

Erasmus without Paper (EWP) as part of the European Student Card initiative

In the Social Summit in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017, EU leaders discussed the social dimension of Europe, including education and culture. One of the decisions was to aim for a European Education Area by 2025. Several aims were set forward including [the mutual recognition of diplomas](#), [creating a network of European universities](#) and [making mobility a reality for all](#).

The latter led to the 'European Student Card Initiative', which aims to build an infrastructure facilitating access to services for European students before, during and after a study abroad experience in another EU country. The timeline now adopted by the Commission is to introduce this initiative by 2021 for all Erasmus students, and for all other students by 2025. So far little official information on the concrete modalities of the initiative is available, but behind the scenes Erasmus without Paper is one of the drivers behind it all.

The advantages for both students and HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) are clear:

For students:

- Easy access to course materials prior to mobility, online course registration and automatic recognition of ECTS credits
- Immediate access to services at the host university, such as libraries, transport and accommodation
- Discounts on cultural activities throughout the EU

Many of these advantages for students will be realised through the Erasmus+ App, which is also part of the overall Erasmus without Paper Ecosystem.

For Higher Education Institutions:

- Easy, online management of the entire mobility process – from student selection, interinstitutional agreements, learning agreement, transcripts of records to the recognition of ECTS credits
- Online identification of students, simplified and secure exchange of student data - including academic records - between Higher Education Institutions
- Reduced administrative burden associated with student mobility because everything is web-based and can be done in real-time

Many of the institutional advantages will be realised through projects funded by the European Commission (via Erasmus+ and Connecting Europe Facility) such as Erasmus without Paper, OLA (online learning agreements), MyAcademicID, EMREX and other related projects that build up the necessary IT infrastructure and work on data standards to enable interoperability.

In addition to the IT infrastructure and the data standards that are obviously needed to make this vision reality, security is an important issue. This has been fully integrated in the EWP infrastructure and software, but again requires adjusting local services to international standards.

The Erasmus without Paper project was started at the end of 2015 and renewed in 2017. It will end as a project at the end of 2019, and it is already fully operational. The main task ahead is its roll-out all over Europe and the definition of its new organisational structure. For these upscaling efforts more funding from European Initiatives will be made available. On the website of the European Student Card Initiative the European Commission say that "With the support of funding from the Erasmus+ programme and the Connecting Europe Facility, the digital projects - Erasmus Without Paper, EMREX and the European Student Card – will be scaled up from 2019", and the initiative will be linked to the EU's electronic identification rules ([eIDAS regulation](#)) to provide the trust needed to authenticate students and to allow them to ascertain their rights online.

Moreover the European Commission publicly announced<sup>1</sup> its trust in Erasmus Without Paper by announcing that the EWP standards will be gradually introduced in the new Erasmus programme starting from 2021

From the very beginning EWP has had the ambition to provide for an overarching system, now called the Erasmus without Paper Ecosystem. That's why links were forged with projects like European Student Card, eQuATIC, EMREX and others. In addition, the grading conversion tool Egracons will be integrated as well and there are close ties with new projects like MyAcademicID and ESMO. But additionally, Erasmus without Paper is looking to integrate other tools such as OLA (Online Learning Agreement) and its associated Erasmus Dashboard, the Interinstitutional agreement Manager (from the University of Porto) and aims to link up with Mobility Tool+, which is used by HEIs to report their Erasmus exchanges to the European Commission. This will be all be realised through the EWP infrastructure. In this way, HEIs without dedicated software for international exchanges can keep up with the most recent innovations and exchange their student data digitally. The disadvantage of this solution, however, is that this does not take care of the connection between the institutions Student Information System (with the databases that record student registrations, curricula of individual students and grades, to mention only the most important components). This can only be solved if the HEIs either invest in adapting their own software and implement the EWP APIs, or use commercial or third-party tools (such as MoveOn or Mobility on Line), because the later take care of the connections. But even in that case you need to provide for an updating process to exchange your data with your own SIS.

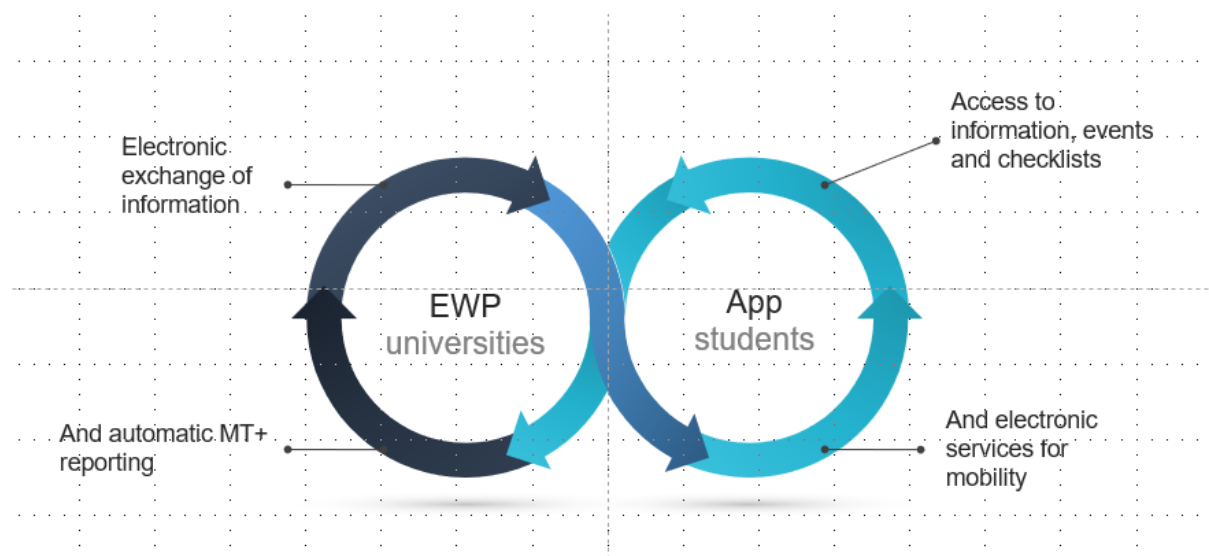
The EWP Ecosystem also includes the [Open Source University Alliance](#). The idea is to create an open repository of source code and software and in this way give the higher education community full access to the necessary tools to meet the demands of digitalised internationalisation. The core of the Open Source University Alliance is composed of HEIs willing to lead by example with regards to sharing open source solutions developed by their respective teams. HEIs that are in the need of developing IT tools that can support the management of, for example, their student mobility, are often forced to do this largely on their own, either by developing something new from scratch or by updating the software they have previously

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<sup>1</sup> The announcement was made during a webinar organized by the European Commission on 7 March 2019 titled "[Erasmus Goes Digital](#)" and further clarified in the webinar on [5 March 2020](#).

developed themselves. This process is not only slow and inefficient, but also expensive. An alternative to working individually is for the higher education community to share the source code of their applications, eliminating redundancy. By doing so, the HEIs would both dramatically accelerate their ability to maintain state of the art systems and enhance the efficiency and cost management for their digital systems. The advantages would also extend beyond this, and promote real collaboration and exchange of expertise among IT teams, which in turn would lead to higher security and quality standards.

Finally, the last component of the EWP ecosystem is the Erasmus+ mobile app, which was developed for the European Commission. In general, EWP aims to upgrade and digitalise the procedures of HEIs, but it is clear that will automatically translate into benefits and better services for students as well. The Erasmus+ mobile App offers services to support students throughout the mobility process. It includes functions such as a step-by-step guide of what to do when going on an exchange, list of Erasmus events in the student area and it allows HEIs to send push-notifications to their Erasmus students. The content is HEI specific and each institution can adapt the information to their incoming and outgoing Erasmus+ students. From 2020 onwards an ever closer integration of the EWP APIs and the mobile app will be realised, leading eventually to a situation where you have separate access points for both HEIs and students, but with interconnections between them.



All in all, it is clear that the Erasmus Student Card Initiative and the EWP Ecosystem are here to stay and that HEIs will have to adapt sooner than later. In many cases it means that HEIs will have to invest in adapting their ICT tools and workflows so as to enable their data to be exchanged online. But progress in this area is inevitable and after the content-related streamlining initiated by the Bologna process, it heralds a new revolution in Higher Education. Data exchange is just a first step in this.

But at a moment in time that it is possible to make payments by simply tapping a bank card or a mobile phone to a scanner (with all the data exchange - often very private - that is related to it), Higher Education cannot but catch up with the innovative developments in society as a whole.