

MODEL WESTMINSTER

EU Balance of Competences Review



Submission by Model Westminster
17th June 2014

What is Model Westminster?

Model Westminster is a UK based social enterprise, which focuses on providing an educational, introduction to the policy-making process. To do this, Model Westminster uses a simulatory technique to educate participants about how societies biggest challenges are solved. Model Westminster will provide students with the opportunity to design tangible policy proposals whilst gaining an understanding of the structural and agency arrangements of British government.

This year Model Westminster's main event will take 150 of the brightest and best students from 15 boroughs across London and immerse them into a two-day policy-making conference, due to be held in Autumn 2014. Over the course of two days, students will tackle both a local and pan-London challenge. Each student will have to manage and represent a different stakeholder engaged in the policy-making process.

Through an intense and academically rigorous event, the participants will have to; 1) compile research, 2) analyse and present vast amounts of quantitative and qualitative data and 3) critically assess empirical and anecdotal evidence, all whilst considering the short and long-term implications for their stakeholder. The legacy of Model Westminster will see the publishing of a co-authored report - outlining the participants' practical policy solutions for the range of issues they have worked on.

Fifi Kara is the Founder & Director of Model Westminster Ltd

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Model Westminster
RPD International
Suite 1.3
Millbank Tower
Westminster
London,
SW1P 4PQ

T: +44 70 7707 0774
E: hello@modelwestminster.org.uk
www.modelwestminster.org.uk





EU BALANCE OF COMPETENCES REVIEW

EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND YOUTH

Edited by Fifi Kara



AUTHORS

Abigail Heywood
Abigail Murray
Agatka Cienciala
Aisha Lama
Alice Dermody-Palmer
Amir Suleman
Angel Layer
Anwulika Elliott
Chante Joseph
Chloe Jackson
Ciara Ellie
Daniel Grishin
Dario Pietro Celaschi
Ellie Emberson
Faheem Ahmed
George Webster
Hugh Turton
Ife Grillo
Jacob Kent - Ledger
Jamie Hilder
Khandsuren Erdenebat
Lauren Richardson
Malvina Bala
Matthew Otubu
Mehvash Amna Ahmad
Natalia Rowczenio
Prabhjot Kaur
Sarah Crothers
Theo Wilson
Thursa Donlevy
Tite-Live Wasolua Kibeti
Wasim Ali
William Fade
Yasmin Rufo
Yousif Alawoad



Introduction

On 17th June 2014, Model Westminster convened a diverse group of students to feed into the EU Balance of Competence Review around Education, Vocational Training and Youth. This was hosted at the Department for Education and supported by the Office for Civil Society (Cabinet Office). The event sought to engage a diverse and ordinarily unlikely audience with the Department for Education's public consultation and the wider Balance of Competences Review across government. The following report is a collation of a series of discussion and activities that occurred on the day.

Outline of the day

The morning of the event was dedicated to a debate surrounding Britain's membership within EU and whether or not the advantageous aspect of EU membership outweighed what we regarded as negatives. The exercise was used to stimulate the group of students and introduce them to the elements of the EU, including its governance and leadership structures, it was also used to draw out various pieces of evidence which was used for the following report and a means of influence for looking at aspects of the EU more closely. During the afternoon the students were split into 5 teams and asked to work in their groups to redesign the Erasmus+ funding programme. Thinking about making it more accessible to students and individuals within the UK, as well as prioritising and allocating sections of the funding to certain areas that they thought would be more beneficial to EU member countries, such as the UK. At the end of the day, the teams presented their ideal funding programmes and were questioned on the reasoning and logic behind their ideas. The event ended by looking at the UK's educational aims in regards to closing the geographical attainment gap between the north and south, as this was not directly related to the consultation it has been omitted from this report.

End of Section.

Education and Training Response

8.1 Does EU action, as opposed to national government action, in the areas of education and vocational training generally benefit or disadvantage the UK? Can you point us to any published evidence or analysis in support of your view?

EU action in regards to education and vocational training can be looked at in two ways. Firstly, education policy within the EU is managed individually, by member states. The European Union acts as an assistive body to a number of areas within education, for the purpose of this review we have assessed the usefulness of EU's competence in regards to the following priority;

According to Article 165 of the "Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union", the Community "shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States, through actions such as promoting the mobility of citizens, designing joint study programmes, establishing networks, exchanging information or teaching languages of the European Union"

The most notable aspect of the EU which seeks to achieve this aim, is the recently released Erasmus+ programme. Our findings revealed the following:

[1.1] Student Mobility

In the year 2010-2011 the UK was the fourth most popular destination for inbound students, sharing 10.2% of the total 39,300 inbound students. (Europa, November 2013) Arguably the popularity of the UK amongst students within the EU is an added benefit in a number of ways. From an ambassadorial prospective, students whom study within the UK have an understanding of the UK's culture and practices, which can be promoted overseas to promote better business practice and collaborations between countries upon graduate employment. Secondly, student exchanges to the UK promote trust, which lead to positive perceptions of the UK, this ensures that the UK is a preferred or desirable member state to trade, work or carry our diplomacy with. Lastly, the positive aspects of the Erasmus programme and the UK being amongst the five most popular destinations for study, is the economy, there is




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Organisation Overview

The following process, which focuses on growing all...
...the opportunity to design, develop and...
...the opportunity to design, develop and...

a greater probability that those who have studied within the UK will stay in full-time employment under the title of 'skilled migrant' whom will aid British employers and employees.

[1.2] Employment

The second way to assess EU education programmes is through employment. Erasmus allows the combination of a work placement with a study exchange. In the academic year 2011-12, a total of 438 students undertook a combined placement, which represents a decrease of 25 % compared to the previous year. This decline follows a 8.5 % drop recorded the year before. The highest number of students on a combined placement came from Germany, followed by Belgium and the United Kingdom. (Europa, November 2013)

Although the work placement combined with study programme has experienced a decline since the previous year of assessment, the UK ranked as one of the highest countries to provide the opportunity. We have argued that greatest benefit to the UK in respect to study-abroad exchange programs can be experienced when coupled with opportunities that involve off-campus activities such as work experience or internships. Enabling students to work whilst studying can ensure greater immersion into UK culture and the ability to spend time with those who aren't from a similar exchange programme or a cohort which has derived from the country of origin the participant has come from. Furthermore, we found that including work experiences with study abroad programmes does increase the likelihood of wanting to stay within the UK and use the UK as a part of one's career ambitions and attaining career fulfilment. In terms of the UK achieving its aims, the Erasmus programme enables employers to have wider access to skilled employees from overseas. This enables greater access to global networks and business opportunities from the experience and knowledge received from alumni and graduates of those who have participated in the Erasmus programme.

Therefore, we have concluded that in response to social mobility and employment within the UK, the EU Erasmus programme can be seen to be an added benefit for the UK's national interest. However, the following section outlines the drawbacks we found in regards to the Erasmus programme for native students.

[2.1] The UK citizen experience of Erasmus+?

In terms of engagement within the Erasmus programme, the EU could improve the recognisability and scope of awareness surrounding the various opportunities available through the Erasmus+ exchange, work and funding programmes. Of the forty students sampled within the Model Westminster consultation only one participant had experience of an Erasmus programme. We argue that the following areas of the EU's erasmus programme should be improved in order to benefit the UK.

Greater awareness should be provided by schools, colleges and HE institutions, most importantly we felt that the Erasmus+ (current and previous) programmes had failed to raise sufficient awareness to students aged 11-18 who attend secondary and further education institutions. Therefore the Erasmus programme and funding opportunities are inherently regarded as something for those within University education, this has excluded a large proportion of the population who are eligible for aspects of the programme. Furthermore, there was little evidence to suggest that those who have participated within Erasmus+ programmes returned to the UK or received enough public awareness surrounding their experiences.

Secondly, we argue that the Erasmus programme should be more skills based to compliment the formal education supplied by the programmes on offer. This will ensure that participants have transferable skills which are valuable for future employment and participating within an ever-growing global community.

Thirdly, we assessed the relationship between NEET's and the EU Erasmus programme. The UK is a member state which is regarded as having a problem with youth unemployment, which currently stands at 853,000 (16-24 year olds). (Dar, Parliament UK, 2014) Citizens who fall under the category of 'NEET' are missing out in developing valuable skills for future employment which can provide sustainable career opportunities and experiences which fulfils one's life. Our evidence found that the Erasmus programme needed to place greater emphasis on NEETs, in order to comply and assist with our national interests.

The Erasmus+ programme currently offers support to NEET individuals, it states it 'will promote flexible and innovative cooperation between youth NGOs, for

mal education institutions, especially vocational ones, and employment services. These groups will have the chance to design new integration pathways to the labour market and share the best of what is being done across Europe.' (Vassiliou, Europa, 2014) We argue that the Erasmus+ programme fails to reach out to and connect to NEET individuals directly, instead there should be specific programmes which tackle youth unemployment and a lack of training. The EU and the Erasmus programme suffer from a lack of recognisability, especially within the UK, arguably it may be useful to use services within the UK which already deal with NEET issues, however, in terms of efficiency and ability to produce results in the simplest way, the Erasmus+ programme fails to directly tackle the NEET issue.

Lastly, we felt as though promoting languages and bilingualism within UK HE institutions was not as formidable as it could be, multilingualism is regarded as an essential skill especially in regards to the EU, whereby our freedom of movement enables an abundance of opportunities. Therefore, the Erasmus programme should work with educational institutions to encourage the usefulness and teaching of various languages within the EU.

End of Section.





Department
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Model Westminster is an after-school programme which gives students the opportunity to develop their understanding of politics and government through a series of workshops and debates. It is open to all students aged 14-18 across London through the opportunity to participate in a case study.

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8.2 Do you think the EU focuses on the right aims and priorities in the Youth field?

Although member states are responsible for the learning and lifelong training aspects for their nations 'young people' the EU has some influence in regards to financial and non-financial support which can be provided to member-state organisations and individuals to achieve a certain number of aims.

In regards to the skills gap, the EU has a specific interest in the training and employment of young people, stating 'among young people in the EU, about 20% are not reaching minimum levels of basic skills in reading, maths and science. Six million are leaving education and training with only lower secondary education or less.' (Europa, March 2014)

In the UK there is a particular issue with the skills gap and its harmful effect on young employable individuals, most recently a survey released by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills warned that 22% of the 559,600 vacancies advertised in England were "skills shortage jobs". This suggests that the EU is currently focusing on a priority for the UK and the wider area of the EU. In terms of funding it provides via Erasmus+ more could be done to tackle skills gaps explicitly and ensuring that educators within the UK have the capacity to train and provide the necessary skills for students which would aid their employability opportunities.

On the other hand, we also looked at the issue of education being the only route for beneficial and fulfilling employment within the UK, it was argued that more could be done to support those who have not attended university and planned to enter the job market after formal, compulsory education.

The Erasmus+ programme currently supports a great deal of university students throughout the entirety of the EU, however the awareness and public understanding of Erasmus has failed to include those who are not in education or at university, this alone has acted as a barrier for support and funding for those arguable in the most need of gaining certain qualifications and skills that the EU programmes and Erasmus+ funding would provide.

8.3 What do you think about the criteria and conditions set by the EU for applying for and receiving funding?

Our consultation focused on the funding programmes for people aged between 16-24, who are seeking funding for various projects to promote EU aims within their countries of origin. We found that on average the EU funding criteria was extensive and excluded those who may not fit one aspect of the criteria, or may be unaware as to how to obtain that aspect of their application. The bureaucracy involved with the funding available for UK students can act as a strong deterrent for those wanting to apply, especially for SME's or new social enterprises.

[1.1] Erasmus Placements

On 22 March 2012, the House of Lords European Union Committee released a publication on The Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe. The report expresses concern on the low levels of UK student outward mobility, and proposes that universities and the commission should promote mobility opportunities and make Erasmus placements more flexible. (Wit, 2012)

We argued that the Erasmus programme is less focused on providing opportunities which are 'open for all' but is now a bureaucratic exercise which places unnecessary levels of constraint and difficulty to those looking to apply. Students of Erasmus funding experience many obstacles from both their host university and university of origin, in regards to receiving financial aid and at what period throughout the year, this can prove incredibly difficult for those solely reliant on the EU funding for all means on support.

The EU should review the criteria and application process for EU funding programmes to ensure more groups and individuals apply, thus achieve its aims both for the EU and the member states.

End of Section.

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Model Westminster Ltd, it's partner organisations, agents or associates.



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