



EFOS

European Federation of Older Students in Universities
Europäische Vereinigung älterer Studierender an den Universitäten
Fédération Européenne des Etudiants Âgés aux Universités



www.efos-europa.eu

(translated from German)

Assen, November 6, 2012

Mrs. Androulla Vassiliou,
Commissioner for Education and Culture
BERL, 10/113
Brussels
Belgium

Re: "Erasmus for All" Programme

Dear Madam,

In view of the current demographic changes within Europe, - the nature of which should be a major issue for the European Commission's new funding period for life-long learning, beginning in 2014, - we observe with great concern the proposed changes in the "Grundtvig" support programme which until now has been successful. Grundtvig is the only European Commission programme which offers funding for learning projects for and with older people in retirement. The planned integration of this support programme within the new comprehensive "Erasmus for All" programme is justifiable provided that the specific terms and conditions for the funding of the learning projects for and with older people are formulated adequately and in sufficient detail and the relevant funding is designated. We do not see this in the current draft proposals under discussion. We fear that projects for older people will compete with those for young people and that the projects for older people will on principle receive the lowest priority. We do not see a clearly designated budget for projects for older people and for intergenerational support programmes without age limits, which are urgently required for purposes of demographic development.

The *European Federation of Older Students in Universities* (EFOS) is the largest international organisation in Europe for third age learning. At their last General Meeting on October 4, 2012 in Wroclaw/Breslau the 16 affiliated institutions and 20 individual members from 9 countries instructed me to send the present letter to you.

When amending or extending the funding programmes for life-long learning we request that you consider our following recommendations and the reasons for them:

1. The future funding of learning projects (learning partnerships) for and with older people (without age limits) should be increased relative to the previous Grundtvig programme (in terms of budget and number of projects), because this target group - measured in terms of its increasing proportion of the total population - is continuing to grow and because at present too few learning projects are being implemented with the goal of influencing demographic change through and with this target group of older people. They therefore require additional support. At the same time this could give a clear signal that the older generation is needed and involved in the continuous process of social change.

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2. Gerontological research (see Simm 2011) shows that the average age for the onset of dementia in older people who regularly engage in complex learning projects is increased by one year. Other research projects also show that third age learning has an important function in the prevention of geriatric diseases. It has therefore an additional importance for public health and the economy, which in decision making is frequently not recognised or considered, or, if it is, inadequately.
3. The learning partnerships and other projects known to us which in recent years have been funded within the framework of the Grundtvig Programme have made necessary and important contributions to an improved understanding between older people from different European countries and to the further development of the European identity of older people.
4. Older people in particular have been important contemporary witnesses of developments within Europe in recent decades and are able to convey their personal experiences to the younger generation. Their experiences are particularly valuable for the stabilisation and continued development of the European Union. They are an important means of explaining the history of recent decades to young people and of motivating and activating them to achieve European unity.
5. It is of particular importance to support political and cultural learning projects involving both older people and young people with the goal of increasing the involvement of the general population in European cooperation and extending the scope of cultural activities within the EU.
6. In order to mitigate current disadvantages, the selection of projects and the provision of content require particular emphasis to be placed on the integration of older people from rural areas, those who are migrants and those with special needs.
7. In selecting projects to be funded older experts should also be involved, who from personal experience have knowledge of the needs and life experiences of the older generation.
8. In order to ensure a long lasting European network of national organisations in the field of third age learning, relevant institutions such as EFOS should receive long term support from the European Commission and national governments.

In support of our concerns we enclose our EFOS Manifesto of July 17, 2012.

Yours truly,

Peter Hug
President

Enclosed: EFOS Manifesto