

SEMINAR REPORT

“Europe-Caribbean Academic Cooperation and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities”

11th MAY 2011

Mona Visitors Lodge & Conference Centre
The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus
Kingston, Jamaica

1. INTRODUCTION

The Seminar “Europe-Caribbean Academic Cooperation and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities” was organised by CKLN, member of the CaribErasmus consortium, within the framework of activities of the CaribErasmus project and the support of the European Commission.

The event, first of several promotion and dialogue building events planned in the Caribbean region by the CaribErasmus project, was targeted to Higher Education stakeholders such as academic officers in charge of International Relations, Curriculum development, information and communication technologies and administration, professors, students of various grades, researchers, university networks and international bodies concerned with the higher education system.

The objectives of the events were:

- To promote the **mobility** opportunities offered to Caribbean students and researchers by the Erasmus Mundus programme;
- To discuss the main **barriers to Europe-Caribbean academic cooperation and mobility** and advance on possible shared **solutions**;
- To present the **first results** of the CaribErasmus project, including a survey on the opinions of Caribbean students about European higher education and a web portal guiding Caribbean students through available scholarships to study in Europe.

2. EVENT REPORT

As a whole, 60 people took part in the seminar quite well representing the whole range of stakeholders targeted. Representatives of some Jamaican Universities, of the Ministry of Information and Communication of Cuba, of the UNESCO office in Jamaica, and of other important stakeholders participated in the meeting.

The seminar was opened by some introductory remarks by the Ambassador of the European Union in Jamaica, Mr Mazzocchi Alemanni, who underlined, notwithstanding the general crisis, the continued commitment of the European Union to support the Caribbean region and in particular Jamaica as well as the focus on fostering higher education and knowledge cooperation.

After some introductory notes on the CaribErasmus project aims and future steps, the CaribErasmus web portal for Caribbean students and some preliminary results from the CaribErasmus Survey were presented and commented. All presentations are available and downloadable from the Cariberasmus website www.cariberasmus.eu.

Then, a roundtable composed by higher education experts and decision makers from Europe and from the Caribbean region took place, with the aim to explore possible long terms strategies to increase successful inter-Caribbean as well as Europe-Caribbean academic cooperation.

The roundtable discussion took off from some points illustrated by the project coordinator which constitute the starting points of the CaribErasmus Green Paper.

The participants discussed the **Vision** towards which we must work. According to this vision, European-Caribbean higher education cooperation should be based on five points:

1. be able to articulate the many ongoing initiatives in both regions;
2. involve all possible levels of society, starting from academics and universities and including companies, cultural associations and other civil society bodies;
3. go beyond the promotion of European universities, and towards an inclusive Higher Education area across EU and the Caribbean;
4. take into account new ways of collaboration such as: e-Learning, Virtual Mobility, Partnerships in research and teaching, including mutual use of – e-infrastructure for education and research;
5. be based on the attitudes, opinions and expectations of Caribbean Higher Education stakeholders towards the European Union and viceversa.

Given such a vision, a preliminary “**Diagnosis**” carried out by the CaribErasmus consortium, highlighted the following key issues:

- Absence of HE as a priority in the existing strategy for EU-Caribbean cooperation;
- Existence of two alternative frameworks of EU-Caribbean cooperation: the LAC (Latin American and Caribbean) and the ACP (Africa Caribbean and Pacific) schemes, both of which are unfit to the purpose of knowledge creation and dissemination in the Caribbean context;
- Different level of participation in students mobility: some countries of the region have much lower level of participation than others (as shown, for instance, by the actual involvement in the Erasmus Mundus programme)
- Uncertainty about the matriculation requirements for entry to European HE institutions by Caribbean students
- Fragmentation of inter-Caribbean cooperation, linked to multilingualism and multiculturalism;
- The extent to which language skills are seen as an impediment to greater access to European HE and research institutions and the possibilities for sustained collaboration
- The extent to which cost is viewed as a delimiter to greater access to European HE
- Existence of a diffused diaspora of professors and researchers and of higher education graduates in general.

These issues were recognised to be both problems and sources of opportunities; it was agreed that the CaribErasmus Green Paper will analyse them trying to show how to build on these very specific characteristics of the Caribbean to reach the vision presented above.

Given such a scenario, some possible areas where action is needed were presented:

1. The approach of the EU towards the Caribbean. The participants agreed that the specificities of the Caribbean region should be taken as much as possible into account when planning cooperation programmes. Whenever possible, specific calls for proposal should be released for EU-Caribbean initiatives.
2. Inter-regional collaboration as a way to respond to the international collaboration challenges. It was agreed that further support should be granted to the existing efforts in terms of regional academic portals, networks and regional university programmes. The example of the Open Access project by the Caribbean Academy of Science is an example in this direction.
3. Local support to international collaboration. Local capacity to cooperate with Europe and to seize EU opportunities should be built within the Caribbean at all levels, of the policy and decision-makers as well as of the higher education practitioners.
4. International collaboration and the diaspora problem/opportunity. Participants commented that EU mobility schemes should be used to facilitate the work of diaspora researchers coming back to the region, even if only for limited periods. A network of “Caribbean students/researchers abroad” able to liaise between the “two worlds” could be established.
5. Fostering articulation among the existing collaboration schemes. The need to collect, coordinate and distribute best practices information, which could constitute a permanent helpdesk source for beginners and actors who need or wish to contact Caribbean initiatives, was expressed and considered important.

3. CONCLUSIONS

CaribErasmus is currently carrying out an online survey on the perceptions of Caribbean students and researchers towards the European higher education system and towards the idea of studying a period in Europe. Once completed, its results will contribute to the Green Paper assumptions or diagnosis.

Meanwhile, other promotion and dialogue events will be organized that will also contribute to raise arguments for the Green Paper.

The planned events are the following:

- 11th October 2011 in Dominican Republic
- 29th-30th November 2011 in the Eastern Caribbean, likely Barbados or Trinidad and Tobago
- February 2012 in Cuba.

In June 2012, a Final Seminar will be organised in Brussels, Belgium, in order to present the project results and recommendations to European stakeholders, networks and European Commission officers.

Annex 1. Agenda

09.30 – 10.00 Welcome and introduction

- Opening- Mr. Mazzocchi Alemanni, EU Ambassador to Jamaica
- Introduction to the event – Carlton Samuels, CKLN

10.00 - 11.00 Fostering students and researchers mobility: European strategies and tools

- “The European strategy for internationalisation of higher education”, Fabio Nascimbeni, MENON
- “The Erasmus Mundus Programme: how it works, what it offers”, Cristina Brecciaroli, MENON

11.00-11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 - 13.00 The CaribErasmus contribution: validation of the main project preliminary results

- “The CaribErasmus Project: aims, activities, expected results”, Carlton Samuels, CKLN
- “Investigating perceptions of Caribbean students on Europe”, Matteo Sgarzi, AlmaLaurea
- “An overview of the opportunities offered by European universities”, Bertrand Laborde, StudyPortals

13.00 - 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 16.00 Discussion Roundtable: long terms strategies to increase successful inter-Caribbean and Europe-Caribbean academic cooperation

Presentation of CaribErasmus Green Paper starting points

Chair: Fabio Nascimbeni, MENON

- Maria Elena Deulofeu Crespo, FORDES, Cuba
- Darwin Muñoz, UNIBE, Dominican Republic
- Isidro Fernandez, UNESCO, Jamaica
- Iva Voldanova, EURASHE, Belgium

16.00 Conclusions

Carlton Samuels, CKLN

Annex 2. The CaribErasmus Project and the Erasmus Mundus Programme

The CaribErasmus project aims to foster cooperation among European and Caribbean higher education institutions in a structured and sustainable perspective.

At the end of this project, the network stemming from the same project interactivity is expected to be self-sustaining and a tool for driving the EU-Caribbean cooperation. In line with the Erasmus Mundus logic, CaribErasmus intends to increase attractiveness of EU Higher Education by facilitating and supporting mutual knowledge and information sharing in a collaboration framework, that means not through one-way promotion activities but rather through long-term partnership building (the slogan of CaribErasmus is “promote and improve by sharing”).

The project involves key European HE networks (MENON, EURASHE and AlmaLaurea), a professional European study choice platform (StudyPortals), two key regional university network from the Caribbean (the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network and the Centro Coordinador para la Formación y Desarrollo del Capital Humano from Cuba) and the Universidad Iberoamericana from Dominican Republic.

Erasmus Mundus is a cooperation and mobility programme in the field of higher education that aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with Third-Countries. In addition, it contributes to the development of human capital and the international cooperation capacity of Higher education institutions in Third Countries by increasing mobility between the European Union and these countries.

The Erasmus Mundus programme provides support to:

- **higher education institutions** that wish to implement joint programmes at postgraduate level or to set-up inter-institutional cooperation partnerships between universities from Europe and targeted Third-Countries;
- **individual students, researchers and university staff** who wish to spend a study / research / teaching period in the context of one of the above mentioned joint programmes or cooperation partnerships;
- **any organisation active in the field of higher education** that wishes to develop projects aimed at enhancing the attractiveness, profile, visibility and image of European higher education worldwide.

More and updated information is available on the project website www.cariberasmus.eu.