

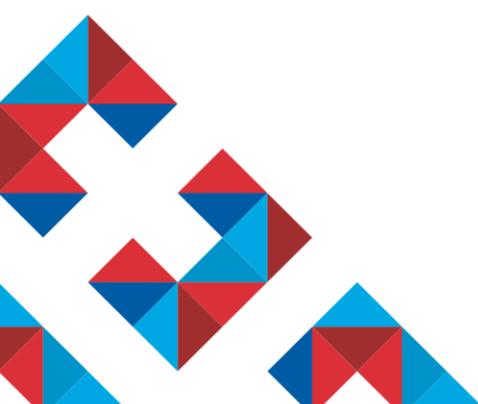
**ERASMUS** 

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UK ACROSS EUROPE

# UK National Agency Guide on Compliance with the ECHE in the UK

Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

Version 1: 7 March 2018



Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport.  
The Erasmus+ UK National Agency is a partnership between the British Council and Ecorys UK.

## Introduction

In order to participate in Erasmus+ projects, higher education institutions (HEIs) must hold the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). The ECHE provides the quality framework for Erasmus+ funded activities carried out by HEIs. The aims of Erasmus+ support the European modernisation and internationalisation agendas in higher education, in particular the quality of student and staff mobility.

Each year the European Commission holds a call for applications for the ECHE. Applications are awarded for the full remaining duration of Erasmus+ (i.e. until the end of the academic year 2020/21). In the UK there are currently 209 ECHE holders.<sup>1</sup>

By applying and signing the ECHE, the HEI confirms that its participation in the Erasmus+ Programme is part of its own strategy for modernisation and internationalisation. This strategy acknowledges the key contribution of student and staff mobility and of participation in international cooperation projects, to the quality of its higher education programmes and student experience. The Charter aims in particular at reinforcing the quality of student and staff mobility and the monitoring of the institutions involved in it.

Compliance of the HEI with the ECHE principles is monitored by the National Agency through a variety of measures.<sup>2</sup> HEIs must respect all the provisions of the ECHE during the implementation of the project. **Violation of any of the ECHE principles and commitments may lead to its withdrawal by the European Commission.**

The most comprehensive checks on ECHE compliance take place through Systems' Checks. In the UK, the Systems' Check comprises of a financial audit, conducted by National Agency staff, and a quality audit, conducted by a pool of peer Erasmus+ Quality Experts. The latter focusses on compliance with the ECHE. Each quality audit results in a report on the HEI's compliance with the requirements, principles and pre-requisites of the ECHE, as well as programme requirements around participant selection and reporting to the National Agency.

Additionally the Quality Expert identifies points of **good practice** that they have come across during the audit. For this purpose, good practice means a process or approach which the Quality Expert perceives to go above and beyond what is required. Good practice will not highlight all items that

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<sup>1</sup> You can see the full list of ECHE holders at [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/erasmus-charter\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/actions/erasmus-charter_en)

<sup>2</sup> See the ECHE Monitoring Guide for Erasmus+ National Agencies for further information [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/eche-monitoring-guide\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/eche-monitoring-guide_en.pdf)

are perceived as being done well, but will draw attention to approaches and processes that the Quality Expert identifies as making a particularly positive contribution which is worth highlighting.

In case non-compliance is identified, an action plan will be agreed between the HEI and the National Agency to solve the problematic issues. If the action plan is not implemented by the HEI within the agreed timeline, this will be reported to the European Commission and may lead to the withdrawal of the ECHE by the European Commission.

With the aim of encouraging improved compliance with the ECHE in the UK, the UK Erasmus+ National Agency has compiled the following report, based on quality audits conducted in 2017. This report will highlight those requirements where the HEIs are frequently not meeting expectations, but also shine a light on the many areas of good practice that the Quality Experts have identified during the audits.

**The UK National Agency would also like to take this opportunity to encourage all ECHE holders to review the commitments they signed up to when applying for the Charter and consider what steps they might take to improve their compliance.** ECHE holders are advised to refer to the ECHE Annotated Guidelines<sup>3</sup>, and may also find the ECHE Monitoring Guide for National Agencies<sup>4</sup> helpful.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/annotated\\_eche\\_guidelines\\_2016.pdf](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/annotated_eche_guidelines_2016.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/eche-monitoring-guide\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/eche-monitoring-guide_en.pdf)

## Quality Audit findings

The purpose of the Quality Audit is to ascertain to what extent the HEI meets requirements, principles and pre-requisites of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), as well as programme requirements around participant selection and reporting to the National Agency (hereafter Requirements). A list of the Requirements audited against in 2017 can be found in [Annex 1](#). Based on the information gathered during the audit, the Quality Expert has used their expertise to find whether or not the answers provided by the HEI are sufficient to consider the Requirements to have been met. Four outcomes are possible:

<b>Endorsement</b>	Requirement is met in full.
<b>Suggestion</b>	Requirement is substantially met (in this case the British Council will raise a suggestion, which would enhance the university's efforts to meet the requirement).
<b>Explanation required</b>	Information captured during the audit has opened up some questions; clarification is required from the HEI.
<b>Recommendation</b>	Requirement is not met or only partially met (in this case the British Council would expect to raise a recommendation to which the HEI is obliged to respond).

Additionally the Quality Expert identifies points of Good Practice that they have come across during the audit.

During the course of 2017, Quality Experts undertook a number of quality audits as part of the National Agency's Higher Education Systems' Checks. **None of the HEIs audited were found to be fully compliant with the ECHE.** The level of non-compliance varied, but each HEI received at least one recommendation and one suggestion. The highest number of recommendations for one HEI was six, and the highest number of suggestions was 14. When considering this figure, it is worth noting that each Requirement might receive more than one recommendation or suggestion.

When looking at the individual Requirements, **in 6 of the 22 Requirements all HEIs were found to have met the Requirement in full.** Additionally, in five of the Requirements, all but one HEI was found to be fully compliant. The six requirements which all HEIs were found to be compliant with are:

- Charge no fees, in the case of credit mobility, to incoming mobile students for tuition, registration, examinations or access to laboratory and library facilities;

- Carry out mobility only within the framework of prior agreements between institutions. These agreements establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties, as well as their commitment to shared quality criteria in the selection, preparation, reception and integration of mobile participants;
- Provide assistance related to obtaining insurance, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants;
- Provide appropriate linguistic support to incoming mobile participants;
- Support the reintegration of mobile participants and give them the opportunity, upon return, to build on their experiences for the benefit of the institutions and their peers;
- Reports are submitted to the National Agency on time and in the required format.

## Good practice

Quality Experts were pleased to be able to identify **points of good practice in 83% of the audits**. 15 points of good practice were identified across 9 separate Requirements, including, interestingly, all of the Requirements which had high-levels of non-compliance. This reinforces the concept that compliance with a Requirement often requires a range of approaches and processes, and even if an institution is non-compliant when looking at the whole of the Requirement, it may still be exceeding specific expectations.

Good practice was identified in the following Requirements:

- Participation in Erasmus+ must be part of the HEI's policy for Internationalisation;
- Respect in full the principles of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all background;
- Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system). Ensure the inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and / or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma supplement or equivalent);
- Carry out mobility only within the framework of prior agreements between institutions. These agreements establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties, as well as their commitment to shared quality criteria in the selection, preparation, reception and integration of mobile participants;

- Ensure that outgoing mobile participants are well prepared for the mobility, including having attained the necessary level of linguistic proficiency;
- Integrate incoming mobile participants into the institutions everyday life;
- Have in place appropriate mentoring and support arrangements for mobile participants;
- Support the reintegration of mobile participants and give them the opportunity, upon return, to build on their experiences for the benefit of the institutions and their peers;
- Ensure that staff are given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement.

## 15 points of good practice from the quality audits

1. The corporate strategy includes a mention to Erasmus+ as a tool to create opportunities for students to experience learning in another country and access a wider range of employment.
2. Providing short-term 'taster sessions' to widening participation students who may not previously have had experience of travelling abroad or the confidence to take part in a longer mobility experience is highlighted.
3. Provision of comprehensive guidance to students and staff on academic recognition for both study and work placements.
4. The use of a grade conversion table by the Grade Conversion Panel provides an objective interpretation of transcripts and a homogeneous approach across the University for all study periods.
5. Product Design students can take part in the European Project Semester (EPS). The EPS is delivered via a network of 19 partners in 12 countries and is worth 30 ECTS. It includes project briefs and a local language component. Academic staff meet regularly to ensure the quality of the programme. This provides a good experience for both outbound and inbound students in terms of overall experience and ensures clearer academic recognition processes.
6. Including specific information about the infrastructure for welcoming and supporting students and staff with disabilities in the partnership agreements.
7. The university has a comprehensive, helpful Pre-departure Guide. It is a valuable, user friendly handbook for the whole year abroad and the return. It covers practical aspects of preparation, academic requirements, advice on budgeting, health and safety, emergency arrangements, cultural adaptation and returning to the university and a contact list. It is a web based publication issued which can be downloaded as a PDF.

8. Offering fully-funded language lessons in a wide variety of languages for Erasmus+ students in the year before departure. This provides a mechanism for outbound Erasmus+ students to enhance their language proficiency prior to departure.
9. All selected students are given access to a Moodle course the year before mobility ensuring that the information provided is similar for all those going abroad despite the decentralised structure of Erasmus.
10. Physical permanent spaces which are located on multiple campuses where staff and students can relax and make friends from around the world; celebrate, take part in and organise student focused cultural events; and find out about international study abroad and placement opportunities.
11. Monitoring of the mobilities carried out by the study abroad office on a one-to-one basis via Skype or telephone at the beginning of each semester and follow-up, and the basic training provided for staff conducting this indicates genuine care for the welfare of students.
12. The study abroad and careers team run a joint careers workshop specifically to help returnee students to present their year abroad achievements to employers.
13. The student exchange mentoring scheme makes an effective use of the experience of returning students to support future exchange students.
14. Use of the MEMO tool<sup>5</sup> to record transferable skills acquired abroad will better enable students to articulate the impact of their Erasmus experience on both their skills and personal development. This will be a valuable resource for developing their CV and future employability.
15. The HEIs' training programme for professional staff provides opportunities for a wide range of service support staff, in the bespoke elements of the training, preparation for mobility, feedback arrangements and establishment of a team approach and sharing of outcomes across departments.

## Non-compliance

Looking across the year, all but one of the HEIs was found to be fully compliant (i.e. received an endorsement) for at least half of the Requirements. However, HEIs are reminded that they have committed to meet **all** the Requirements of the Charter. As such, **the UK National Agency strongly encourages all ECHE holders to revisit the commitments they made when applying to obtain the ECHE.**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.memo-tool.net/>

20 recommendations, meaning that the HEI in question was found to not meet the Requirement or only partially meet it, were found across 10 Requirements, and there were 35 suggestions made by the Quality Experts where they found that the HEIs were substantially compliant, but still needed to take action to be fully compliant. These findings were spread across 16 out of the 22 Requirements.

It is of concern to the UK National Agency that there were four Requirements where either no HEIs or only one HEI was found to fully compliant, namely:

- Participation in Erasmus+ must be part of the HEI’s policy for Internationalisation;
- Respect in full the principles of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all background;
- Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system). Ensure the inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and / or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma supplement or equivalent);
- Ensure that staff are given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement.

## Summary of recommendations and suggestions made in the 2017 quality audits

Include a specific reference to Erasmus+ in the institution’s Internationalisation Strategy.
Make the institution’s ECHE and European Policy Statement easier to find on the HEI’s website.
Include information about mobility activities on the student’s diploma supplement, or equivalent.
Have and publish formal procedures for staff recognition.
Ensure that there is a consistent, fair and transparent process for selecting staff and students.
Ensure that mobility opportunities are proactively promoted to all potential participants, including staff and students with special needs.
Work closely with institutional widening participation and disability support staff.
Improve credit and grade recognition for students, including the provision of transparent information to students.
Ensure that course catalogues contain sufficient information and are made available to prospective students well in advance of the mobility period.

Include information for students on traineeships in pre-departure guidance.

Provide clear guidance to academic schools on the requirements for the Learning and Teaching Agreements in order to ensure compliant completion.

Provide clearer guidance on obtaining visas for staff mobilities.

Provide clear guidance to academic schools and incoming students about arrangements and requirements in regards to support and mentoring.

Ensure that Erasmus+ is promoted and acknowledged in HEI publications, such as the HEI prospectus.

## Annex 1: The 2017 Quality Audit Requirements

1.1 Participation in Erasmus+ must be part of the HEI's policy for Internationalisation.
2.1 Respect in full the principles of non-discrimination set out in the Programme and ensure equal access and opportunities to mobile participants from all background.
2.2 Ensure full recognition for satisfactorily completed activities of study mobility and, where possible, traineeships in terms of credits awarded (ECTS or compatible system). Ensure the inclusion of satisfactorily completed study and / or traineeship mobility activities in the final record of student achievements (Diploma supplement or equivalent).
2.3 Charge no fees, in the case of credit mobility, to incoming mobile students for tuition, registration, examinations or access to laboratory and library facilities.
3.1 Publish and regularly update the course catalogue on the website in the institution well in advance of the mobility periods, so as to be transparent to all parties and allow mobile students to make well-informed choices about the courses they will follow.
3.2 Carry out mobility only within the framework of prior agreements between institutions. These agreements establish the respective roles and responsibilities of the different parties, as well as their commitment to shared quality criteria in the selection, preparation, reception and integration of mobile participants.
3.3 Ensure that outgoing mobile participants are well prepared for the mobility, including having attained the necessary level of linguistic proficiency.
3.4 Ensure that student and staff mobility for education or training purposes is based on a learning agreement for students and a mobility agreement for staff validated in advance between the home and host institutions or enterprises and the mobile participants.
3.5 Provide assistance related to obtaining visas, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants.
3.6 Provide assistance related to obtaining insurance, when required, for incoming and outgoing mobile participants.
3.7 Provide guidance to incoming mobile participants in finding accommodation.
4.1 Ensure equal academic treatment and services for home students and staff and incoming

mobile participants.

4.2 Integrate incoming mobile participants into the institutions everyday life.

4.3 Have in place appropriate mentoring and support arrangements for mobile participants.

4.4 Provide appropriate linguistic support to incoming mobile participants.

5.1 Accept all activities indicated in the learning agreement as counting towards the degree, provided these have been satisfactorily completed by the mobile students.

5.2 Provide incoming mobile participants and their home institutions with transcripts containing a full, accurate and timely record of their achievements at the end of their mobility period.

5.3 Support the reintegration of mobile participants and give them the opportunity, upon return, to build on their experiences for the benefit of the institutions and their peers.

5.4 Ensure that staff are given recognition for their teaching and training activities undertaken during the mobility period, based on a mobility agreement.

6.1 Display the Charter and the related Erasmus Policy Statement prominently on the Institution's website.

6.2 Promote openly and consistently activities supported by the Programme, along with their result.

6.3 Ensure that information about International Credit Mobility opportunities is communicated to disadvantaged groups in the partner country institution. (Applicable only If the HEI participates in International Credit Mobility).

7.1 Reports are submitted to the National Agency on time and in the required format.

Please note the above are the Requirements audited as part of the UK Quality Audits in 2017 only. The European Commission sets the parameters for the Systems' Checks on a yearly basis, and as such the exact Requirements the Quality Experts will audit are subject to change as the Erasmus+ programme develops. However, the principles contained in the European Charter for Higher Education will always be included, and will constitute the majority of the Requirements.