

CONCLUSIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY DEBATE DAY ON INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL MOBILITY (4.5.2017)

The Debate Day took place at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It involved students, Alumni members and mobility organisers from nine Catalan universities: University of Barcelona, *Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*, Rovira i Virgili University, University of Girona, Ramon Llull University, *Universitat Internacional de Catalunya*, Open University of Catalonia, University of Vic and *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*. There were also representatives from East Anglia University in London and two institutions with links to international professional mobility: the Barcelona Bar Association and the Secretariat for External and European Union Affairs, Department of Institutional and External Affairs and Transparency of the Government of Catalonia (*Generalitat*).

The Debate Day began at 9.30 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m., with the following programme.

9.30 a.m. Welcome session.

10 a.m. Introductory talk by **Sara Moreno**, vice-rector for Students and Employability.

10.15 a.m. "Labour Mobility in the EU: Data, Instruments and New Proposals from the Commission". A presentation by **Jordi Curell Gotor**, Head of Labour Mobility at the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission.

11 a.m. Questions from the floor.

11.15 a.m. Break.

11.30 a.m. Discussion in groups: "**Mobility Grants and Funding**", "**Mobility Support Services**", "**Mobility for Researchers**", and "**Support Services for Returnees**".

1.30 p.m. Lunch.

2 p.m. Concluding plenary and questions from the floor.

4 p.m. Closing session.

The event opened with an introductory talk by Sara Moreno, vice-rector for Students and Employability at the UAB, who welcomed all the attendees and thanked them for their presence. The vice-rector explained the aims and actions of the Euroacció Mentoring programme. She set out the content and aims of each discussion group, and announced that the Support Services for Returnees group would join with the Mobility Support Services group, due to low numbers (doubtless because there is not yet a large number of returnees in in Catalonia and Spain).

Following this, Jordi Curell, head of Labour Mobility at the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, gave the presentation "Labour Mobility in the EU: Data, Instruments and New Proposals from the Commission".

He began by expressing his gratitude for being invited to the Debate Day, which has allowed him to get to know service users and persons working in areas that the European Commission is discussing and deciding on. He expressed his satisfaction that the sessions would produce a document of proposals, since a discussion was being initiated at the EC on the new generation of mobility programmes for the year 2020 onwards.

His presentation focused on the benefits afforded by workers' mobility: for the workers (who are given access to a wider range of jobs with higher salaries), for companies (which are not restricted to the local labour force and can hire workers with the highest levels of competence), for the countries receiving these workers (because the latter contribute to growth and the public finances), and for the countries sending them (because, on their return, they will have new experience, competences and skills that can be of benefit to their own countries). He then pointed out, however, that these generally favourable effects are not always automatic and nor are they always perceived to be favourable. An example of this is the case of Brexit.

Mr Curell described the two basic pillars of European mobility: first, the legal conditions and workers' rights of free movement and equality; second, the creation of instruments to promote transparency and information, such as the ERASMUS programme for students, EURAXESS for researchers, and EURES for workers.

The "2015 Annual Report on Labour Mobility" states that there are 11 million people working in a different country: 4% of the European working population, and it reveals that "we are beginning to see a significant movement of return, especially in the eastern countries".

Mr Curell went on to say that there are obstacles to mobility, such as legal restrictions and withholding of information by the public administration in countries receiving the highest numbers of immigrants. For this reason the EC has proposed remodelling and extending the EURES Network, and has sent out a directive to administrations encouraging them to be more open and to set up immigrant information and reception services.

Looking forward to future improvements in mobility, Mr Curell pointed to the programmes Your First EURES Job and European Solidarity Corps. He explained that both programmes were set up to help young people, both in getting their first job outside their own country and in doing social work for a minimum of six months.

At the end of the presentation, questions from the floor were taken.

Subsequently, the attendees divided up into the three discussion groups on the proposed topics.

The groups were moderated by the following persons, who also reported on their conclusions.

a) For “Mobility Grants and Funding”: Laura Ripoll, Head of International Relations, University of Girona.

b) For “Mobility Support Services”: Eva Miquel, director of UAB Alumni, and for “Support Services for Returnees”: Sergi Ortiz, a member of UAB Alumni and a family and community doctor.

c.) For “Mobility for Researchers”: Begoña Miñarro, EURAXESS coordinator at the UAB.

The conclusions reached during the discussions are as follows.

a) Mobility Grants and Funding

1. *Include information on the specific advantages that many host countries offer to mobility students, which add to the amounts received from the country of origin.* Country-by-country information on these advantages is not gathered together in a single web site or page belonging to the EC, the Executive Agency or national agencies. Gathering this information together would give a boost to mobility, since students could find out about the funding and other advantages available to them above and beyond the Erasmus grant. For example, Norway offers a 75% rent discount for young students.
2. *Extend traineeship-mobility grant periods for recent graduates: from the current twelve months to thirty-six at least.* The EC should contemplate such an extension given the fact that youth unemployment levels remain high and in order to provide further help for young people seeking to gain professional experience.
3. *Set up an institutional European website that groups together all mobility grants and funding options by country.* The universities know about certain grants and funding options, but are unable to group them all together systematically and offer this information.
4. *Allow funding for mobilities that have already been carried out as zero grants, if the state body receives additional funds during that academic year.* This is one of the main difficulties and discriminations generated by the Erasmus+ programme and those present do not know whether the problem derives from the Spanish government or a European Commission directive.

5. *Promote equality in the withholding of taxes from teaching staff. Taxes are withheld from staff on Erasmus teaching assignments but not from those on research assignments.* Lecturers have worker status in both cases, so these differences in taxation seem inconsistent.
6. *Simplify formalities and paperwork for both the beneficiaries of projects and the programme participants.* The impression is that with each new generation of programmes implemented by the EC the number of formalities increases, together with documentation, reports and red tape.
7. *Implement digital signatures on all Erasmus+ documents (Learning Agreement, Grant Agreement, etc.) for both the beneficiaries of projects and participants.* The proposal is to copy the EC's existing signature system for Europass Mobility documents, and apply it to the Erasmus+ programme.

b) Mobility Support Services and Support Services for Returnees

1. *Intensify communication and dissemination of the programme and the opportunities it provides, directly from Europe, focusing on target groups and also on companies.* It is considered necessary to inform about the advantages and benefits of participating in this programme, without leaving this task to the national agencies.
2. *Set up a web page to group together and share useful information on accommodation, transport, recommendations, company contacts, etc., aimed at future participants.* The proposal is to add a section to the ErasmusIntern website or to Mobility Tool.
3. *Propose specific laws and regulations on traineeships in all countries, attempting to unify criteria.* Some countries are legally obliged to remunerate traineeships, while others are not. The proposal is to unify criteria for Erasmus+ Traineeships, favouring equality.
4. *Bring back specific funding for onsite language courses during the mobility.* In the previous generation of programmes, participants who took certified language courses in the host institution received this specific funding. Now, participants have to take the OLS test before and after the mobility, and if they take the language course they are given no certificate to show this, or to show they have passed a particular level.
5. *Establish mechanisms for assessing mobilities that include the views of grant holders, ensure feedback, and lead to real improvements in the programmes.* European institutions and national agencies do not pass the exploitation of results on to the organisers and improvements are not introduced for new programmes.
6. *Begin to build up support services and programmes to advise returnees on career paths, job hunting, tax law and contract issues in their countries of origin.* This is seen as a necessary initial step even though returnee numbers are still quite low.
7. *Analyse the specific economic sectors in which there is a shortage of professionals in the countries of origin, in order to facilitate and provide funding for programmes that encourage professionals to return and find stable employment.* The proposal is that the European institutions should prepare and promote these programmes.

c) Mobility for Researchers

1. *Add a new section to EURAXESS to show what funds are available for mobility grants for PhD students, post-doctoral students, and also for short research stays.* Currently, this information is dispersed.
2. *Add a new section to EURAXESS for individual candidacies,* where those interested in doing international stays can post their CV, like the section already in place on the EURES website.
3. *Use the EURAXESS site to implement a database of research groups at European universities, along with their principal researchers.* This would assist in searching for and choosing international stays.
4. *Group together and structure the information on portability of pensions by countries.* In the case of the most senior researchers, this would be very useful, and EURAXESS could be the most suitable channel.
5. *Simplify red tape in calls and increase flexibility.* If the research is being conducted in two different universities, allow the budget to be shared between these instead of being allocated to just one.
6. *Adopt a standard CV format for researchers, on EUROPASS lines.* Currently, researchers' CVs vary in accordance with the body awarding the grants, and there should be a standard format for Europe.

After these conclusions had been presented, questions from the floor were taken, during which certain points were clarified.

The Debate Day was brought to a close at 4.45 p.m.