

CUSU stance on seamless mobility

Aarhus CUSU Seminar Feb 2024

1. Intro

Mobility is an essential aspect of Circle U. and a primary objective of CUSU. Mobility should entail access to lectures and other activities at all the member universities. Joint programs require practical and well-executed mobility, including virtual offers. Socioeconomic factors should not hinder students from participating in educational exchange, and credits need to be easily recognized both at the students' home universities and internationally. CUSU finds it necessary that Circle U. facilitates sustainable and green physical mobility within the alliance, especially through financial aid.

We think it is important to keep in mind all the stages in mobility, including signup and preparation, execution, and aftermath.

CUSU emphasises that virtual mobility is not on par with physical mobility and can't in no way replace it. CUSU recognises the potential of virtual mobility as a tool to make education and internationalisation more accessible but is adamant that it doesn't have the same cultural experience.

2. Mobility in general:

2.1. Leadup

An important factor for even being able to experience mobility is transparent systems, rules and criteria. The bureaucratic landscape can be complicated and easy to get lost in. A solution is to either streamline it and make it transparent as well as creating access to resources that might help.

These resources should include at least: Webpage, helplines, answers to frequently asked questions on the webpage.

We suggest that all the bilateral agreements should portray similar process if not the same to enable an easier international experience within the alliance.

Application: We should work to make the application easier. Course information should be readily available.

Separate programmes in CU should be accessible easily on a separate CU website. The open campus is an excellent opportunity - should be easily visible and accessible on each university's platforms.

2.2. Execution

During mobility either physical or online it is important that the student still feels safe and it is therefore important that there are options for communication with and support from the home and host university regarding issues, unforeseen or arisen from the system. This support has to be visible and easily accessible.

2.3. Aftermath

Courses and classes attended must easily be converted and credited in the home university as these kinds of issues can be a major deterrent for students, especially for subjects with strict prerequisites

CU courses should have accreditation transferred automatically, without having to go through the usual "accreditation process" with programs like Erasmus.

It should, in the future, be possible to see which courses that will provide merit at your home university

While online courses are a great opportunity to broaden a student's horizon and area of studies, physical mobility should be as extensive as online mobility - online possibilities should not replace the focus on physical mobility.

2.4. Key issues

Language barriers: While there is a common understanding that the language of the alliance is English, it is still important that this is integrated in every level of the mobility such as: teaching, material, guides, practicalities and help from relevant parties. Therefore it is essential that courses be taught in English.

Also, it will benefit students tremendously if the host university offers language courses.

Administrative barriers: We have to look into the barriers for mobility and bureaucracy can be a major issue. It should therefore be as streamlined as possible and Circle U should have administrative/bureaucratic barriers in mind across all elements

Credits: Credits are a complicated issue and we have a different paper related to the subject

Transfer of grades in relation to honour students: While there are tables of conversion between grade systems, it has come to our attention that these transfers sometimes don't

carry over properly in relation to application as an honour student. This is an issue that should be looked into.

3. Physical mobility:

A student's financial situation should not be an obstacle for students who want to do a physical mobility program within the CU alliance

3.1. Leadup

Application: We should look into how to further streamline the application process and even make it easier than Erasmus+. This can also be through simple yet elaborate guides

Grants: CU should provide info and help regarding searching grants and maybe even make a Circle U grant for internal mobility. The rules should be made easy such that students don't accidentally break the agreements. The grants should be available for all students.

Basic information: There has to be a guide for every university, both online and pdf with practical information including but not limited to:

- Practical/external information:
 - Housing
 - Public transport
 - Bureaucratic and legal necessities to prepare for
- Internal information
 - Maps of campi
 - Contact information for administration and helplines on the university
 - How to access schedules, course location and other information related to the host campus

It would further be beneficial to have a hotline for information or at the very least an emergency hotline. We have seen these been manned by AI and while that can be an assisting tool, is it in no way a sufficient solution on its own.

It is of course essential that all of this material is in english

3.2. Execution

Collaboration with the students: For longer physical mobility it is important that the students have a feeling of belonging. This is created through social interaction with other exchange students and the local students. It is therefore important that the universities facilitate and encourage contact between the exchange students and relevant student organisations. We have furthermore seen universities have great success with having buddy-schemes.

Student cards: Student access card should be ready upon arrival either through having an EU student card by proper preparation by the administrative organs. In the case of students following a gender-affirming path, there should be inter-university recognition of student card identities referring to the chosen name and gender (using two student cards: the one with the legal name, to use outside university and for legal matters, the one with the chosen name, linked with the first one, to use inside university, for the person transitioning to be comfortable in university spaces).

We also suggest that to enhance the feeling of belonging of all students within Circle U, a Circle U logo should be added in all students cards from the alliance universities.

3.3. Aftermath

Recognition of courses: It is not only important that once the physical mobility is over that ECTS are granted. It is also important that the universities take the skills learned into consideration in regards to prerequisites for courses. It is a huge issue for mobility among the more practical subjects that students have to have complete specific courses to progress and courses outside the home university aren't recognised as sufficient to merit taking the course.

3.4. Key issues

Lack of compatibility: In the unfortunate case that a student abroad hasn't passed every exam, an issue might arise from the fact that the 30 ECTS per semester aren't split the same way, as some universities have courses in multiples of 5 while others have multiples of 6. CUSU believe it would be beneficial to have minor courses of a few ECTS to allow for filling gaps, such that students don't have to take an unreasonable amount of courses when they get back home.

Financial aid: The biggest obstacle is the economic one. On the administrative side, however, it can also be a major obstacle: efforts should be made to simplify these practices. Legal requirements for scholarships can be obscure and there is a need of clear instructions

Housing: It can be hard to find housing while abroad, especially for shorter mobility. This is an essential component for physical mobility and is something that the universities should at least provide assistance in finding.

Support from home/hosting university: It is important that students receive administrative and bureaucratic support throughout the entire process of the physical mobility. This has to be the case before, during and after.

4. Online mobility:

4.1. Leadup

Online courses should be available to students from all member universities without being part of an “extra” mobility program - the available courses should appear in each university’s course list so students can sign up for the class

Information about the course should be clear, including course criteria and requirements needed to pass the class

4.2. Execution

The platform should be universal such that it can be used by all universities

Course material and resources should be available online (pdfs, slides...) for all enrolled/attending students.

Students should be encouraged to speak English during group exercises and projects in order to avoid language barriers and promote internationalisation.

4.3. Aftermath

After the course is completed online material should stay available for a while and there should be a warning in case it gets taken down or the student loses access in case the student can use it for another purpose like a project

4.4. Key issues

Time Zones: It is worth keeping in mind the difference in time zones due to some universities having a different timezone than the rest of the alliance. As such should all online courses have their schedule explicitly include the timezone

Course completion/proof of attendance: There are a few issues to keep in mind in regards to course completion and attendance. We believe that the educational outcome weighs greater than attendance and as such the course completion should be to the extent that it is possible determined by an evaluation of the student rather than attendance

The issues with requiring attendance is both logistical due to having to check every student, but also legal due to privacy rights.

Platforms: The platforms are the base of online mobility and such they must be up to standard. We are not only considering lecture platforms such as Zoom, but also platforms for material, work and inter-student communication and other didactic resources.

Furthermore it is a common issue that professors are not proficient in using the online platforms.

Internet infrastructure: An improper internet structure could be detrimental to the value and quality of online courses. As such it is essential that online courses is supported by proper platforms and infrastructure across the alliance

Professors acknowledging the attendance of international students

Collaboration across universities: An important part of both didactics and internationalisation is the collaboration and communication between students across the different universities. It can be hard to foster an environment online that supports this, but it is of great importance that an effort is made in order to encourage this kind of behaviour.