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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**on the evaluation of the cooperation programmes between the European Community
and the United States of America in the field of higher education and vocational
education and training and between the European Community and Canada in the fields
of higher education and training**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This communication has been established pursuant to article 7 of the agreement between the European Community and the United States of America signed on 18 December 2000¹ and pursuant to article 7 of the agreement between the European Community and the Government of Canada signed on 19 December 2000².

The Final Evaluation report, and background information on the programme will be made available to the general public on the following internet address:
(http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm).

2. THE COOPERATION PROGRAMMES

2.1 Aims

The overriding aims of both Programmes are to contribute to the promotion of greater understanding between the peoples of the European Union and those of the United States of America and of Canada, including broader knowledge of each other's languages, cultures and institutions³; and to improve the quality of human resource development in both the European Union and in the United States of America and Canada.

2.2. Instruments of intervention

The main instrument is the three-year *consortia implementation project*, which aims to benefit students through adding an international curriculum and cultural dimension to their studies via a combination of curricular innovation and study or training abroad.

The EC/US programme also features support for one-year *consortia preparatory projects* and for one- or two-year *complementary activities*. *Preparatory projects* are designed to enable institutions with little or no international experience to plan and develop a potential implementation project. *Complementary activities* may be either independent or related to a three-year consortium implementation project and are designed to provide opportunities for

¹ Council decision no. 2001/196/EC on the conclusion and signature of the EC-US agreement, published in the OJ L71 of 13/3/2001

² Council decision no. 2001/197/EC on the conclusion and signature of the EC-Canada agreement, published in the OJ L71 of 13/3/2001

³ For the full set of objectives, see Article 3 of each of the current Agreements.

international cooperation in multidisciplinary fields or to deal with issues of quality standards, credit recognition and accreditation.

Each consortium must involve a minimum of six partners in total, with at least three European higher education or training institutions from three different Member States and at least three from Canada (EC/Canada programme) or the United States of America (for the EC/US Programme).

In addition, the EC/US Programme supports the *Fulbright/European Union grant scheme*, which provides support for a full academic year or a one-semester period of research, lecturing or study on European Union affairs or EC/US relations at an accredited institution in the United States of America or in the European Union.

More details about the above instruments can be found in the Annexes to the Agreements⁴ and in the Guidelines⁵ accompanying the recent calls for project proposals.

2.3. Funding and outputs

The European Community provides funding for the direct use of European Union partners. The United States of America and the Government of Canada provide funding for the direct use of partners from their respective countries. Details of the financial support available in the current funding round for each kind of intervention instrument can be found on each Programme's website⁶.

Programme financing is done on the basis of an overall matching of funds between the parties to each Agreement. The European Union's annual budget for the EC/Canada programme is about 0.7 million euros, and for the EC/US programme, about 1.7 million euros.

| | EC/US programme (except Fulbright/EU) | | | | |
|---------------|---|----------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|
| Year | EU Funding (in Mio €)Budget line 15 02 03 (ex B7-830) | US Funding (in Mio USD) | Number of projects | Number of EU institutions involved in projects* | Number of US institutions involved in projects* |
| 2001 | 1,5 | 2,0 | 13 | 33 | 38 |
| 2002 | 1,6 | 2,2 | 13 | 40 | 40 |
| 2003 | 1,6 | 2,1 | 12 | 40 | 37 |
| 2004 | 1,9 | 2,3 | 13 | 41 | 39 |
| Totals | 6,6 | 8,6 | 51 | 154 | 154 |

⁴ See footnotes 1 and 2.

⁵ Canada Guidelines: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-canada/call/guidecan_en.pdf
US Guidelines: http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-usa/call/guideus_en.pdf

⁶ See "How much financial support is available?" sections in:
Canada Programme EU website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-canada/canada_en.html
US Programme EU website:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/eu-usa/usa_en.html

| | EC/Canada programme | | | | |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| Year | EU Funding (in Mio €) Budget line 15 02 03 (ex B7- 830) | Canadian Funding (in Mio CAN\$) | Number of projects | Number of EU institutions involved in projects* | Number of Canadian institutions involved in projects* |
| 2001 | 0,7 | 1,2 | 6 | 23 | 25 |
| 2002 | 0,7 | 1,2 | 6 | 21 | 26 |
| 2003 | 0,8 | 1,2 | 6 | 19 | 19 |
| 2004 | 0,8 | 1,2 | 6 | 21 | 19 |
| Totals | 3,0 | 4,8 | 24 | 84 | 89 |

* Some institutions may participate in more than one project.

| | Fulbright/European Union scheme | |
|---------------|--|--------------------|
| Year | Grant amount | Number of grantees |
| 2001 | 60.000 | 9 |
| 2002/2003 | 129.000 | 11 |
| 2004 | 100.000 | 8 |
| Totals | 289.000 | 28 |

3. THE EVALUATION

Further to a call for tender published in April 2004⁷, the contract for the interim evaluation of the EC/US and EC/Canada cooperation programmes in higher education and training was awarded to the company Ecorys NEI (from The Netherlands) in September 2004. The evaluation work started in October 2004 and was carried out over a period of five months until the end of February 2005. The Commission received the Final Evaluation Report on 4 March 2005.

With regard to the methodology, the evaluators gathered the data for their assessment through documentary evidence and desk research (programme documentation, applications, reports and databases), surveys, interviews in the European Union, in the United States of America and in Canada, and via focus groups and case studies.

4. RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

The independent evaluation concluded that the programmes are a powerful tool for establishing long-term transatlantic partnerships in higher education and vocational training. The evaluators observed that almost all the projects succeeded in establishing student exchanges based on shared or mutually developed curricula. The programmes have given a tremendous stimulus to the participating institutions, faculty and students to build long-term relations with US and Canadian partners, and have significantly improved cross-cultural

⁷ Call for Tender no. EAC/24/04 published in the O.J. 2004-S 77-065229 of 20/04/2004

knowledge and skills of participants at all levels. The evaluators concluded that the programmes have a large unexploited potential that can be fulfilled only with a significant increase in the budgetary resources available. The Commission agrees that there is scope to further exploit the potential of these programmes.

4.1. Intervention logic

The evaluators concluded that the programmes in their current format are coherent and are working well and that, in general, all the assumptions on which the programmes' intervention logic is built appear to be valid. The evaluators considered the programmes to be complementary to other relevant interventions. No major external factors appear to have influenced the results of the programmes in recent years with the exception of the negative influence of 9-11 on the willingness of US students to study abroad. The Commission shares the evaluators' analysis on this point.

4.2. Relevance

The evaluators found that the programmes continue to be relevant to the goals of strengthening transatlantic cooperation and improving the quality of education and training systems in the European Union. The official objectives are mainly subscribed to by project partners, participating students and other stakeholders, especially so with regard to the objectives of "promoting closer mutual understanding" and "improving the quality of human resource development". The evaluators concluded that the programmes offer ample possibilities for lifelong learning, although the small budget limits the possibility of fully exploiting their potential. The evaluators found, however, that not all official objectives of the programme are perceived to have the same importance by the participating institutions.

4.3. Effectiveness

The evaluators concluded that the outcomes and impacts of the programmes were fully consistent with their objectives. However, the evaluators found the size of the programmes to be too small to produce systemic impacts. The evaluators also pointed out that the programme management by the European Commission is experienced as "bureaucratic".

The programmes contributed to the enhancement of the quality of the education received by undergraduate and graduate students and by trainees, and generated considerable cross-cultural understanding among participants at all levels. Most of the exchange students and staff share their personal experiences with friends and family in the home country thereby promoting cross-cultural transatlantic understanding on a broader scale. The programmes have led to increased possibilities for the participating students to work in an international environment. Evaluators concluded that students' participation in the transatlantic exchanges will improve their international careers.

The financial support granted to the higher education and vocational training institutions participating in the programmes has given tremendous impulse to the creation and intensification of transatlantic contacts.

4.4. Efficiency

The programmes are considered to be cost effective, especially considering the very high preparatory and organisational costs related to the set up of a transatlantic partnership with institutions from several Member States. The evaluators found that the budget per project appears to be just sufficient to realise a project's activities. Efficiency gains could be achieved by better separating preparatory grants and full implementation projects and by providing funding for student and staff mobility only to projects that are at a more advanced stage in developing a framework of cooperation, such as an unambiguous institutional backup, a good working network, or an agreement on credit recognition and on student selection and preparation procedures.

The evaluators also highlighted the need for the Commission services to compare the performance of the projects on a more structured basis and suggest the introduction of a software/internet-based monitoring system.

The Commission agrees in part with the evaluators. Greater efficiency would be achieved by raising the standards at application level and providing funds for projects that are capable of demonstrating at the time of selection that they are in an advanced stage of cooperation. There is little evidence to suggest that preparatory grants do enhance projects' quality. As regards the internet-based monitoring system, the Commission considers that the scale of the programmes does not justify the introduction of such a tool. This can only be envisaged as part of developments undertaken for other Community programmes in the fields of education and training.

4.5. Utility and sustainability

The evaluators concluded that the programme has yielded substantial and potentially long-lasting benefits to the individuals and institutions involved. Current project partners' plans and results from older projects indicate that the projects are largely sustainable, although not all the activities are continued in the same way. Lack of alternative sources of funding after the end of the project is an obstacle to continued student mobility.

The programmes are considered to take proper account of subsidiarity. A number of bilateral arrangements between universities on the two sides of the Atlantic exist. However, the programmes bring in a multilateral European Union dimension that bilateral agreements lack. Furthermore, administering the programme at European Union level permits economies of scale.

4.6. Fulbright/European Union scheme

The Fulbright/European Union scheme is a small but important component of the overall EC/US programme. The evaluators concluded that the grant scheme plays a role in strengthening political and cultural ties between the European Union and the United States of America. Most of the European Union participants come from institutions specialising in European integration studies. However, the evaluators highlighted that the Fulbright/European Union scheme is relatively unknown among national academic institutions. Grantees of the Fulbright/European Union scheme appear to be satisfied with the opportunities given and the support received.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluators' recommendations (in italics) are outlined below, together with the comments of the Commission.

5.1. Intervention logic

- (1) *As the equal importance of all the objectives is not yet recognised, we recommend prioritising the Programmes' six official objectives (in terms of the specified goals of the Programmes). Particular consideration should be given to reformulating or suppressing the objective regarding e-learning and distance learning.*

The Commission agrees to this recommendation.

5.2. Relevance

- (2) *Participation of Canadian students is now restricted to undergraduate and graduate students up to the age of 30. Taking lifelong learning into consideration, this age restriction should be eased. Accordingly, the evaluation team recommends reconsidering the age criterion of the Canadian programme.*

The age-criterion is imposed by Canadian regulations.

- (3) *Furthermore, we recommend widening the scope of the Programme to post-graduates as there is a need for exchange of post-graduates.*

This widening would dilute the impact of the programmes by reducing the already scarce resources available for exchanges of undergraduate and graduate students.

5.3. Effectiveness

- (4) *a) To better attune project planning to the actual project period, we recommend extending the possibilities for one-year preparatory projects, preferably as an integrated part of the consortia projects. b) Furthermore, we recommend that the management of the Programmes clearly enunciates its position on 'no-cost' project extensions as soon as possible. c) Moreover, serious consideration should be paid to enabling successful projects to apply for follow-up mobility funding.*

In the light of experience, the Commission agrees that multi-annual funding should go to projects that can demonstrate having a solid framework for cooperation including unambiguous institutional backup, a good working network, and an agreement on credit recognition and on student selection and preparation procedures. This can be achieved by tightening selection and award criteria.

- (5) *To increase the Programmes' sphere of influence (in accordance with the Programmes' ambitions), we recommend substantial increases in the Cooperation Programmes' budget.*

The Commission takes note of this recommendation that should also be matched by a similar commitment on the side of the United States of America and Canada.

- (6) *As many projects encounter similar problems in organising their activities, we recommend that good practices be made available to applicants and project partners, for instance via the Internet. These good practices should provide information on such subjects as organising language training and cultural preparation, coordinating educational settings, structures and time schedules of participating institutions. Special attention should be given to successful dissemination and follow-up activities.*

The Commission agrees with this recommendation.

- (7) *a) We recommend redesigning the administrative procedures in order to relieve project partners of the administrative burden as much as possible. b) Furthermore, we think that a team of programme managers could enhance the effectiveness of communications with project partners. A possible solution involves appointing account managers to a specified number of projects.*

The management of the programme is governed by the provisions of the Financial Regulation. The Commission has allocated additional staff to the programmes in 2004.

5.4. Efficiency

- (8) *a) We recommend allocating additional resources to manage the Programmes, for instance by appointing an executive agency for the Programmes. b) Furthermore, we recommend adapting the calendar of the Programmes' procedures to the academic/educational years. c) The institutions should be informed of the decision regarding their proposal at least six months before the start of the academic and educational year to improve the efficiency of the projects. Consequently, the project selection procedure should start six months earlier as well.*

The recourse to an executive agency is not appropriate given the political significance of cooperation between partner administrations. As for the timetable, the suggestion to start the selection procedure 6 months earlier will be taken into consideration.

- (9) *We recommend focusing efforts on fully integrating the preparatory projects and the three-year projects. Winning a grant for a preparatory project should result in a higher chance of being granted support for a three-year project. This will encourage institutions to undertake sufficient preparatory activities.*

There is no evidence that preparatory grants have contributed to enhancing the quality of projects.

- (10) *The current monitoring method fails to allow efficient project comparison. We recommend refining and strengthening the existing software-based monitoring system, preferably via the Internet. The monitoring systems in the US and Canada are good examples as they enable the comparison of projects on a regular basis and the exchange of information on good practices. The use of questionnaires in monitoring should also be considered.*

The Commission agrees and is studying how best to implement this recommendation.

5.5. Utility and sustainability

- (11) *We recommend taking existing previous contacts into consideration in the project selection process. However, this recommendation merits caution as selecting only projects involving the participation of previous contacts may limit the Programmes' accessibility and may discourage institutions to apply.*

While priority is given to new projects and to institutions that have never received funding under the programme, institutions that have participated in previously funded projects are indeed eligible in each new call for proposals.

- (12) *We recommend incorporating sustainability into the project plan. A suitable way of doing this would be to require a sustainability plan to be included in the final report. The sustainability plan should clearly indicate which activities are to be pursued, how they are to be effected and an indication of the resources involved.*

The Commission agrees to this recommendation.

- (13) *The evaluation demonstrates that the availability of student mobility grants is by far the most important factor in fostering the sustainability of projects. We therefore recommend an additional grant for student mobility, which will enable successful projects to continue exchanging students.*

Most projects have demonstrated that they are sustainable in that the cooperation links established through the programmes are maintained after the project in question has been completed. This does not necessarily mean that the activities continue in exactly the same manner. Mobility, for example, may be reduced or discontinued due to lack of funding.

- (14) *We recommend disseminating good practices on additional funding. This can be done in several ways, including presentations made during the annual conference, compiling a handbook or database of examples, which is made available via the EC.*

The Commission agrees with this recommendation. The Commission has contracted out a feasibility study on the sustainability of international cooperation projects in the fields of higher education and vocational training. The results of this study will be available at the end of 2005.

5.6. Fulbright/European Union scheme

- (15) *If the EC strives for greater diversity in terms of professional and institutional background, the selection of subjects should be less strict and a broader focus on European academic institutions should be considered. We recommend increasing the visibility of the Fulbright-EU Programme, for instance, by publishing the call for proposals in academic journals.*

The scope of this action is defined in the Annex to the EC/US agreement. The suggestion of the evaluators will be taken into account in view of the possible renewal of the agreement to cover more broadly matters of interest to EU/US relations. The Commission recognises the need for enhanced promotion of the Fulbright/EU scheme.

- (16) *For the purpose of monitoring and evaluation, the Fulbright Commission should ask grantees to provide better insight as to what they produced during and after their time abroad. Output (e.g. articles, books, etc.) in response to participation in the scheme should be listed in a database.*

The Commission agrees with this recommendation.

- (17) *We recommend introducing a minimum stay abroad of six months (one semester). Return on investment appears to be limited when scholars are sent out for only a period of three or four months.*

The requisite of a period of stay abroad for at least one semester should be applied as a priority but not as an eligibility criterion.

- (18) *As grantees seem generally unaware of its existence, we recommend improving the visibility of the Fulbright-EU Programme alumni organisation.*

The Commission sees the value of this recommendation.

- (19) *Fulbright-EU Programme grantees should establish follow-up connections with their host institution. An option would be to provide additional subsidies to EU and US institutions for arranging ongoing exchange of (postgraduate) academics. A connection with the current plan for mobility grants under the EU-US Cooperation Programme could be considered.*

While the first part of the recommendation has some value, the Commission believes that this cooperation scheme should maintain its specificity and be reserved to provide grants for individuals, not to institutions.

- (20) *While there are concrete signs that the financial resources for grantees might not be sufficient to cover the costs of professional activities abroad, we recommend a study to assess whether the financial resources provided to Fulbright-EU Programme grantees are sufficient.*

The Commission, together with the US authorities, will evaluate the adequacy of the Fulbright-EU programme grants.

- (21) *Given the success of the Fulbright/EU Programme, we recommend increasing the programme's budget to augment the annual number of academic exchanges. This increase should be contingent on an overall reinforcement of the EU-US Cooperation Programme.*

These recommendations could be taken into account in a future EC/US programme agreement and are contingent upon a significant overall reinforcement of the EC-US cooperation programme.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The interim evaluation confirms the relevance of the EC/US and EC/Canada programmes, which have been successful in providing a strong stimulus to transatlantic cooperation in higher education and vocational training. The evaluators concluded that the great majority of projects were successful in implementing the planned curriculum development and student mobility activities and, more importantly, that the programmes have each been effective in creating long lasting institutional, professional and people-to-people links over the Atlantic. They have thus contributed both to improving mutual understanding and to the quality of our higher education and vocational training systems.

The evaluators have made a number of suggestions to improve certain aspects of the programmes but found no major shortcomings. Many of these suggestions concern the future rather than the present programmes. The Commission has already taken action with regard to some of the suggestions and will take many of them into consideration in the manner indicated above.