



**EUROPEAN
STUDENT
CARD
INITIATIVE**

European Student Card Initiative Stakeholder Governance

Meeting report March – April 2023

Written by the EWP+ (Erasmus Without Paper) Consortium

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About this report

This short report provides an overview of all Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) forums meetings in March and April 2023 and summarises the most important discussion points and findings. The report is for EWP users in higher education institutions and other stakeholders. It gives an overview of the discussions in the different EWP governance bodies which underpin the decision-making on the further developments of the EWP Network. Keep in mind that not all of the bodies meet every month. Therefore, the report does not include a summary from all forums.

A description of each of the forums (and how often they meet) can be found on the ESCI Portal: [here](#).

1. Topics discussed across bodies

Erasmus Without Paper practical guidelines

Publication of practical guidelines on learning agreements and inter-institutional agreements in the Knowledge base (under resources). These guidelines consist of a set of concrete steps and tips that are applicable in the context of the daily work of the International Relations Office and decentralised internationalisation services. An article series called *Implementing EWP Series* supplements the guidelines. In these articles, colleagues reflect on their experience with implementing EWP. They share success stories, as well as challenges they overcame. It is meant as a source of inspiration for institutions implementing EWP. The articles can be found on the EWP Competence Centre under [resources](#).

State of play of the EWP Champions initiative

The Erasmus+ National Agencies shared an open call for higher education institutions to participate in the EWP Champions Initiative. These HEIs will share their good practices in implementing EWP. They will also help shape further developments based on their experiences. The initiative will give visibility at the EU level to institutions that have been early adopters and put in great efforts to implement EWP. This helps to showcase the benefits of digitalisation and ways to overcome common challenges

User feedback on the enrolment of the EWP Dashboard enhancements

Survey on the enhanced version of the EWP Dashboard: Colleagues using the EWP Dashboard are positive about the improvements. They find it easier to use, the interface looks better and they are likely to use it more.

- Positive improvements include: 1) Ease of use and clarity, 2) Improved design, 3) New Download options, 4) Filtering Options, and 5) Performance.
- Areas for improvement include: 1) More filter and search options, 2) Faculty-specific views, 3) Login with HEI credentials, 4) Interface translation in local languages, and 5) Download IIA in xls/csv

2. Business Process Owners Forum

This forum represents international relations officers in higher education institutions (HEI). The following topics were discussed during two meetings of the Business Process Owners Forum Standing Expert Group (BPO-SEG) in March and April:

- Nominations via EWP network: There is consensus among colleagues on suggesting nominations as to the next step on the digitalisation agenda, provided systems have been extensively tested beforehand. Furthermore, the 'confirmation of stay' including dates, would be helpful. Colleagues also discussed a draft document presenting the potential evolution of processes once nominations are supported via EWP.
- The use and promotion of the Erasmus+ App: Colleagues discussed how to optimise the role of the Erasmus+ App within the mobility process and increase the use of the Erasmus+ App by students.
- IIA and LA state of play: Although the BPO-SEG members saw some improvements in the IIA workflow, the number of approved IIAs via EWP is still low. LAs in general work well but many colleagues still have a fragmented process mainly due to institutions not yet using EWP to manage incoming and outgoing learning agreements.
- Discussion on aspects in EWP to be clarified: The colleagues discussed specific examples of what needs to be clarified in the formal global end user manual under preparation. A key issue raised was IIAs for BIPs. Colleagues have different experiences when organising BIPs with partners where some require a specific IIA for the related mobilities and others do not. As a follow-up action, a discussion in the EWP User Groups was suggested to collect more information on the reasons behind the different practices.
- Expansion of activities: Members welcome more regular EWP User Groups consultations. Colleagues discussed ideas to improve the consultation process in the groups and how to promote and activate the forum more.
- Potential of digitalisation: Full potential of digitalisation is not always used, for example in the case of Factsheets. This is mostly due to limited capacity in the institutions, not a lack of interest. Most HEIs need to prioritise aspects of EWP implementation and with the challenges of the IIAs in particular, other aspects have been postponed.

EWP User Groups

Survey on Factsheets in EWP User Groups (44 replies): Most responders use third-party provider systems, followed by the Dashboard. Nearly 100% agree that the factsheets and automatic updates via EWP are useful. However, around 50% of HEIs are not using factsheets for varying reasons. Meetings with developers and universities are planned to understand better how factsheets are (not) being used and how to unlock the benefits for all HEIs.

Membership: 242 new members joined since the start of 2023. Most new registrations are from Spain (56), Italy (31) and Austria (25). In total, there are 1458 users registered on the platform. The relationship managers will develop a promotional flyer that can be shared by

the community, National Agencies, and the EWP Consortium to foster greater engagement.

Consultations: Three consultations (on IIA deletion, factsheets, IIA statuses) have been completed in the EWP User Groups. The next consultation will be on the interpretation and display of IIA statuses and validity, because partners reported that there is lack of clarity as to when agreements are valid. Also, statuses are not displayed in a uniform way across diverse systems.

3. Digital Officers Forum

This Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) forum represents Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) and National Authorities (NAUs) of EU Member States and third countries associated to the Erasmus+ Programme. The Digital Officers Forum met two times in March and April. The following topics were discussed in the DOs forum:

- Feedback on EWP Champions concept: The colleagues support proactively involving HEIs in optimising processes in EWP (even if the concrete approach is still being developed). DOs see the initiative as a good approach for positive communication on EWP/ESCI, emphasising the advantages of digitalisation and promoting examples on how to address digitalisation challenges at the institutional level.
- The role of NAs and NAUs in the ESCI: The DO colleagues welcome the idea for a physical meeting in 2023. High on the agenda is to share best-practices of other countries to better understand the priorities each national authority is placing on the different ESCI building blocks. For the successful implementation of some components of the ESCI, clear support from member states representatives is needed.
- Note to NA directors on the timeline of digitalisation: The note (which explains the timeline and next steps) brought some relief. It addressed the concerns of HEIs regarding the difficulty in achieving implementation targets. However, it also showed the importance of a central information source. The ESCI portal is the primary source to find information on EWP. Institutions looking for the latest updates, can find them there.
- Report on the Mobility Management System usage: There is gradual improvement in the usability of EWP. Nevertheless, the MMS Report shows that a large number of HEIs are still using two EWP solutions. This could also affect questions about migration from one EWP solution to the other.
- Transparency: A clear wish of the DOs is to be more informed about the discussion status in the other governance bodies. Here, more transparency is desired at the operational level in order to be able to collaborate on the actual goal of making the full potential of ESCI/EWP available to the HEIs.
- Risk of overburdening IROs: The experience with the implementation of digital IIA and digital LAs was far from optimal. DOs stress that any further efforts should take into account the working context (other horizontal priorities of the E+ programme, Beneficiary Module, etc.) and the wider dependencies on other HEI departments (IT, Examinations Office, etc.) in which the IROs' staff find themselves. Especially for smaller HEIs and low staffing levels, the Erasmus+ programme needs to remain accessible.

4. Infrastructure Forum

The Infrastructure Forum is the meeting place for the EWP technical community: IT colleagues in higher education institutions and from 3rd-party software providers. In the course of March and April the Infrastructure Forum met twice. Also, a technical workshop for developers of in-house systems took place in Thessaloniki (30-31 March). The target audience of the workshop were IT developers from higher education institutions.

Important developments discussed with IT colleagues:

- Long-term planning: A proposal has been put forward for more long-term planning of API updates and improvements. In 2023, the focus will be on improving IIAs and to give users the possibility to modify, terminate and delete IIAs through the EWP Network. The factsheet API and the Learning Agreement API will be the focus in 2024, ensuring better alignment across all systems and with updated EAC templates.
- The termination and modification of IIA: Discussion among members on the results of a survey among providers regarding the most optimal approach for implementing the termination and modification of IIAs. The proposed solutions will be evaluated and included in the mandatory business requirements for IIAs.
- Statistics: There is an increase in both the number of HEIs connected to EWP and HEIs exchanging data via EWP. The increase in number of HEIs exchanging is higher than in the numbers of newly connected. In contrast, the number of HEIs actively using EWP to exchange IIAs and LAs started out low, and saw a gradual increase. However, statistics shows that there is still way to go as a majority of exchanges (IIAs and/or LAs) happens outside of EWP for HEIs.
- Monitoring: The monitoring API is already delivering useful data. It is now possible to trace how long errors stay in the network. It is becoming clear that the removal of known errors is rather slow. This will remain a crucial point of discussion with the different providers.
- Restructuring of the network: Move from 'one host many HEIs' to 'one host one HEI' model finalised, with the Registration Portal taking over as a source of registered manifest files. This allows governance to be put in the hands of HEIs.
- Updates in API specifications: Working on changes to optimise specifications is not made easy by the fact that only a small group of providers participate in GitHub discussions. Additionally, the discussion is not always geared to finding a consensus acceptable to all. The colleagues shared that collaborative effort is essential in order to find compromises and practical solutions that benefit end users as a whole.
- How to join procedure: Some providers and HEIs are slow in implementing rules of the 'How to join procedure'. To date, only a small number of HEIs have implemented the EWP admin attribute.

5. University and Students Forum

The University and Students Forum represents University Networks, European University Alliances and European student organisations. It meets twice a year.

There were two main discussion points among the colleagues:

How to support HEIs in fully implementing IIAs and LAs? Members suggest to strengthen communication and engagement of stakeholders of the Higher Education Community to support the adoption of EWP:

- Allocate more time to coordinate with University Networks who are willing to help promote EWP related activities and initiatives (e.g., participation in EWP user groups).
- Strengthen and invest in closer cooperation with European University Alliances.

Key ideas for improving the mobile student experience: A fruitful discussion emerged around the question of 'how could digitalisation improve the mobile students' experience?'

- The forum members emphasise the need for a much greater focus on reducing bureaucracy for students.
- The colleagues strongly believe that the benefits of digitisation for students can also provide a holistic experience in student exchanges, for example by integrating local services.
- Similarly, colleagues consider the further development of the Erasmus+ App to be integral towards both objectives (reduce bureaucracy and integration of local services).

6. Advisory Board

The Erasmus Without Paper Advisory Board consists of external experts in education and digital technologies. The AB meets twice a year. The University of Gent hosted a physical meeting on 9 March.

The main takeaways and discussion points from the meeting include:

- Conformance testing: Efficient conformance testing is essential in order to roll out new phases of the EWP implementation (i.e., nominations and transcript of records). The documents that describe the business requirements for providers should contribute to establishing a comprehensive process of conformance testing.
- Metrics and indicators: Metrics of success are important to better monitor the process as well as map where the issues lie.
- Mandatory Business Requirements: Basic requirements and interoperability standards should be mandatory and communicated as part of the overall EU approach to digitalisation.
- Interoperability: Interoperability has to be seen in light of what the EU as a whole is doing in terms of interoperability. There is a EU digital strategy, which comprises several action fields. ESCI should present itself as part of the bigger strategic plan of EC on digitisation. It is not a standalone initiative, but part of a larger framework for the future.
- Digital Maturity of IT processes: There are various levels of digital maturity. Digitalisation uncovers the friction that was there in the first place. Inertia is strong when it comes to the institutionalisation of new bureaucratic processes. The transitional period is also an opportunity to solve inefficiencies that are part of the mobility process as a whole.
- Existing tools: Existing EU tools that currently are external to the EWP ecosystem, should be integrated in EWP but avoiding disruption when transitioning to a 'new' overall system.

7. Stakeholders and Business Governance Board (SBGB)

The Stakeholder and Business Governance Board (SBGB) consists of the chairs of the EWP governance forums and has quarterly meetings. The purpose of the board is to present and discuss the main outcomes of meetings in different governance bodies over the preceding four months and to translate them into recommendations and proposed actions for DG EAC.

Representatives of DG EAC attend the meetings as observers and to ask questions. This allows for effectively transmitting proposals to the ESCI steering committee which will take decisions on which proposals to accept.

Overview of discussions during the SBGB meeting on 23 March:

- Each governance body representative reported on three important developments and three concerns and/or recommendations relating to what we have learned since the start of the FWC.
- Members discussed approaches to better measure and monitor progress in implementing EWP
- Suggested ways forward in terms of timing, strategy and risks related to the following points to improve EWP:
 - Exclusion measures for non-compliant nodes
 - Revising APIs to improve performance and interoperability based on users feedback
 - Increasing digitalisation momentum by introducing new features

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