

# Field trial on the impact of enabling easy mobility on recognition of external studies (EMREX)

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## Keywords

Learning mobility, student information systems, digital result exchange, European policy experimentations, recognition

## 1. BACKGROUND

According to a study performed by the Erasmus Student Network 2012 (ESN) involving 25 student unions, the biggest obstacle for student mobility, after financial support, is the lack of recognition. Another study, the PRIME2010 (ESN), reports that 19% of the HEIs said that the students fail to provide the necessary documentation. Currently the recognition of previous studies from another country requires a substantial amount of paper work from the student and also from the universities. Since no integrated IT-system for handling the process exists, most of this is manual work. One outcome of this labour intensive process is that in many cases the students do not get recognition for previous studies to the extent they are entitled to. Only 73% of students within the Erasmus programme received full recognition for their studies abroad. Partial recognition for certain parts of the studies was the case for 24% of the students and 3% did not gain any credits at all. Astonishing 21.6% of the students were asked to repeat parts of their courses upon return, and 3.6% had to repeat all their studies. It can be argued that the figures for free-movers are even worse.

This paper aims to present the objective for the EMREX project, the outcome (policy experimentation as well as the development and implementation of a technical solution), and the benefits.

## 2. THE OBJECTIVE

The EMREX project addresses the EU 2020 target that 20% of higher education students should be mobile during their studies. It also addresses similar national policy goals of the countries participating in the project. Furthermore the project is initiated because of fiscally strained national public resources that require more effective and efficient education systems and services supporting them. Academic recognition in higher education is seen as a challenge in learner mobility and also as a potential area for the improvement of a more efficient education system in general.

The EMREX field trial aims at testing new ways to make the administration of student mobility easier and thus promoting higher attainment level to student mobility in higher education and also encouraging more effective recognition of prior learning and avoiding overlapping studies. In the first phase the trial will be set up between Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Italy.

## 3. THE OUTCOME

The field trial will comprise the following activities:

- Developing the EMREX platform and connecting the national contact points in a network
- Implementing the EMREX platform at the selected universities
- Piloting EMREX by a selected groups of students
- Gathering data from the field trial via interviews, surveys, and university registries
- Evaluating the results of the field trial
- Promoting a wide-scale implementation of EMREX

## Case example: Retrieving student data



- A student returning to home university in Oslo from an exchange period in Finland
- The home university has implemented the Student Mobility Plug-in (SMP)
- National Contact Point (NCP) contacted in visiting country
- ELMO standard used for transferring student records

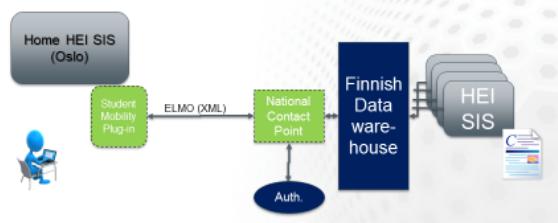


Figure 1: The Emrex concept with example

The tangible outcome of EMREX is a federated solution that supports the exchange of student data on achievements. The solution will be highly scalable and can thus easily be implemented in the whole European community. All institutions of higher education would be able to use the information from countries offering the functionality. The existence of this functionality would create an imperative to an institution to offer its own information to be visible also in the Europe-wide information exchange and hence enhance the recognition of external studies. Experiences from national solutions for exchanging student records and from other industries have proven that going from labour intense manual work to an automated e-tool both lowers the costs and increases the usage. This strongly suggests that EMREX will prove effective.

#### 4. BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The biggest benefit coming out of this policy project will be the increased availability, quality and reliability of information about student records of achievement information. This will make student mobility processes easier and faster and more transparent for students. Students will also benefit from the recognition of previous academic studies and degrees because of increased eligibility, when applying for studies in higher education. The universities will benefit from a reduction of manual work. The trial also supports the collection of measurable data on the rate of recognition that can then be analysed and used for improving the national policies on student mobility and rules for recognition of previous studies. The data will increase quality of the learning mobility statistics.

One of the goals and benefits of the trial is the peer learning of the authorities involved. The measure to support this particular goal will be making the results of the development process openly available through open source code. The up-scaling of the EMREX-platform will be provided by applying a decentralised management model: the higher education institutions in the European Community will be responsible for the operation and funding of their own part of the solution. The EMREX-platform will thus not be dependent on being coordinated by a central body or organisation nor on centralised funding either, which will secure its sustainability.

To date, a variety of initiatives have been launched with a view to simplifying the transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications across Europe. These include: The European Qualifications Framework, credit systems - ECTS and ECVET, and some quality assurance arrangements in higher education. The EMREX-platform completes the tools already in action by providing an integrated IT-system for handling the process of administration of student mobility. The solution will thus ensure quality, reliability and increased availability of the student achievement information.

Furthermore, the solution will ensure the quality of the achievement data exchanged between the European higher education institutions. As the credentials will be sent from one National Contact Point to another, the use of false diplomas within the HE-sector is expected to decrease. EU2020 identifies efficient recognition of credits gained abroad through effective quality assurance as one of the key policy issues for EU member states. Creating the EMREX working framework supports this goal. Also the “Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training” (ET2020)

sets out expansion of mobility as one of the strategic objectives for the framework and addresses the need of progress in the implementation of lifelong learning strategies as well as the development of national qualifications frameworks linked to the European Qualifications Framework and more flexible learning pathways. The EMREX-tool contributes to this objective as well.

## 5. BIOGRAPHIES



Mats Lindstedt has a Master of Science in Business Strategy and International Marketing and a Licentiate in Applied Mathematics from the Helsinki University of Technology. He has over 15 years of experience from the ICT industry including program management and R&D development. Since 2012 he work for CSC Ltd in Finland and with developing support for student services. Previously he was the project manager for Tiptop, developing web based support for university students' personal study plans. Currently he is the project manager for the EMREX project.



Anders Bøgebjerg Hansen holds a master's degree in political science from the University of Copenhagen. He has worked with different student information systems at two universities and has 15 years of experience coordinating systems development on the customer side within higher education in Denmark. He is a special adviser at the IT Department of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (UFM-IT) where he works with contract and project management with relation to the student information system STADS and the application system DANS. These systems are used at all 8 universities and several institutions of architecture and art in Denmark. Anders Bøgebjerg Hansen has been the project manager of many large EU tenders and has for several years been involved in Nordic forums in the area of student information systems.



Simone Ravaioli holds a Bachelor and Masters Degree in Management Information System from Loyola University Chicago. After a corporate experience in New York and Milano, he joins CINECA's group, the leading consortium of Italian Universities dedicated to developing software for HE. He currently holds the position of International Business Development and Country Manager Turkey. Simone is founding member of RS3G - an international group of HE implementers focusing on data exchange standards. He also represents RS3G in the European Standardization Committee (CEN). In 2010 he is appointed Chair of the first EAIE Task Force called DSDP - Digital Student Data Portability. Specialties: European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, Standards in Higher Education, Internationalization of Higher Education, Software Development Processes, Public Speaking



**Geir Vangen** has more than 20 years experience in developing nationwide systems within higher education in Norway. At USIT, the University of Oslo University Center for Information Technology, he works as development manager for the student information system FS. Geir Vangen is also responsible for architecture and methods for the section within USIT that develops systems for student information (FS), research information (CRISTin), national admission (SO) and data warehouse. He participates in national and international standardization work, and has been a member of the groups developing the MLO and ELM-standards. He is a member of the steering committee of RS3G. He has been member of national committees appointed by the Ministry of Education and Research, and has lead projects on behalf of the Ministry. Geir Vangen graduated from University of Oslo, Institute of Informatics in 1989.



**Agnethe Sidselrud** is a Deputy Manager for FS Consortium. Graduated from Adam Mickiewicz University in 1996 as Master of Scandinavian Studies, and from University of Oslo in 2001 as Master of Nordic Medieval Studies. Since 1998 she has been working in the Norwegian HE-sector in student and research affairs and in the university management. She has lead the national implementation project for the Current Research Information System in Norway. She is currently involved in the implementation projects for several national information systems: The National Exclusion Register, The National Credentials Recognition Database and a new BI solution for student information analytics.



Pamela Henriksson obtained a Degree of Master of Science in Biology from Mälardalen University College in 2007. After graduation she worked as a municipality biologist, where her focuses included production and distribution of scientific information to the public. Since 2009 she works at the University of Gothenburg as a degree officer and project leader at the Section of Degrees with educational and degree related issues and analysis and evaluation. In the EMREX project she is the representative of the national consortium Ladok, as the project leader of the field trial work package. The consortium owns the Ladok system, which is the higher education industry standard in Sweden; the system is used at 37 of the universities and university colleges.



Janina Mincer-Daszkiwicz graduated in computer science in the University of Warsaw, Poland, and obtained a Ph.D. degree in math from the same university. She is an associate professor in Computer Science at the Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics and Mechanics at the University of Warsaw. Her main fields of research include operating systems, distributed systems, performance evaluation and software engineering. Since 1999, she leads a project for the development of a student management information system USOS, which is used in over 40 Polish Higher Education Institutions, gathered in the MUCI consortium. In 2008, she started the Mobility Project with RS3G. Janina takes active part in many nation-wide projects in Poland.