 'soup' is made up of an amalgam of ideas each which requires the support of a coalition to champion one of those ideas. In this context, developing and agreeing new policy is a slow process. Souto-Otero, Fleckenstein & Dacombe (2008) describe the EU as advancing 'slowly and persistently' in its acquisition of competences in this area (p. 232). Dale (2009) agrees, adding that these advances have created an emerging space for European education policy.

The emerging space for policy development at a European level has, according to Corbett (2003), enabled the EC to 'devise a distinctive cooperation policy – unlike anything on the international scene' (p. 325). Ertl (2003) contends that EU Community Action programmes such as Erasmus are the main way in which the EU can influence national policy. Papatsiba (2006) in turn claims that the Erasmus programme has laid the foundations for the 'Bologna process.' This process has brought together 47 European countries with the aim of establishing a common bachelor/masters /doctorate system, greater focus on quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications and periods of study abroad (European Commission, 2011), an initiative that has laid 'the foundation of a system of higher education institutions at a European level' (2006: 93).

These recent advances in cooperation are having an impact, impacting at an institutional, national and international level that has implications for policy.

At an institutional level, there appears to be limited interest in supporting the EU to advance policy formation. Findlay *et al.*, (2006), reporting on a survey of British universities, claims that 'only a third of the 80 HEIs responding to the questionnaire had a specific strategic plan for student mobility and even fewer had specific numerical targets for mobility' (p. 311). De Wit (2012) and Papatsiba (2006) report that academic staff are losing interest in organising student mobility as it is time consuming and not well rewarded. One of the challenges, therefore, is how to bring about the attitudinal shift in relation to policy required in order to make student mobility a priority.

At a national level, in many countries, there appears to be no urgency to prioritise the formulation of policy in the area of student mobility (Rodríguez González *et al.*, 2006). To date, the internationalisation of HE in both Ireland and the UK has focused almost exclusively on the recruitment of high yield, fee paying non-EU students (Jones & Brown, 2007; Brooks & Waters, 2011, Brooks, Waters & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). Furthermore, the EC EURYDICE report (2010) mentions that 'Ireland has no outbound mobility targets but has set numerical targets for incoming mobility' (p. 42).

The importance of making mobility a national policy priority has already been identified by the governments of some countries. According to Brooks *et al.*, (2012) 'the Austrian government has set a target for 50% of graduates to have had a 'mobility experience' relevant to their studies by 2020, while Finland has set the more modest target of outgoing student mobility in its universities to have reached 6% by 2015' (p. 283). Beyond Europe, there is also a growing awareness of the value of study abroad, for example in the US (the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program), in Brazil (Ciência sem Fronteiras programme) and in Chile (Becas Chile) all offer students the possibility of a nationally funded study abroad experience as part of their undergraduate programme.

Despite advances in other countries, Europe continues to lead the way in the area of student mobility. In July 2013, the EC announced that over 3 million students had

participated in the Erasmus programme since its inception, clearly demonstrating that the EU is indisputably the world leader in promoting student mobility (European Commission, 2013). Anxious to maintain this position and in order to offer the best opportunities possible to European students, the most recent summit of EHEA states held in Bucharest in April 2012 identified four main themes for a revised 'Bologna process' in the period to 2015. Of particular note, is the change in emphasis from a 'Europeanising' focus to a new call for a global perspective to prevail for future developments. Indeed, one of the four key themes of the Bucharest communiqué relates to mobility in a global context, with a call for member states to review policy relating to, 'Global academic mobility: Incentives and barriers, balances and imbalances' (EHEA, 2012: 1).

A focus on developing global relationships will also be a central tenet of the revised Erasmus programme, announced in June 2013 and to be known as 'Erasmus +'. The proposal, if accepted by the European Parliament and Council, will run from 2014-2020 and reflect the shifting world order whereby European students and staff will be able to study, train or teach anywhere in the world. The project has a proposed budget of €16 billion and, if approved, will offer mobility opportunities to more than 4 million people (European Commission, 2013). This revolutionary extension of the Erasmus programme will, it is envisaged, significantly increase interest in mobility and open new doors to enable the people of Europe to build lasting global relationships.

2.vi. Conclusion

Whilst it may be argued that change in relation to policy development is slow, there is reason to believe that, from the chaotic context - or primordial soup - in which the Erasmus programme has evolved, mobility policy may slowly, but nonetheless surely, evolve.

Upon careful consideration of the literature explored above, and with reference to the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study, the following research question is articulated:

> *What are the financial and other possible barriers that might hinder Irish student participation in the Erasmus programme, and in what ways might Irish education policy be developed in order to improve participation in Erasmus in the Irish context?*

3. Research methods

Traditionally, there have been two major approaches to research: the quantitative approach, defined by Aliaga and Gunderson as 'explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods' (1999). And on the other hand, the qualitative approach, defined as one which 'usually emphasizes words rather that quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2008: 366). In line with the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study, where the focus is almost

exclusively on the collection of numerical data, this research is also quantitative in its approach.

The research design is also based on that used in the study by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010). The design framework of the study sought to achieve an alignment between the various aspects of the research process including the research question and purposes as well as theoretical considerations, methods and sampling strategy (Robson, 2002).

The method chosen in the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study was that of internet-based survey, a method that proposed to draw the benefits both from usage of a survey and from that gained from using an internet-based approach.

Robson (2002) lists 3 advantages of using surveys:

- 'They provide a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives.
- They may be adapted to collect generalizable information from almost any human population.
- High amounts of data standardization,' (p. 233/4).

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) outline the advantages of using an internet-based survey approach. When compared to postal surveys they claim that the costs are significantly lower, the time needed to distribute, gather and process the data is much reduced and there are fewer missing entries (p. 280). Bryman (2008) likewise finds that 'online questionnaires are completed with fewer unanswered questions than postal questionnaires' (p. 653). He also notes that in the case of open questions, 'they tend to be more likely to be answered online and to result in more detailed replies' (*ibid.*). Dillman (2000) in Neuman (2006: 175) notes that this method offers 'a potential for overcoming international boundaries as significant barriers' when compared to paper based surveys.

The Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study consists of two surveys: the first was sent to students who participated in the Erasmus programme in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 (which from now on will be referred to as the *Erasmus student survey*), and the second was sent to students who did not participate in the programme (from now on referred to as *Non-Erasmus survey*).

For the purposes of this Irish-focused project, the same two surveys were adopted. No modifications were made to the original surveys so that direct comparisons could be made between the findings in the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study and those resulting from this current study. The *Erasmus student survey* was sent to Irish students who participated in the Erasmus programme in 2011/2012 or 2012/2013 and the *Non-Erasmus survey* and was sent to all students registered in Irish HE institutions in 2012/2013 in order to reach the widest possible range of respondents.

The surveys were uploaded to Survey Monkey, an internet survey platform, and sent by e-mail to the Director of International Affairs in all of the twenty-six HE institutions in the Republic of Ireland that offer the Erasmus programme. They were sent in mid-April 2013, the same month in which the surveys were sent in the original study. The surveys were accessible on-line for a seven week period which was also the case in the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study.

All institutions agreed to circulate the *Erasmus student survey* to those who had been on Erasmus in 2011/2012 or 2012/2013. A reminder phone call was used as a follow-up method when required. With regard to the *Non-Erasmus survey,* eight institutions agreed to circulate it on their virtual learning platforms such as Moodle. For various reasons, the other institutions did not do so. Interestingly, one institution explained that it was against policy to circulate such surveys on Moodle.

The survey of Irish students yielded a total of 1,055 responses, of which 660 relate to the *Erasmus student survey* and 395 to the *Non-Erasmus survey*. This provides a very broad representative sample which proportionally compares very favourably to the response rate received in the seven countries in the study by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010).

4. Research findings

This section will present the findings of the surveys: initially the main characteristics of the sample will be adumbrated; after which the findings of the *Erasmus student survey* and the *Non-Erasmus survey* will be presented*.*

4. i. Introduction

The findings of the *Erasmus student survey* indicate that the most popular destinations for Irish students are France, Spain and Germany, which are the chosen destinations for over two thirds of the students surveyed. (Table 2).

Top three destinations for Irish students on Erasmus programme 2011-2013	
France	30.2%
Spain	21.1%
Germany	14.8%

Table 2: Top three destinations for Irish students on Erasmus programme 2011-2013

The most popular academic areas of study for Irish students are the same as those for students in the research by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) with the largest group of

respondents from Business studies, followed by Humanities and Languages. A total of 88% of respondents to the *Erasmus student survey* were age 22 or less.

4. ii. Reasons for participation in the Erasmus programme

The main reasons for participating in the Erasmus programme are outlined in Table 3. The results presented for Ireland are compared to the European average taken from the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study.

	Ireland	EU average
Opportunity to receive ERASMUS grant	**12**	43
Opportunity to receive other financial support to study abroad	**8**	28
Guidance provided regarding the benefits of the ERASMUS programme was compelling	**37**	39
Available support in finding accommodation	**16**	21
Available support to meet ERASMUS administrative requirements	**18**	24
Quality of host institution	**42**	44
Opportunity to choose the institution abroad	**41**	51
Good alignment between the curriculum at home institution	**25**	27
The length of study period abroad was appropriate	**52**	51
Possibility to choose a study programme in a foreign language	**57**	65
Opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods	**68**	72
Benefits for my future employment opportunities in my home country	**83**	78
Benefits for my future employment abroad	**85**	75
Opportunity to learn/improve a foreign language	**76**	88
Opportunity to live abroad	**92**	93
Opportunity to meet new people	**89**	90
Opportunity to develop soft skills i.e. adaptability, demonstrating initiative	83	**86**
Expected a 'relaxed' academic year abroad	36	**30**

Table 3: Reasons for undertaking the Erasmus study period abroad (% of students considering the factor important or very important)

Table 3 shows the percentage of students who reported that the incentives to participate in the programme were either important or very important (See table with results for all countries surveyed, Table 6 in Appendix). Further analysis of the survey reveals that Irish students place particular value on the benefit that participation in Erasmus will bring to their future employment prospects both at home and abroad. Other benefits which are highly valued by Irish students include the opportunity to live abroad, meet new people and develop 'soft skills'. In addition, the study reveals that while students generally value the opportunity to learn or improve a foreign language while on Erasmus placement, Irish students value this opportunity considerably less than the European average. Some 76% of Irish respondents say that improving language skills is, important or very important, compared to an overall average of 88%.

Interestingly, the opportunity to receive the Erasmus grant is seen as important or very important by only 12% of Irish participants in the programme compared to a European average of 43%. In addition, just 43% of Irish participants thought that the Erasmus grant was too low compared to a European average of 56%. Of those who had considered participation, the percentage who agreed that the grant was too low was almost equal to the European average but for those who had not considered participation and indeed contrary to the literature, finance is not the key concern as just 29% of respondents rated it as important or very important.

4. iii. Reasons for non-participation in the Erasmus programme

In contrast to the perceived benefits of Erasmus mobility, the findings represented in Table 4 or the *Non-Erasmus survey*, present an overview of the various perceived barriers to mobility. This survey represents the opinions of six different groups with regards to Erasmus participation divided as follows:

1. EU students who have participated in the Erasmus during a previous programme of study
2. Irish students who have participated in the Erasmus programme during a previous programme of study
3. EU students who have considered participation in the Erasmus programme
4. Irish students who have considered participation in the Erasmus programme
5. EU students who did not consider Erasmus participation
6. Irish students who did not consider Erasmus participation.

Barrier	Erasmus Participants EU	Erasmus Participants IE	Considered Erasmus Participation EU	Considered Erasmus Participation IE	Did Not Consider Erasmus Participation EU	Did Not Consider Erasmus Participation IE
Awareness/information						
Lack of information about the programme	16	**21**	30	**53**	27	**13**

Difficulty to find appropriate institution/program	18	**12**	26	**36**	32	**29**
Uncertainty about quality education abroad	24	**21**	25	**35**	33	**30**
Uncertainty about education system abroad	37	**39**	30	**38**	39	**38**
Personal background						
Lack language skills	19	**21**	29	**37**	42	**62**
Plan to study abroad full qualification in the future	19	**17**	10	**18**	6	**3**
Family and personal relationships	14	**22**	28	**52**	47	**62**
Work responsibilities	9	**11**	16	**33**	23	**34**
Financial barriers						
Uncertainty about Erasmus benefits	11	**13**	24	**31**	34	**34**
Erasmus grant levels too low	56	**43**	44	**43**	39	**29**
Erasmus conditions						
Difficulties administration of the programme	36	**46**	22	**28**	15	**13**
High competition Erasmus grants	19	**9**	32	**29**	23	**18**
Not possible to choose institution abroad myself	32	**17**	17	**26**	17	**12**
Erasmus period too long	3	**9**	11	**25**	15	**14**
Erasmus period too short	28	**20**	10	**8**	4	**3**
Lack of student services abroad	33	**33**	24	**25**	25	**23**
Higher education system compatibility						
Incompatibility academic calendar	22	**18**	20	**23**	18	**11**
Lack integration studies home/abroad	36	**35**	32	**32**	31	**22**
Expected difficulties credit recognition	38	**31**	38	**26**	32	**22**
Lack of study programmes in English	19	**11**	28	**28**	20	**21**

Table 4: Self-identified barriers to participation in the Erasmus programme by type of student (in percentages)

The student sample for this survey was varied and included responses from all academic areas with the highest level of engagement from students in Business Studies, Engineering and Humanities. However, the age profile of respondents to this survey is very different from that of the *Erasmus student survey*, and to that of the *non-Erasmus survey* for other countries with the exception of Sweden. Some 45% of respondents were age 27 or over. Nonetheless, it is also worth noting that 41% of responses were from students in the 18-22, or average undergraduate age category.

Having clarified how the sample for this part of the study was composed, the barriers faced by Erasmus and non-Erasmus students will now be examined. Table 4 shows the percentage of respondents in each category of students who reported a barrier as high or very high. Several notable patterns emerge and, in the main, the Irish student survey results broadly coincide with those from the other countries surveyed.

The survey reveals that the low level of Erasmus grant funding available is seen as the biggest obstacle to mobility for EU students who have either 'participated' in or 'considered participating' in the programme with 56% and 44% of respondents respectively. However, while acknowledging funding as important, the Irish students surveyed do not see it as the biggest barrier. For those Irish students who have participated in Erasmus, the biggest obstacle is seen as 'difficulties with administration of the programme' which is reported by 46% as being a challenge. Some 43% of those surveyed added that the Erasmus grant was too low and 39% claimed that they were uncertain about the education system abroad.

For those Irish students who had considered taking part in Erasmus, the biggest obstacle identified was lack of information about the programme with some 53% of respondents claiming that this had impacted negatively on their decision. Family and personal relationships were cited as the second most important barrier with 52% of students reporting that family commitments or attachments meant that they could not commit to studying abroad. When compared to the other countries surveyed, where finance was an important issue and the low level of the Erasmus grant was the number one barrier, this factor was rated as third most important by Irish students who had considered participation, and sixth most important by those who had not considered taking part in the programme. Also, in contrast to the European cohort, Irish students rated lack of language skills as a bigger barrier to mobility. This is notable amongst students who had considered participating in Erasmus, 37% of whom claimed it was an obstacle. However, this perceived barrier was particularly evident amongst those who had not considered Erasmus participation, 62% of whom reported is was a factor that would be important or very important in any decision to study abroad.

5. Discussion

'Erasmus mobility is considered as an *optional extra* which would be nice, but not necessary' Rodríguez González *et al.* (2010: 421).

The wealth of information gathered in the survey gives rise to many interesting questions, not all of which can be expanded upon in this particular study.   This discussion will focus on the four research questions presented in section 1.i of this study in relation to:

- the current situation regarding Erasmus mobility and participation in Ireland
- the perceived benefits of participation in the Erasmus programme
- the perceived financial and other barriers to students' participation in the Erasmus programme
- the potential need for a national mobility policy to support participation in the Erasmus programme.

The study highlights a renewed interest in Erasmus mobility in recent years. The number of students travelling out from Ireland on Erasmus has risen from 1,421 in 2008/2009 to 1, 963 in 2011/2012. The HEA reported in 2012 that participation in the Erasmus programme from Ireland had grown by 18% in the period 2010/2011 compared to 2009/2010 which represented the 4th highest growth rate amongst Erasmus participating countries for that period.

The study provides rich data in relation to the perceived benefits and barriers to Irish student participation in Erasmus, some of which is perhaps surprising.

With regard to the benefits of participation, one particularly interesting insight is in terms of the idea of the professional value of Erasmus (Janson *et al.,* 2009; Teichler, 2012). Whilst the literature indicates that the professional value of Erasmus is becoming less important generally across Western Europe, this survey reveals that Irish students who have participated in the Erasmus programme value the benefits for future employment more than any other nationality. Some 85% of Irish participants believe that their experience abroad will be of benefit when seeking employment overseas and 83% see it as an advantage when seeking work at home. The study by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) suggests that the trend of valuing the Erasmus experience for its professional value tends to be more apparent 'in "new" European countries and countries where participation is relatively low' (p. 52).

Three other significant perceived benefits of taking part in Erasmus that are identified in this study include: the opportunity to live abroad, the opportunity to meet new people, and the opportunity to develop 'soft skills'. Whilst the latter clearly links in with the professional value of Erasmus, the opportunity offered by Erasmus to live abroad and meet new people has an obvious social dimension, an aspect which is not explored widely in the literature, even though it is also acknowledged as of extreme

importance in the Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) study. It emerges therefore as a perceived benefit that merits further inquiry.

The perceived benefits of participation in Erasmus by Irish students are broadly similar to those in the rest of Europe (Vossensteyn *et al.* 2010). When we begin to look at the perceived barriers to participation, the results once again are broadly the same, with two remarkable differences: the role of finance and the importance of information.

The study by Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) shows that financial concerns were the most important barrier to student participation in the programme (p. 43). This is further echoed by King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Souto-Otero, 2008; Doyle *et al.*, 2010; Deacon, 2011; Souto-Otero *et al.*, 2013). It is of particular note that the study reveals that financial reasons are not seen as the main barrier to mobility by Irish students.

In contrast to the other countries surveyed, family and personal responsibilities represent the biggest obstacle to mobility from Ireland. For students who had not considered participation in Erasmus, this is the number one barrier to mobility and for those who had considered spending time on Erasmus, it is the second highest rated factor. Vossensteyn *et al.* (2010) also report that family and personal responsibilities represent a considerable obstacle constituting the second biggest barrier to participation for students across all countries surveyed (p. 44). However, this factor is only mentioned briefly in the broader literature (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Doyle *et al.*, 2009; Deacon, 2011) and so is an area for further exploration.

The lack of relevant information on the Erasmus programme is identified as a highly significant factor by all three categories of student surveyed for this research. And, some 53% of students who considered participating in Erasmus, but decided against, cited lack of information about the programme as a barrier to participation, significantly higher than the average 30% recorded for the rest of Europe (Vossensteyn *et al.,* 2010). Whether such information is available, made available or needs to be made available is not clear at this time; nonetheless, the issue of the provision of relevant information undoubtedly requires attention and would need to be addressed in the formulation of any policy at institutional or national level. The matter of making information freely available on the internet arises again, as it did in relation to the provision of the questionnaires on Moodle as outlined in Section 3.

In comparison to all other factors which impact on mobility, languages represent both a barrier and an incentive. Findlay *et al.* (2006) argue that language 'exerts a double influence as, for language students, it acts as a channel for mobility, but this channel is narrowing, given the fall-off in numbers studying foreign languages' (p. 306). They further claim that 'for non-language students, it acts as a powerful barrier to mobility' (*ibid.*). Deacon (2011) also cites 'lack of fluency in a foreign language' as a block to many students when deciding about studying abroad (p.12). The survey indeed reveals this 'double influence' whereby 76% of Irish students who participated in Erasmus see the experience as an 'opportunity to learn/improve a foreign language'

compared to a European average of 88% while 37% of Irish students who considered participation see 'lack of languages skills' as a barrier compared to just 29% as an average in Europe.

'Erasmus mobility is considered as an *optional extra* which would be nice, but not necessary' (Rodríguez González *et al.,* 2010: 421). There is evidently a continuum between the two positions that at least embraces the concept of the 'desirable optional extra' and 'the highly desirable optional extra', as illustrated below:

Figure 4: Erasmus mobility as an 'optional extra'

However, if Ireland wishes to support its students in participating in Erasmus, and if she wishes to enjoy the many positive outcomes that might emerge from such participation, it is unarguable that policy needs to be developed. 'What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories' (Ball, 1993:10), a toolbox that includes the 'ad hocery, serendipity, muddle and negotiation' rejected by Ozga (1990), but welcomed by Ball as complexity.

That there is no urgency to develop policy in the area of encouraging outward student mobility seems rather clear (Rodríguez González *et al.*, 2006); that some steps need to be taken in this direction now is also clear. This can begin in a range of ways from the more structured to the more negotiated. If a third of HE institutions have a specific strategic plan for student mobility in place (Findlay *et al.*, 2006), this is a figure that can be built upon. And if staff are losing interest in promoting Erasmus (De Wit, 2012; Papatsiba, 2006), it is timely to inject some enthusiasm into the project, potentially by way of even the humblest of policy developments, as well as by the most visionary.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The research has set out to gain further insight into the current situation in Ireland regarding Erasmus mobility and participation, looking especially at the perceived benefits and barriers associated with participation, and seeking to ascertain whether there is a need for Ireland to develop policy in this area.

It has been established that, whilst 4, 275 Erasmus students came in to Ireland in 2011/2012, only 1, 963 Irish students participated in travelling abroad on the Erasmus programme, fewer than half the numbers of in-coming students. From the considerable amount of data generated by the study that contributes to our understanding of the incentives and barriers to participation in the Erasmus programme, some salient conclusions have been reached.

The professional value of Erasmus, and the desire to live abroad and meet new people, are identified as the most powerful incentives to Irish students to participate in the programme. And in terms of barriers to participation, the research findings have debunked the myth that finance is always the most important disincentive to participation in the Erasmus programme. While an important factor for Irish students, it comes second to concerns about leaving family and friends which is the biggest concern, particularly for students who considered or not considered Erasmus participation.

Lack of information on the programme is considerably higher in Ireland than in other countries which points to a need for increased promotional efforts at a national and institutional level. This promotional work could also serve to inform students of the fact that language, seen by many Irish students as a barrier, is increasingly less of an obstacle to mobility as an ever growing number of programmes throughout Europe are being offered in English.

There are limitations to the research that need to be borne in mind when considering the findings. These include:

- The use of an almost exclusively quantitative approach to data collection that may have limited the type of information gathered
- Data collection depended on the extent to which International office exchange coordinators forwarded the survey and also on the accuracy of their distribution lists
- Preliminary Erasmus mobility statistics for 2011/2012 became available from the EC in late June 2013 allowing little time for analysis. In addition, statistics for the total number of Irish students who participated in the Erasmus programme in 2012/2013 will not be available until 2014. It is therefore not possible to finalise comparisons between the findings of the original surveys by Vossensteyn *et al.* and those collected for the research on Ireland at this time.

The findings also point towards areas for further possible research. These include:

- The extent to which the expected benefits for employment following an Erasmus placement are realised by students after graduation
- The reasons why financial barriers seem to be a less important barrier to Erasmus participation for Irish students than other nationalities
- The ways in which family and personal relationships impact on Erasmus participation by Irish students
- The role of EU policy in promoting student mobility and the possibility that Member States may require their own national mobility policy.

There is no doubt that whilst policy formation with regard to education in the EU has come a long way since the foundation of the EEC in 1957, its legislative competence in the area of education policy remains limited (Alexiadou, 2007). The launch of the

Erasmus programme in 1987 marks a significant step in policy formation and has created a forum for cooperation, which over the course of time, has created an impetus for the development of policy on matters pertaining to HE in particular. Education is no longer 'taboo' (Pépin, 2007).

And yet, despite the positive rhetoric about the benefits of participation in the Erasmus programme, the survey findings ring true the words of Rodríguez González *et al.,* (2010) who suggest that for many, 'Erasmus mobility is considered as an *optional extra* which would be nice, but not necessary' (p. 421). An attitudinal shift is required in order to move the perception of Erasmus further along the continuum from 'nice' in the direction of 'necessary'.

It is hoped, therefore, that this study may make a worthwhile contribution to 'policy as text and policy as discourse' (Ball, 1993). Discussion is seminal to the exploration and generation of ideas, and is foundational in the creation of fora for cooperation upon which Erasmus has been built, and which must be built upon. The 'active engagement of all participants in education policy processes at all levels' (Vidovich, 2007: 295) is to be encouraged. Discussion is essential for the emergence of policy as discourse which is as vital in local, institutional settings as in larger arenas such as the legislative corridors of government.

In order to give greater gravitas to the Erasmus programme and in order to meet the EU target of 20% mobility by 2020, policy as text is unarguably also required. Irish education policy on mobility must be developed in order to improve participation in Erasmus by Irish students, particularly given the innumerable benefits for individuals, for the Irish State and for the European Community. It is incumbent upon all Irish HE institutions, the HEA and the Department of Education and Skills of the Irish government to turn their attention towards this project in a timely fashion, and take action.

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Appendices

Table 5: Erasmus programme in Ireland; participant institutions, July 2013

Institutes of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology
Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown
Institute of Technology, Carlow
Cork Institute of Technology
Dublin Institute of Technology
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology
Dundalk Institute of Technology
Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Limerick Institute of Technology
Institute of Technology, Sligo
Institute of Technology, Tallaght
Institute of Technology, Tralee
Waterford Institute of Technology

National College of Art & Design, Dublin

Teacher Training Colleges

Froebel College of Education, Dublin
Marino Institute of Education, Dublin
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin
St Angela's College of Education, Sligo
St Patrick's College of Education, Dublin

Universities
Dublin City University
National University of Ireland, Galway
National University of Ireland, Maynooth
University College Cork
University College Dublin
University of Dublin, Trinity College
University of Limerick

Table 6: Reasons for undertaking the Erasmus study period abroad (% of students considering the factor important or very important)

	CZ	FI	DE	PO	ES	SE	GB	IE	Average
Opportunity to receive ERASMUS grant	52	51	47	60	69	23	27	12	**43**
Opportunity to receive other financial support to study abroad	30	37	29	19	66	17	20	8	**28**
Guidance provided regarding the benefits of the ERASMUS programme was compelling	21	26	56	55	57	21	39	37	**39**
Available support in finding accommodation	31	24	20	25	26	8	21	16	**21**
Available support to meet ERASMUS administrative requirements	32	21	40	23	30	10	20	18	**24**
Quality of host institution	59	35	28	48	55	38	46	42	**44**
Opportunity to choose the institution abroad	62	60	31	60	52	54	48	41	**51**
Good alignment between the curriculum at home institution	30	24	17	27	41	23	29	25	**27**
The length of study period abroad was appropriate	48	55	57	44	60	42	53	52	**51**
Possibility to choose a study programme in a foreign language	68	55	75	72	79	57	56	57	**65**
Opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods	87	65	61	83	81	67	64	68	**72**
Benefits for my future employment opportunities in my home country	81	70	74	84	72	77	81	83	**78**
Benefits for my future employment abroad	73	71	68	72	76	78	80	85	**75**

Opportunity to learn/improve a foreign language	93	92	93	95	94	84	81	76	**88**
Opportunity to live abroad	89	96	93	94	95	94	90	92	**93**
Opportunity to meet new people	87	93	90	92	91	90	88	89	**90**
Opportunity to develop soft skills i.e. adaptability, demonstrating initiative	82	89	88	87	93	76	85	83	**86**
Expected a 'relaxed' academic year abroad	16	52	33	32	23	14	34	36	**30**

Table 7: In what country did you spend your ERASMUS study period abroad?

Erasmus survey

SECTION ONE - Background information. In what country did you spend your ERASMUS study period abroad? (host country)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Austria	3.9%	26
• Belgium	2.0%	13
• Bulgaria	0.0%	0
• Czech Republic	3.0%	20
• Cyprus	0.0%	0
• Denmark	1.7%	11
• Estonia	0.0%	0
• Finland	2.0%	13
• France	30.2%	199
• Germany	14.8%	98
• Greece	0.3%	2
• Hungary	0.5%	3
• Iceland	0.2%	1
• Italy	4.1%	27
• Latvia	0.0%	0
• Lichtenstein	0.0%	0
• Lithuania	0.0%	0
• Luxembourg	0.0%	0
• Malta	0.6%	4
• Netherlands	5.3%	35
• Norway	0.8%	5
• Poland	0.5%	3
• Portugal	0.2%	1
• Romania	0.0%	0
• Slovakia	0.0%	0
• Slovenia	0.0%	0
• Spain	21.1%	139
• Sweden	4.2%	28
• Turkey	0.6%	4
• UK	3.8%	25
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Table 8: Which academic year did you participate in the ERASMUS programme?

Erasmus survey

Which academic year did you participate in the ERASMUS programme?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• 2011/2012	43.0%	284
• 2012/2013	56.2%	371
• Other	0.8%	5
(please specify)		11
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Table 9: Which of the following subject areas match the subject area which you are studying in your home institution?

Erasmus survey

SECTION TWO - Programme of study. Which of the following subject areas match the subject area which you are studying in your home institution?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Agricultural Sciences	0.2%	1
• Architecture, urban and regional planning	0.3%	2
• Art and design	0.6%	4
• Business studies and management sciences	30.0%	198
• Education teacher training	0.9%	6
• Engineering, technology	1.8%	12
• Geography, geology	1.2%	8
• Humanities	21.4%	141
• Languages and philosophical sciences	15.8%	104
• Law	10.0%	66
• Mathematics, informatics	0.5%	3
• Medical sciences	3.0%	20
• Natural sciences	1.4%	9
• Social sciences	7.4%	49
• Communication and information sciences	0.2%	1
• Other areas of study	5.5%	36
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Table 10: How many years of study was your degree/diploma originally?

Erasmus survey

How many years of study was your degree/diploma originally?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Up to 2 years	1.8%	12
• 3 years	28.2%	186
• 4 years	67.4%	445
• 5 years	2.0%	13
• 6 years or more	0.6%	4
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Table 11: At the time of your ERASMUS study period abroad were you studying for:
Erasmus survey

At the time of your ERASMUS study period abroad were you studying for:		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Bachelor degree	98.0%	647
• Masters degree	1.1%	7
• Doctoral degree	0.3%	2
• Other – please provide the level of studies in the text box below	0.6%	4
Other (please specify)		7
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Table 12: How long was the duration of your ERASMUS study period abroad?
Erasmus survey

How long was the duration of your ERASMUS study period abroad?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• 3 months	4.4%	29
• 4 months	8.2%	54

• 5 months	10.3%	68
• 6 months	4.2%	28
• 7 months	0.9%	6
• 8 months	3.0%	20
• 9 months	33.5%	221
• 10 months	27.7%	183
• 11 months	4.7%	31
• 12 months or more	3.0%	20
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

SECTION THREE - Difficulties encountered and reasons for participation in ERASMUS programme. What difficulties did you encounter when you were preparing for the ERASMUS study period abroad? Please indicate the extent to which the difficulties mentioned below affected you. (1 - not at all important and 5 – very important)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	Response Count
• Uncertainty about the benefits of the Erasmus period abroad	314	141	113	68	17	653
• Lack of information about Erasmus programme and how it works	194	184	138	101	37	654
• Difficulties with any other administrative requirements (in home institution or abroad)	90	121	141	188	111	651
• High competition to obtain an Erasmus grant	368	143	85	39	18	653
• Uncertainty about the costs of the study abroad	85	125	152	198	91	651
• Uncertainty about the Erasmus grant level	145	142	154	136	72	649
• Erasmus grant levels are low	95	118	155	143	131	642
• Lack of other financial resources needed to study abroad (e.g. because I needed to leave a job, difference in costs between city where I was living and abroad, need take-up accommodation outside parental home, etc.)	129	115	126	139	145	654
• I could not select a higher education institution of my choosing to study abroad (only one with which my higher education had an Erasmus agreement)	323	119	98	60	53	653

• Difficulties to find appropriate institution and/or study programme abroad	341	145	86	57	22	651
• Uncertainty about education quality abroad	219	164	131	90	50	654
• Uncertainty about education system abroad (e.g. examinations)	122	112	159	156	95	644
• The study period abroad was too long	414	110	65	34	24	647
• The study period abroad was too short	308	96	113	58	71	646
• Expected difficulties with the recognition of credits in my home institution	213	107	130	107	92	649
• Lack of integration/continuity between study subjects at home and abroad	150	118	151	136	95	650
• Incompatibility of academic calendar year between my home country of study and abroad	307	121	101	73	44	646
• Insufficient knowledge of the language of tuition abroad (in your country of destination)	267	147	105	87	49	655
• Lack of study programmes in English in hosting institution (abroad)	379	113	81	36	36	645
• Plan to study for a full qualification abroad in the future anyway	299	103	138	68	40	648
• Lack of support to find accommodation or in other student services abroad	202	118	110	96	122	648
• Family reasons or personal relationships	255	135	119	81	60	650
• Work responsibilities in my home country of study	359	119	96	39	35	648
Other (please specify)						18
answered question						**660**
skipped question						**0**

Table 13: Difficulties encountered and reasons for participation in ERASMUS programme. What difficulties did you encounter when you were preparing for the ERASMUS study period abroad?

Table 14: Why did you decide to undertake the ERASMUS study period abroad? Please indicate to what extent each of the following was important for your decision to participate.

Erasmus survey

Why did you decide to undertake the ERASMUS study period abroad? Please indicate to what extent each of the following was important for your decision to participate. (1 - not at all important and 5 – very important)						
Answer Options	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Response Count**
• Opportunity to receive Erasmus grant	384	103	88	43	38	656
• Opportunity to receive other financial support to study abroad	442	100	55	30	25	652
• Guidance provided regarding the benefits of the Erasmus programme was compelling	131	112	167	148	88	646
• Available support in finding accommodation	302	130	116	64	40	652
• Available support to meet Erasmus administrative requirements	242	142	149	79	37	649
• Quality of the host institution	108	116	153	171	101	649
• Opportunity to choose the institution abroad	144	95	147	156	107	649
• Good alignment between the curriculum at home institution	185	145	159	102	60	651
• The length of the study period abroad was appropriate	91	57	168	201	134	651
• Possibility to choose a study programme in a foreign language	139	46	93	159	213	650
• Opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods	53	51	105	200	244	653
• Benefits for my future employment opportunities in home country	20	30	63	168	373	654
• Benefits for my future employment opportunities abroad	16	22	60	151	401	650
• Opportunity to learn/ improve a foreign language	67	41	47	82	420	657
• Opportunity to live abroad	13	9	32	98	502	654
• Opportunity to meet new people	13	11	45	106	479	654

i.e. adaptability, demonstrating initiative						
• Expected a 'relaxed' academic year abroad	140	123	154	110	125	652
Other (please specify)						41
answered question						**660**
skipped question						**0**

Table 15: Demographic characteristics. What was your age at the start of your ERASMUS study period abroad?

Erasmus survey

SECTION FOUR - Demographic characteristics. What was your age at the start of your ERASMUS study period abroad?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Up to 20	51.5%	340
• 21	30.5%	201
• 22	5.8%	38
• 23	2.7%	18
• 24	1.5%	10
• 25	0.3%	2
• 26	1.2%	8
• 27 and over	6.5%	43
answered question		**660**
skipped question		**0**

Survey of Non-Erasmus students

Table 16: Programme of study. Which of the following subject areas match the subject area which you are studying in your home institution?

SECTION ONE - Programme of study. Which of the following subject areas match the subject area which you are studying in your home institution?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
• Agricultural Sciences	0.3%	1
• Architecture, urban and regional planning	0.5%	2
• Art and design	2.6%	10
• Business studies and management sciences	24.8%	96
• Education teacher training	5.2%	20
• Engineering, technology	11.9%	46
• Geography, geology	1.8%	7
• Humanities	10.6%	41
• Languages and philosophical sciences	0.5%	2
• Law	0.0%	0
• Mathematics, informatics	0.8%	3
• Medical sciences	6.2%	24
• Natural sciences	7.8%	30
• Social sciences	9.3%	36
• Communication and information sciences	2.8%	11
• Other areas of study	15.0%	58
answered question		**387**
skipped question		**8**

Table 17: How many years of study is your degree/diploma? Non-Erasmus students

How many years of study is your degree/diploma?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
• Up to 2 years	3.1%	12
• 3 years	35.5%	137
• 4 years	58.0%	224
• 5 years	2.6%	10
• 6 years or more	0.8%	3
answered question		**386**
skipped question		**9**

Table 18: If you have already spent an ERASMUS study period abroad, at that time were you studying for:

Non-Erasmus students

If you have already spent an ERASMUS study period abroad, at that time were you studying for:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count

• A Bachelor degree	73.4%	47
• A Masters degree	1.6%	1
• A Doctoral degree	0.0%	0
• Other – please provide the level of studies in the text box below	25.0%	16
Other (please specify)		22
answered question		**64**
skipped question		**331**

Table 19: Have you considered taking part in the ERASMUS study abroad programme?

Non-Erasmus students

SECTION TWO - ERASMUS programme. Have you considered taking part in the ERASMUS study abroad programme?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Yes	51.6%	204
No	48.4%	191
answered question		**395**
skipped question		**0**

Table 20: Why were you interested in ERASMUS programme?

Non-Erasmus students

Why were you interested in ERASMUS programme? Please indicate to what extent each of the following was important for you to consider participation in ERASMUS. (1 - not at all important and 5 – very important)						
Answer Options	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Response Count**
• Opportunity to receive Erasmus grant	23	12	19	14	37	105
• Opportunity to receive other financial support to study abroad	17	15	18	23	31	104
• Guidance provided regarding the benefits of the Erasmus programme was compelling	7	18	29	27	20	101
• Available support in finding accommodation	10	27	23	19	25	104

• Available support to meet Erasmus administrative requirements	10	23	26	23	22	104
• Quality of the host institution	6	9	20	32	36	103
• Opportunity to choose the institution abroad	3	11	16	30	44	104
• Good alignment between the curriculum at home institution	7	11	23	25	37	103
• The length of the study period abroad was appropriate	6	9	20	34	34	103
• Possibility to choose a study programme in a foreign language	26	13	21	17	28	105
• Opportunity to experience different learning practices and teaching methods	3	7	14	31	49	104
• Benefits for my future employment opportunities in home country	5	3	5	24	68	105
• Benefits for my future employment opportunities abroad	3	3	7	18	74	105
• Opportunity to learn/ improve a foreign language	6	14	15	21	49	105
• Opportunity to live abroad	3	2	13	23	62	103
• Opportunity to meet new people	4	6	10	28	57	105
• Opportunity to develop of soft skills i.e. adaptability, demonstrating initiative	6	5	12	37	44	104
• Expected a 'relaxed' academic year abroad	25	18	34	16	9	102
Other (please specify)						2
answered question						**106**
skipped question						**289**

Table 21: Why have you not considered taking part in the ERASMUS study abroad programme?

Non-Erasmus students

Why have you not considered taking part in the ERASMUS study abroad programme? Please indicate to what extent each of the statements applies to you. (1 - not at all relevant and 5 – very relevant)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	Response Count
o Not interested in a study abroad programme	30	22	23	14	38	127
o Study abroad is not important for my future career	32	24	31	18	20	125
o Study abroad would delay my graduation	60	14	22	6	18	120
o Study abroad is too costly	13	5	21	28	56	123
o I am uncertain about education quality abroad	32	22	29	18	17	118
o I am uncertain about education system abroad (e.g. examinations)	28	17	30	21	25	121
o Difficulties to find an appropriate institution and/or study programme abroad	37	19	31	19	17	123
o Lack of language skills to follow a course abroad	20	8	20	23	54	125
o Family reasons or personal relationships that make going abroad difficult	28	8	11	17	61	125
o Work responsibilities in my home country of study	51	12	20	18	24	125
o Decided to study abroad for a full degree at a later date	102	8	9	1	3	123
o I never heard of the Erasmus programme	84	7	13	5	17	126
o I could not find enough information about the Erasmus programme and how it works	74	12	20	9	7	122
o Too high competition to obtain an Erasmus grant	64	12	24	8	14	122
o Difficulties to meet Erasmus administrative requirements	72	10	25	5	11	123
o Erasmus grant is insufficient to cover	49	7	30	15	20	121

	1	2	3	4	5	
additional costs of period abroad						
o Uncertainty about the benefits of the Erasmus period abroad	42	11	27	24	17	121
o The choice of institutions is too limited in the Erasmus programme	52	14	40	7	8	121
o The study period abroad is too long	53	15	36	11	6	121
o The study period abroad is too short	65	14	38	2	2	121
o Expected difficulties with the recognition of credits in my home institution	58	13	32	16	3	122
o Lack of integration between the curriculum abroad and in current country of study	54	10	31	16	11	122
o Incompatibility of calendar year between my current institution and institutions abroad	56	17	33	7	6	119
o Lack of study programmes in English in hosting institution (abroad)	44	17	35	14	12	122
o Lack of support to find accommodation abroad	49	14	29	16	12	120
Other (please specify)						7
answered question						**133**
skipped question						**262**

Table 22: What measures, if any, would have had stimulated you to participate in the ERASMUS programme?

Non-Erasmus students

What measures, if any, would have had stimulated you to participate in the ERASMUS programme? Please indicate to what extent each of the following would be important for you to participate in ERASMUS. (1 - not at all important and 5 – very important)						
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	Response Count
• Increased value of Erasmus grant	28	13	34	33	64	172
• Increasing flexibility in student financing system	26	10	31	42	59	168

• Information on Erasmus programme	28	10	28	39	64	169
• Information on the benefits of mobility	31	23	37	32	44	167
• Recognition of credits	25	14	32	42	54	167
• Flexibility in curriculum	27	11	41	44	43	166
• Compatibility of calendar year	36	15	44	33	37	165
• Making the period of studying abroad compulsory	52	20	35	19	38	164
• Language learning at secondary education	35	15	29	45	47	171
• Language learning at higher education	31	12	38	45	43	169
• Provide study periods in foreign languages	33	22	32	46	34	167
• Possibility to participate in the full degree study programme	50	23	43	27	23	166
• Possibility to undertake Erasmus study period in one year master programmes	46	21	28	29	41	165
• Possibility to undertake shorter mobility periods	37	24	43	28	33	165
• Possibility to choose the university including the ones which do not have agreements with the home institution	35	15	42	33	41	166
• Increasing attractiveness of the hosting higher education institutions	32	17	53	34	31	167
• Increase the quality of experiences abroad	32	11	33	37	54	167
Other (please specify)						6
answered question						**176**
skipped question						**219**

Table 23: - Demographic characteristics: What is your age?

Non-Erasmus students

SECTION THREE - Demographic characteristics. What is your age?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
• Up to 18	1.5%	3
• 19	6.1%	12
• 20	8.6%	17
• 21	14.7%	29
• 22	10.2%	20
• 23	6.1%	12
• 24	2.5%	5
• 25	4.6%	9
• 26	1.0%	2
• 27 and over	44.7%	88
answered question		**197**
skipped question		**198**