

# *Chapter 1*

## *The impact of temporary study abroad*

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In Europe, the Erasmus programme was established in 1987 with the vision that eventually 10% of students would spend a period in another European country during the course of study. The Leuven 2009 Communiqué of the Ministers involved in the Bologna Process set a target of 20% for 2020. This underscores how highly student mobility that is temporary, “horizontal” and outbound is appreciated in Europe. Based on various evaluation studies, the author of this chapter has argued that “learning from contrast” is the key value of horizontal mobility, i.e. study in another country in the framework of study provisions, which are different in substance, but more or less equal in quality to those at home. Various surveys show that formerly mobile students do not achieve a substantially higher professional status than formerly non-mobile and are considered only slightly more professional competent. They seem to be more competent, however, to handle international environments, and they are clearly more likely to be internationally mobile after graduation. However, a survey undertaken some years ago suggests that temporary mobility within Europe might be losing its exceptionality, thus raising the question of how international learning could be more creative in the future.

### **1. Temporary outwards mobility: the prime emphasis in Europe**

Increasing mobility and enhancing the value of student mobility has been one of the major objectives of higher education policy across Europe (cf. Teichler, 2009; Wächter, 2008; van der Hijden, 2012). There has been hardly any other major theme of higher education policy associated with so much appreciation. While almost all issues of higher education tend to be discussed controversially, temporary student mobility seems to be “good” from all points of view – leaving aside occasional remarks that some students consider temporary study abroad as extended holidays, that a minority of mobile students have difficulties coping with the demands at the host institution, and that student mobility for the whole study programme has led to “brain drain” of talents from economically disadvantaged countries (see Wächter, 2006).

Yet, student mobility is such a heterogeneous feature that hardly any generalisation can be made about its modes and its impact. Only two features are kept in common: first, there is a contrast between the living and learning environment of the country that students were accustomed to previously, and the living and learning settings of the country that students experience when they are mobile. Secondly, international offices of universities tend to be in charge of the whole spectrum of mobile persons.

In-depth analyses of student mobility have shown that four distinctions have to be made to understand its character and possible impact (see the overviews in Kelo, Teichler & Wächter, 2006; Teichler, Ferencz & Wächter, 2011):

1. “Foreign students” and “study abroad” versus student mobility;
2. Temporary mobility (occasionally called “credit mobility”) versus mobility for the whole degree programme (occasionally called “degree mobility”);
3. “Horizontal” versus “vertical” mobility;
4. Inward versus outward mobility.

First, most available studies employ the term “student mobility”, but actually provide information about students whose citizenship is different from that of the country where they study. Even many experts in student mobility ignore the difference between *foreign* and *mobile* students when they refer to statistics (see for example Banks & Bhandari, 2012; de Wit, 2012). We know, however, that many foreign students have already lived and learned in the country where they eventually study; moreover, some mobile students have lived and learned abroad, prior to returning to the country of their citizenship for the purpose of study. Therefore, a distinction has to be made between foreign students and study abroad on the one hand and student mobility on the other. Moreover, the frequently employed term *international students* is most confusing in this context because it evades this distinction.

Second, many students go to another country with the intention to be eventually awarded a degree there, and thus spend the whole study period in another country. But temporary student mobility, possibly for a semester or an academic year, is by no means an infrequent phenomenon. *Temporary mobility* is clearly distinct from *degree mobility*, i.e. mobility for the whole study programme, because learning at more than a single university during the course of study is a key component of study for temporarily mobile students – experiencing contrasting learning environments and expecting that phases of study at two or more universities will eventually be recognized as part of a whole study programme.

Third, there is an important distinction that will never show up in official statistics: that between *vertical* and *horizontal* student mobility. In the former case,

students move from an academically and often economically less favourable country or institution, to a more favourable country and institution. This is based on the hope that the quality of one's competences will be substantially enhanced by such a leap upwards, and adaptation to the host country and institution is the imperative. In the latter case, students are mobile between countries and institutions of a similar academic level: learning from valuable contrasts is the aim, rather than a leap upwards. Available information suggests that most upwardly mobile students study abroad for the whole study programme, whereas most horizontally mobile students opt for temporary study in another country.

Fourth, a distinction can be made between the directions of mobility. For example, a temporarily mobile student can be viewed as *outwardly mobile* (or "outgoing") from the perspective of the university where she or he has studied previously, and as *inwardly mobile* (or "incoming") from the perspective of the host university. This distinction certainly plays a role for the universities concerned: they, as a rule, take more active care of the inwardly mobile students from other countries than of those who left the university for a while, but they are eventually more responsible for the assessment of the outgoing students, because, in eventually awarding the degree, the students have studied in another country as part of the overall achievement in the local study programme. And this distinction also plays a role in national policies: as regards inwardly mobile students, the individual country might reflect on how it serves the competence enhancement of students most of whom eventually will live and work afterwards in other countries. As regards outwardly mobile students, one might reflect on how the competences of "our" students (and subsequently "our" graduates, who will eventually live and work in the home country) might change and might hopefully be enhanced, as a consequence of experiencing life and study in another country for a while.

Temporary horizontal mobility has gained enormous popularity in Europe over the years. It was already addressed by the Council of Europe in the 1950s when conventions for the recognition of prior learning were formulated for mobile students and graduates. The Erasmus programme, established by the European Union in 1987, was a breakthrough to move temporary mobility from an exceptional choice to a normal option. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 called for a similar structure of study programmes and degrees across European countries, notably for the purpose of facilitating both horizontal intra-European (mostly temporary) mobility and vertical inward (mostly degree) mobility, whereby the latter was expected to reflect a growing attractiveness of higher education in Europe for students from other regions of the world. Finally, the ministers of countries participating in the Bologna Process agreed with the Leuven Communiqué of 2009 in setting the target for the year 2020 that 20% of all students should have experi-

enced a period of mobility (including internships) during their course of study (see Teichler, 2012).

Thus, temporary study in another country has been emphasized increasingly across European countries. This is bound to raise questions concerning the actual impact of this extensive temporary horizontal mobility.

We have to take into consideration, though, that temporary study in another country does not have the same weight in the higher education policies of all European countries. Notably, the United Kingdom could be seen as a clear exception, where most attention clearly has been paid to incoming degree mobility for a long period. Recent indications of growing attention to temporary study abroad, however, suggest that the possible value of temporary study in another country cannot be ignored in the long run: How do our own graduates get competent to be international players?

This chapter aims at delineating the frequency of temporary student mobility in Europe and assessing the impact of temporary mobility on the career and work of formerly mobile students. In the past, temporary student mobility has been the step-child of official statistical information (see Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Teichler & Ferencz, 2011), and the majority of surveys have focussed on the conditions and the effects of mobility for whole study programmes (see Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012; de Wit, 2008). This chapter intends to contribute to a better balance of information by drawing from available more complex statistical sources and by reporting the major results of surveys undertaken in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that have addressed the Erasmus programme, i.e. the largest scheme in Europe for the promotion of temporary student mobility.

## **2. Deplorably weak information base on temporary outwards mobility**

Europe-wide statistics relevant to understanding the frequency of international student mobility are produced jointly by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in Montreal, the OECD in Paris and EUROSTAT (the statistical agency of the European Union) based in Luxembourg. These three supranational agencies, here called UOE for short, address the national agencies in charge of national collection of educational data and ask them to deliver national statistics according to a common set of definitions and operational guidelines that is updated annually. As national agencies might have definitions and practices of their own, UOE have to decide whether the information provided more or less fits the guidelines or should be treated as “missing information”.

We often read publications reporting high absolute numbers of foreign students worldwide. It looks impressive to note that this figure has been 300,000 or

so in the 1950s and might have surpassed 4 million today. However, the total number of students has increased similarly; thus, the proportion of foreign students among all students worldwide did not increase much beyond 2%.

Although student mobility is so high on the political agenda, the quality of international data collection on the subject is deplorable. Three weaknesses are most salient in this context:

- Dominance of data on foreign students and study abroad;
- No distinction made between temporary mobility and mobility for the whole study programme;
- Exclusion of most temporarily mobile students.

First, international student statistics have solely focussed on foreign students (from the perspective of the host country) and on study abroad (from the perspective of the country of origin). The United Kingdom was the only country for a long time that did not deliver data on citizenship to UOE, but rather data on mobility (measured by the difference between the country of domicile and the country of study). Nowadays, however, a larger number of European countries measure both, i.e. foreign students and mobile students. A recent study employing both measures (Teichler & Ferencz, 2011) came to the conclusion that only about three quarters of foreign students in Europe are mobile for the purpose of study; moreover, the available data suggest that one tenth of mobile students in Europe are not foreign. The respective figures for the United Kingdom in 2007 were the following, as Table 1 shows: 13.6% of all students in the UK were foreign mobile students, 5.9% foreign non-mobile students, and 1.3% incoming students with home nationality (mostly “returners”). Thus, the total number of mobile students (the first and the third figures) was 14.9% and the total number of foreign students (the first and the second figures) was 19.5%.

**Table 1.** Percentages of foreign/mobile students 2007 according to UOE data

|                                 | A    | CH   | UK   | E   | DK  |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| a. Foreign mobile students      | 11.9 | 14.3 | 13.6 | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| b. Home country mobile students | 0.5  | 2.1  | 0.7  | 0.0 | 2.8 |
| All mobile students (a, b)      | 12.4 | 16.4 | 14.3 | 1.8 | 5.5 |
| c. Foreign non-mobile students  | 4.6  | 5.0  | 5.9  | 1.6 | 6.3 |
| All foreign students (a,c)      | 16.7 | 19.3 | 19.5 | 3.4 | 9.0 |

Source: Based on Teichler, Ferencz & Wächter, 2011

Second, no distinction is made in the statistics between temporarily mobile students and those mobile for the whole study programme. This holds true for the international statistics as well as for most national statistics. In many publications, statistics of Erasmus students were provided as a proxy for temporary student mobility in Europe. At present, however, this approach is employed less frequently, because experts estimate that Erasmus students comprise less than one third of all temporarily mobile students in Europe.

Third, although the UOE even recommend the national agencies not to include students from foreign countries and mobile students who are temporarily mobile for less than one year in the statistics they contribute to UOE international datasets, at present about half of the temporarily mobile students in Europe seem to be counted as “international students” in these statistics (see Teichler, Ferencz & Wächter, 2011).

### **3. The frequency of student mobility in the light of available statistics**

As pointed out above, the available international statistics do not really provide an appropriate picture of student mobility. However, we will start off with the most widely used data and then move towards more accurate data.

According to the combined UOE data, as shown in Table 1, 19.5% of students studying in the United Kingdom in 2007 were foreign students. (See Teichler, Ferencz & Wächter, 2011 for details of data compilation.) Along with Switzerland (19.3%), this was the highest quota of foreign students, if we disregard very small European countries with “incomplete” higher education systems (e.g. Liechtenstein and Cyprus). The respective rates were about 11% each in France and Germany.

In contrast, the ratio of students with home nationality studying abroad to resident students with home nationality was only 1.2% in the case of the UK in 2007. This was the second lowest among EU countries (following Bulgaria with 1.1%). The respective figures were 3.2% for France and 4.3% for Germany.

If we address intra-European student mobility, we still note non-reciprocity in the case of the UK: while 0.6% of UK students studied in other European countries, 5.3% of the students in the UK were citizens of other European countries. The respective figures for Switzerland were about 6% versus 11%. In contrast, reciprocity held true for Germany (4.3% versus 4.4%) and for all Erasmus-eligible countries on average (3.3% versus 3.3%).

The picture is similar, if we focus merely on Erasmus student mobility. In 2007, only about 0.3% of all students in the UK studied in another country in the framework of Erasmus as compared to 0.7% of all students in all Erasmus-

eligible countries. In reverse, 0.7% of the students in the UK were Erasmus from other European countries; this proportion was close to the European average (cf. Ferencz, 2011). According to the first major evaluation of the Erasmus programme (for the years 1987-1995), UK Erasmus students had lowest expectations, felt least prepared, had least foreign language proficiency, and eventually were least satisfied with the study abroad period (Teichler, 1997).

The figures presented so far showed proportions of foreign or mobility students among all students enrolled in a given year. The ministers in charge of higher education of the countries cooperating in the Bologna Process, however, pointed out in 2009 that the most interesting figure is the proportion of students having studied abroad – for some period or the whole programme – during their course of study (we might call it the “event” or the “occurrence” of student mobility), and they put forward a target for 2020: By that year, 20% of all European students should have been mobile before they eventually graduate.

Graduate surveys so far are the best possible source of information on the occurrence of temporary student mobility. According to a secondary analysis of surveys in ten European countries undertaken at different times in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the respective rates among bachelor graduates were 24% in the Netherlands, 18% in Austria, 15% in Germany, 6% in the Czech Republic, 5% in Italy, 4% in the UK, and 2% in Poland (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011). Although these figures do not include students spending the whole study programme in another country, we can draw the conclusion that the European target rate of 20% has been reached already more than a decade earlier in some countries (i.e. the Netherlands and Austria), can be reached with ease in some countries (e.g. Germany), and seems to be out of reach in other countries (e.g. the UK).

## **4. The value of temporary student mobility**

### *4.1. The information base*

There is a multitude of studies on the “impact”, “outcome”, “success” or “value” of student mobility (see for example the overviews in Deardorff & van Galen, 2012, and de Wit, 2009; cf. also the general overviews on research on internationalisation in de Wit & Urias, 2012; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). They cover a wide range of settings of mobility, and they address altogether many dimensions of results, such as cultural learning, personality development, international understanding, foreign language proficiency, general academic enhancement, and subsequent mobility, as well as career enhancement. Most of the available studies, however, address the results of mobility for the whole study programme.

The following overview of the impact of temporary mobility will largely report the findings of an evaluation study of the Erasmus programme published in 2009 which can be considered as the most in-depth study undertaken in recent years on temporary student mobility (Janson, Schomburg & Teichler, 2009; Teichler & Janson, 2007). Certainly, we know that there are more temporarily mobile students in Europe outside Erasmus (funded by national support schemes, covering the costs themselves, etc.) than Erasmus students. Available comparative information suggests that Erasmus students are a slightly less selective group, and eventually also a slightly less successful group, than all temporarily mobile students. Yet, the survey of former Erasmus students is the most thorough base of information available; moreover, it not only shows the views of formerly mobile students, but also those of teachers, administrators and employers. One has to take into consideration that the study shows the views of persons who had spent a semester or a year of study abroad in the academic year 2000; more recent information certainly would be desirable, but the data presented here cannot be viewed as completely outdated (cf. also the findings of a more recent survey in Bürger & Lanzendorf, 2011).

The study named *The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility* draws not only from the survey of 2000 Erasmus students undertaken five years later (called *Study C* in Tables 3 and 4). It also takes into account the results of a survey of Erasmus 1989 students undertaken about five years later (called *Study A* in Tables 3 and 4; see Maiworm & Teichler, 1996; Teichler & Maiworm, 1997) as well as representative surveys of all graduates of the academic year 1995 surveyed about four years after graduation in four European countries (called *Study B* in Tables 3 and 4; see Jahr & Teichler, 2007).

#### 4.2. *The most visible effects*

The surveys show that international mobility increases the interest in further study: about twice as many formerly mobile students embark on further study as formerly non-mobile students. There is another striking, but certainly not surprising effect: a substantial proportion of formerly mobile students have a foreign partner or spouse.

In singling out the strongest professional difference between formerly mobile students and formerly non-mobile students, we have to point to professional mobility. A few years after graduation, 15-20% of formerly mobile students are employed in another European country, as compared to only about 3% of formerly non-mobile students in Europe. In addition, a substantially higher proportion of the former are sent abroad temporarily by their employers.



### 4.3. Competences upon graduation

Surveys of former Erasmus students are by no means a perfect tool for measuring the impact of a study period in another country on the competences acquired overall, when students eventually graduate. The survey of 1995 graduates (*Study B*), however, allows us to compare the retrospective self-rating of competences acquired at the time of graduation between those who had been mobile in the course of study and those who had not been mobile.

As was to be expected, former Erasmus students felt three times as strong in foreign language proficiency as formerly non-mobile students. They were also convinced that temporary study in another country was very helpful in getting to know the culture and society of the host country and in understanding other cultures and getting along with persons from different backgrounds. The formerly mobile ones also viewed themselves as moderately stronger as far as working independently, adaptability, and general communication skills are concerned. Otherwise, the formerly mobile students reported hardly any major difference in both specific knowledge and general competences, compared with formerly non-mobile students.

In the most recent study (*Study C*), the formerly mobile students were asked to compare their competences to those of formerly non-mobile students. In this case, the formerly mobile rated their level of competences somewhat higher according to almost all the dimensions addressed in the survey. One might suspect that the formerly mobile students overrate their competences; however, the employers surveyed in the same study rated graduates with international experiences somewhat higher in many respects as well, for example for their organizing abilities, adaptability, initiative and assertiveness (see Table 2). Surveys of teachers have also shown that they estimate the academic calibre of Erasmus students as slightly higher on average than that of non-mobile students.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning that former Erasmus students look retrospectively with a favourable eye on their experiences during the study period in another country. Problems regarding academic matters were less often named than those concerning accommodation, financial matters and administrative matters. Even though former Erasmus students do not get all their achievements recognized upon return by their home institution, more than half of them are convinced that they made greater academic progress abroad than during a corresponding period at home, while about one quarter considered their academic progress to be equally high and less than a quarter conceived their academic progress abroad as lower than during a corresponding period at home. Altogether, the assessment of the Erasmus period has remained surprisingly constant over the years. This suggests on the one hand that efforts for

**Table 2.** Competences of young graduates with and without international experience according to employers 2005 (percentages\*)

|  | Young graduates                            |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | <i>with</i><br>international<br>experience | <i>without</i><br>international<br>experience |
| <i>International competences</i>   |  |   |
| Foreign language proficiency   | 88   | 48  |
| Knowledge/understanding of international differences in culture and society, modes of behaviour, life styles, etc. | 76   | 28  |
| Ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds  | 76   | 40  |
| Professional knowledge of other countries (e.g. economical, sociological, legal knowledge)                         | 59   | 16  |
| <i>Knowledge and methods</i>   |  |   |
| Computer skills  | 69   | 66  |
| Field-specific knowledge of methods  | 64   | 54  |
| Field-specific theoretical knowledge   | 62   | 58  |
| <i>General competences</i>   |  |   |
| Adaptability   | 81   | 57  |
| Initiative   | 79   | 62  |
| Getting personally involved  | 79   | 67  |
| Assertiveness, decisiveness, persistence   | 75   | 57  |
| Analytical competences   | 70   | 59  |
| Problem-solving ability  | 70   | 58  |
| Written communication skills   | 70   | 58  |
| Planning, co-ordinating and organising   | 67   | 50  |
| Loyalty, integrity   | 66   | 62  |
| Power of concentration   | 63   | 59  |
| Accuracy, attention to detail  | 59   | 57  |
| Applying rules and regulations   | 58   | 52  |
| Count (N)  | (187)                                      | (250)   |

Question C4a: Please rate the competences of the young graduates in your organisation. To what extent do they have competences in the following areas on average? Please answer this question both for the group of young graduates with international experience and for the group of young graduates without international experience.

\* Responses 1 and 2 on a scale from 1 = "to a very high extent" to 5 = "not at all"

Source: Janson, Schomburg & Teichler, 2009

improvement have not been visibly successful, but on the other hand that the growth of temporary student mobility has not decreased the quality.

#### 4.4. Job search and transition to employment

All three studies addressed the transition from study to employment. The majority of former Erasmus students are convinced that the temporary study experience in another country was helpful to obtain their first job. This was stated by 71% of the Erasmus students of the late 1980s (*Study A*), 66% of those graduating in the mid-1990s (*Study B*), but only 54% of those studying abroad around 2000 (*Study C*; see Table 3). The value of study experience in another country, thus, seems to be on the decline in this respect.

**Table 3.** Perceived positive influence of the Erasmus study period on employment and work: A comparison between various surveys of former Erasmus students (percentages of employed graduates)

|                            | ERASMUS<br>students 1988/89<br>surveyed 1993<br>(Study A) | Graduates<br>1994/95<br>surveyed 1999<br>(Study B) | ERASMUS<br>students 2000/01<br>surveyed 2005<br>(Study C) |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| Obtaining first job        | 71  | 66   | 54  |
| Type of work task involved | 49  | 44   | 39  |
| Income level               | 25  | 22   | 16  |

Question H1 (2005): What impact do you feel that your study abroad experience has had with regard to your employment?

Source: Janson, Schomburg & Teichler, 2009

The surveys also suggest that temporary study in another country makes the job seeker's CV more distinctive. More than 60% of the respondents of all three surveys believe that their foreign language proficiency played a major role in their employer's decision to recruit them, and more than 50% noted that their international study experiences did so. The employer surveys mention academic knowledge and personality as more important criteria, but also point out that foreign language proficiency and work experience abroad, as well as study abroad experiences, are important criteria for hiring formerly mobile students.

#### 4.5. The employment situation

Only 25% of the former Erasmus of the late 1980s (*Study A*) believed that their study period abroad contributed to a higher income than that of the formerly non-mobile students. This proportion fell to 22% among the respondents of the later

study (*Study B*) and to only 16% of those of the most recent study (*Study C*) – in the third case even slightly lower than the proportion of those assuming that they had a lower income.

Another representative survey undertaken in 2005 of graduates from various European countries who had graduated around 2000, took into consideration not only mobility during the course of study, but also shortly after graduation. Accordingly,

- graduates who had been temporarily mobile (only) during the course of study, earned 11% more;
- those who were internationally mobile (only) after graduation, earned 9% more;
- those who were internationally mobile both during the course of study and after graduation, earned 14% more than graduates who had not been internationally mobile at all (see Allen & van der Velden, 2011). One has to bear in mind, though, that this difference might be partly due to the fact that some of those working only have a higher income as a temporary allowance for work abroad.

These small income advantages might be disappointing for those hoping that temporary study in another country is an entry ticket to top careers. But, after all, Erasmus is a programme providing public support for additional study expenses in another country. It facilitates study abroad in many respects without requiring substantial individual monetary and non-monetary “investment”. Such a support programme can be viewed as successful, if it contributes to European and international competences and to related work assignments, rather than promising a higher status and a higher salary.

About five years after the study period in another country, i.e. less than three years on average on the job, the transition to employment is not completed by all former Erasmus participants, and not all have reached a stable employment situation. In comparing the three surveys, we note:

- an unemployment quota at the time of the survey of 4% of those in the first study (*Study A*), 3% in the second study (*Study B*) and 6% in the third study (*Study C*);
- 10%, 7% and 10% were employed part-time;
- 27%, 27% and 35% were employed on a temporary contract.

Available information suggests that temporary employment of graduates during their early career has increased in Europe in general. Therefore, there is no evidence that international study experience is a cause for the increased proportion of temporary employment among former Erasmus students.

#### 4.6. *Links between study and subsequent work*

Altogether, 61% of the former Erasmus participants surveyed in *Study C* stated that they use the knowledge acquired in the course of study to a high extent. In the previous surveys, no significant differences could be found in this respect between formerly mobile and formerly non-mobile students.

The Erasmus experience was viewed as having had a positive influence on the graduates' work tasks some years later by 49% of the respondents of the first survey (*Study A*), 44% of the respondents of the second survey (*Study B*) and 39% of the respondents of the third survey (*Study C*). Thus, the positive influence of Erasmus on later work tasks decreased over the years, according to the former Erasmus students' perception.

As already mentioned, one of the most visible influences of Erasmus on subsequent employment is the high rate of those working internationally or in an international environment. Actually, 18% of the respondents of the first survey, 20% of those of the second survey and again 18% of those of the most recent survey reported that they were employed in a country different from the country of graduation for at least some time after graduation. This compares with only about 3% of all highly qualified Europeans employed in another European country than that of their nationality.

An international working environment is indicative for the work situation of former Erasmus students. The majority of respondents of the recent survey stated that understanding of foreign cultures was an important element of their work assignment, and about two thirds named working with people of different cultures and communicating in foreign languages as important. However, less than half of the former Erasmus students responding in any of the three surveys stated that their work tasks were to a high extent internationally visible according the five areas addressed in Table 4. Over the years, this proportion declined. For example, using the language of the host country frequently on the job fell from 47% to 42% and eventually to 38%. Similarly, frequent use of knowledge of the culture and society of the host country was reported by 30% and thereafter even by 32%, but declined to 24% in the third survey.

The surveys show that former students from all fields of study underscore the importance of their international competences for their work. The differences by field turned out to be smaller than conventional wisdom suggests. For example, professional knowledge of other countries (e.g. economical, sociological, legal knowledge) was considered most often, as one could expect, as important for their current work by those students having graduated from humanities and business studies (52% each), but this was also stated by a substantial proportion of graduates from natural sciences (31%) and medical fields (32%, according to *Study C*). Also knowledge or understanding of international differences in culture and socie-

**Table 4.** Erasmus-related work tasks of former Erasmus students: A comparison between various surveys (percentages of employed graduates)

|  | ERASMUS<br>students 1988/89<br>surveyed 1993<br>(Study A) | Graduates<br>1994/95<br>surveyed 1999<br>(Study B) | ERASMUS<br>students 2000/01<br>surveyed 2005<br>(Study C) |
|--|---|--|---|
| Using the language of the<br>host country orally                 | 47  | 42   | 38  |
| Using the language of the host<br>country in reading and writing | 47  | 40   | 38  |
| Using first-hand professional<br>knowledge of host country       | 30  | 25   | 25  |
| Using first-hand knowledge<br>of host country culture/society    | 30  | 32   | 24  |
| Professional travel to<br>host country                           | 17  | 18   | 14  |

Question F6 (2005): To what extent do the responsibilities of your work involve the following? Responses 1 and 2 on a scale from 1 = to a very high extent to 5 = not at all.

Source: Janson, Schomburg & Teichler, 2009

ty, modes of behaviour, lifestyles, etc., was viewed as important, as one might expect, by many of those graduating from humanities (68%), but also not infrequently by those from natural sciences (40%). Further, the proportion of those considering the ability to work with people from different cultural programmes as important for their work ranged from 71% in business studies to 60% in natural sciences. Finally, the number who named ability to communicate in foreign languages as important ranged between 74% by former Erasmus students of business studies and 61% of those in medical fields.

Overall therefore, the professional value of the Erasmus period in another European country, and the resulting knowledge and understanding of the host culture and society, seems to be somewhat in decline.

## 5. Concluding observations

A temporary study period undertaken in another European country certainly turns out to be professionally valuable. As surveys of former Erasmus students undertaken in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

show, the majority of them believe that their understanding of foreign cultures and societies in general or specifically of the host country is important. Their international experience seems to have been helpful for most of them in getting employed for the first time. A substantial proportion, even though less than half, consider their work tasks to be linked to their study experiences and are strongly involved in visibly international activities (e.g. utilizing foreign language, communicating with foreigners, utilizing knowledge on other countries, etc.). Moreover, students mobile during the course of study are by far more frequently internationally mobile during the first few years of their career than their colleagues who had not been mobile during the course of study. Thus, temporary student mobility seems to be effective in preparing students for an increasingly internationalizing world.

Not only the majority of formerly mobile students, but also the majority of teachers in higher education and the majority of employers believe that internationally experienced students turn out to be superior in many professionally relevant competences: general academic competences, professional knowledge and various communicative skills and personality features. Also, formerly mobile students reach slightly higher positions and a slightly higher income than formerly non-mobile students.

These findings vary somewhat by field of study as well as by the formerly mobile students' home and host country. As regards field of study, these differences are smaller than conventional wisdom suggests. As regards country, however, one finding stands out which was not discussed in this article: Former Erasmus students from Central and Eastern European countries reported a high professional value for temporary study substantially more often than former Erasmus students from Western European countries. In the Central and Eastern European countries, study experience in another European country clearly was a more exclusive experience ensuring a higher professional reward – at least in the years addressed in the three studies examined. This indicates that study in Western Europe on the part of students from Central and Eastern European countries is often interpreted as upward vertical mobility (i.e. not as horizontal mobility which seems to dominate in student mobility between Western European countries).

The slight superiority of formerly mobile students over non-mobile students as regards general competences, professional knowledge, personality, income, professional position, etc., cannot necessarily be viewed only as an impact of temporary study abroad. Rather, it might be explained to some extent as a “selection effect”, because the available studies show as well that a slightly above average number of formerly mobile students have parents with high income and high educational attainment, and also had international experiences more often already, before embarking in higher education study.

Altogether, temporary mobility cannot be viewed as a magic tool for career enhancement. It is nonetheless a successful means to strengthen abilities needed in

the growing number of job roles with visible international work tasks as well as work tasks requiring understanding of other cultures and lifestyles. The moderate effect in those directions might be viewed as disappointing as regards some expectations, but certainly it is a success according to the core objectives of Europeanisation and internationalisation policies in higher education.

There is one finding, however, that suggests some caution in assessing the overall professional value of temporary study abroad. The professional value of the Erasmus experience turns out to be more modest for recent generations of students than for those having studied in another European country some time ago. It seems that temporary study in another country offers an exclusive experience to a lesser extent now than some years ago, and that visibly international work assignments grow to a lesser extent than the proportion of internationally experienced graduates.

This finding of decreasing “value added” of temporary student mobility might be explained as being caused by a declining exceptionality of international experiences (see Janson, Schomburg & Teichler, 2009). Over the years, students have achieved increasing international experiences outside higher education even if they do not spend a period of study in another country. In addition, the students’ chances to have international experiences at their home institutions of higher education increase with growing opportunities of contact with academic staff and students from other countries as well as growing efforts to strengthen international dimensions of the home curriculum, for example undertaken under the label “internationalisation at home”.

One might draw the conclusion that temporary study experience in another country will not grow consistently alongside the increasing professional relevance of international competences. Rather, targeted curricular efforts will be needed to ensure that temporary study abroad will be a clearly more promising environment for students who later will play an important role in the internationalising world of work.

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