

Green Paper

Strategies to strengthen collaboration in Higher Education between Europe and the Caribbean

Produced by the CaribErasmus project (Erasmus Mundus)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Increasing globalisation has led to more international academic competition, but also to new academic opportunities and partnership possibilities. Through the Bologna Process¹, the European Higher Education area has undergone far-reaching reforms adopting both a top-down approach, thanks to a new set of general policy frameworks, and from a bottom-up approach, thanks to the effort of the universities themselves, to adapt to these new circumstances, and to facilitate structural and administrative modernisation processes. In parallel, international Higher Education cooperation between Europe and other parts of the world has substantially increased in recent years, both in terms of mobility of students and staff and of “structural” cooperation.

One of the main instruments set up to foster cooperation and mobility in the field of Higher Education is the **Erasmus Mundus Programme**. The Programme was originally launched in December 2003 following the Decision of the European Parliament and Council to establish a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries. The Programme works towards the objectives of enhancing the quality of European HE through international cooperation; improving the development of human resources; promoting dialogue and understanding between peoples and cultures and promoting Europe as a centre of excellence in learning around the world.

By supporting the **CaribErasmus project** (see www.cariberasmus.eu for the project results) in the period 2001-2012, Erasmus Mundus wants to specifically contribute to increase academic collaboration and mobility between the EU and the Caribbean region. One of the most important outcomes of the project is the present **CaribErasmus Green Paper**, an effort to stimulate consultation and reflection among relevant stakeholders, in particular among decision-makers in the field of Higher Education from Europe and the Caribbean, on strategies to enhance cooperation between the two regions in the field of Higher Education. The Green Paper was conceived by the CaribErasmus consortium with the contribution of a number of stakeholders, and aims at providing a direct added value both to the EU-Caribbean ongoing cooperation process in the field of higher education and also to European and –above all – Caribbean students and stakeholders. The Green Paper is articulated in three main sections: the CaribErasmus vision, detailing “how cooperation should work”, followed by a brief analysis of the main challenges as emerging from desk research and consultation with stakeholders and by some practical proposals to enhance cooperation.

¹ The Bologna Process was launched in June 1999 as an intergovernmental initiative subscribed by 46 Ministries of Education and based on cooperation with higher education institutions, students, staff and international organisations. The Process aims at creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to allow harmonization among education systems,

2. THE CARIBERASMUS VISION²

We consider universities as natural champions of a “**non traditional integration**” among different countries and regions of the world. We refer to an integration that goes beyond economic and trade relationships and that implies knowledge creation and sharing in a perspective of mutual recognition as well as contribution to the development of society in an international perspective. Further, we consider students, researchers and professors’ **mobility** to impact positively in terms of institutions’ reciprocal **knowledge**, and to contribute to the establishment of praxes of mutual recognition of titles and qualifications. Mutual recognition increases **trust** among the parts and constitutes a step forward in the search for the best modalities to foster synergies and increase cooperation. Mobility itself should be framed into a broader strategy for scientific cooperation among the institutions involved in exchange and mobility programmes, and turn into a starting point to increase the **transfer of knowledge and technology**.

To achieve this goal, CaribErasmus considers the following four elements as essential:

- 1) A systemic and permanent/long term approach to cooperation, able to integrate and articulate the many – and not always collaborating – ongoing initiatives in both regions, so to maximise the impact of Higher Education cooperation within and between Europe and the Caribbean;
- 2) Encouraging collaboration and long-term partnerships among all involved stakeholders groups, starting from academics and universities and including companies, cultural associations and other civil society bodies: however ambitious it may sound, it traces a direction, given that the promotion of European universities alone is not enough, neither is the right approach, to build an inclusive Higher Education area across EU and the Caribbean.
- 3) Without undermining the importance of physical mobility of students and researchers new modalities and dimensions of collaboration should be considered and investigated, such as e-learning, virtual mobility, internationalisation of curricula through joint development and delivery of academic programmes leading to joint titles, mutual use of infrastructure.
- 4) Observing and understanding the attitudes, the opinions and the expectations of Caribbean Higher Education stakeholders towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is relevant. However, it is necessary to also take into consideration the opposite perspective, the European one towards the Caribbean. Hence, a systematic monitoring process on the perceptions of the respective systems involving the actors of both regions should be ensured.
- 5) International academic cooperation should be an instrument to strengthen the capacities of the organizations involved in intellectual, cultural, technological, scientific as well as social terms. Cooperation is a learning process in itself where all participating parts get to know one another and can complement each other.

² Adapted from C. Dondi, G. Alberti at al., 2008 “Contribución A Una Estrategia Innovadora Para Implementar El Espacio Comun De Educación Superior – Alcue”, http://www.value-project.eu/value/images/GreenPaperVALUE_ES.pdf.

3. IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES

A number of consultations run by the CaribErasmus project with experts, decisions makers and practitioners from the Caribbean and European Higher Education communities, have highlighted the following challenges which shall be taken into consideration when designing strategies to enhance cooperation:

- Higher Education is not a priority within the broad Europe-Caribbean policy dialogue, despite the existence of important bottom-up initiatives (such as the MUNDUS-ACP Erasmus Mundus network) and of strong bilateral national cooperation links. The heterogeneity of the Caribbean region, composed of European regions, growing economies such as Trinidad and very poor countries like Haiti is not helping a EU-Caribbean integrated dialogue.
- Multiple and uncoordinated frameworks of EU-Caribbean cooperation exist, with some Caribbean countries falling under the “LAC – Latin American and Caribbean” group of states and others under the “ACP – Africa Caribbean and Pacific” groups. In most cases, the coexistence of different schemes does not represent an asset but rather a source of divide among groups of Caribbean countries.
- Researchers and students from the Caribbean do not participate extensively in mobility programmes with Europe: the rates are slowly and steadily growing but are still below the achievements of other countries of Central America. Linguistic barriers to mobility exist, at the same time the number of programmes taught in English in Europe is increasingly exponentially.
- The Caribbean experiences a strong diaspora of professors and researchers, most of which are working in Europe and in the US: this issue should be looked at both as a challenge and as an opportunity, and should be considered in the present context of the global knowledge society and economy.
- The Caribbean Higher Education panorama is changing fast, with a growing number of Community Colleges and with quickly growing private universities. In this context, the two regional universities of the region (the University of the West Indies and the Université des Antilles et de la Guyane) can act both as facilitators of regional cooperation through Need to “open leadership models” or as “gatekeepers” towards the younger and smaller HE actors of the region.
- Economic developments in Europe and on a global scale might be affecting the whole process, therefore there is a need to look for robust solutions (ways of action) that would be sustainable even within this changing economical and political context.

4. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

With the aim of reaching the desired vision despite the existing challenges, the Green Paper proposes some actions that, if taken and properly monitored at the appropriate levels, could improve the way EU-Caribbean Higher Education cooperation works.

A) SMOOTHEN THE EU-CARIBBEAN HE COLLABORATION FRAMEWORK

- A.1 Coherence between the top-down political objectives (such as the one of building a common ALCUE area for HE) and the existing tools to support bottom-up cooperation should be increased, for example by opening the ALFA Programme to the Caribbean or by fostering cooperation between the LAC and the ACP schemes.
- A.2 We should make sure that adequate funding for the region is deployed. The specificities of the region, including high travelling costs and need for institutional capacity building, should be taken into account when planning cooperation programmes, for example within the ACP cooperation scheme. Whenever possible, specific calls for proposal shall be planned for EU-Caribbean HE cooperation, such as – but not limited to – EDULINK.

B) TRANSFER INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION CAPACITY FROM EUROPE TO THE CARIBBEAN

- B.1 Caribbean countries should be engaged in the Bologna Process, as a way to structurally increase academic cooperation and mobility between the two regions, possibly with a strong role for CARICOM. A “Bologna Event” could be organised targeted to the Caribbean region.
- B.2 Further support the existing efforts in terms of Caribbean academic networking and regional university programmes should be provided from Europe, both financially and through practices exchange. Strengthening the HE networks at the national and at the regional level in the Caribbean is a leverage to better EU-Caribbean cooperation.
- B.3 EU mobility schemes should be used to facilitate the mobility of Caribbean researchers working in Europe, even for limited periods, leveraging on the diaspora potential. A network of “Caribbean students/researchers abroad” could be created and supported.

C) WORK ON THE LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

- C.1 Cooperation should be monitored: a European Commission – CARICOM Yearly Meeting on Higher Education should be organised to facilitate monitoring of progress. This meeting should be an occasion for all stakeholders working on EU-Caribbean collaboration to meet and strengthen collaboration
- C.2 Internationalisation of Caribbean universities should be supported locally: capacity to cooperate with Europe and to take advantage of EU opportunities should be built within the Caribbean. The idea of creating units for cooperation with Europe within Caribbean universities should be explored.

5. NEXT STEPS

With the present Green Paper, the CaribErasmus project wants to contribute to a convergence process that should involve institutional actors and the most consolidated networks active in this field, and advocate that synergy can be created and a “federative” effort may bring academic cooperation much beyond the limited horizon of a closed coordination process among a few government representatives.

The present paper is proposed for discussion and consensus building to all those interested in the achievement of the EU-Caribbean Common Space of Higher Education, within and beyond existing bilateral cooperation schemes:

- European Commission
- CARICOM
- ACP Secretariat
- UNESCO-Kingston
- EURASHE
- European University Association
- Universia
- ESU (European Students Union)
- ACTI - Association of Caribbean Tertiary Level Institutios
- Caribbean Ministries of Education
- Ministerio de Educacion Superior, Cuba
- Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle, Haiti
- MESCYT, Dominican Republic
- Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (MSTTE), Trinidad & Tobago
- Ministry of Education, Jamaica.

If you wish to contribute to the discussion please contact Fabio Nascimbeni at fabio.nascimbeni@menon.org.

ANNEX: MORE ON THE CARIBERASMUS PROJECT

The CaribErasmus project aims to foster cooperation among European and Caribbean higher education institutions in a structured and sustainable perspective. At the end of this project, the expectation is that the network that is built from interactivity will be self-sustaining and a tool for driving EU-Caribbean cooperation.

In line with the ERASMUS MUNDUS logic, CaribErasmus intends to increase attractiveness of EU Higher Education by facilitating and supporting mutual knowledge and information sharing in a collaboration framework, that means not through one-way promotion activities but rather through long-term partnership building (the slogan of CaribErasmus is “promote and improve by sharing”).

In order to achieve this, the following specific objectives will be pursued:

- To build the capacity to monitor and understand the opinions, attitudes and expectations of Caribbean HE students and researchers towards European HE and towards the idea of creating a common EU-Caribbean HE area (survey component);
- To promote the attractiveness of European HE through the development of new partnership value proposition to Caribbean HE institutions and through the celebration of three promotion and partnership-building events in Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Cuba, the three most populated countries of the region (promotion component);
- To promote the possibility to study and to do research in Europe (both within and around EM Courses) through a web portal designed to support EU-Caribbean HE cooperation and mobility in a sustainable perspective (web component).
- To contribute to the policy debate on the possibility to foster EU-Caribbean cooperation by producing a White Paper on the theme and by validating it through a Workshop in Brussels (policy support component).

The project involves key European HE networks (MENON, EURASHE and AlmaLaurea), a professional European study choice platform (StudyPortals), two key regional university network from the Caribbean (the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network and the Centro Coordinador para la Formación y Desarrollo del Capital Humano from Cuba) and the Universidad Iberoamericana from Dominican Republic.