



Mariya GABRIEL

*Commissioner for Innovation, Research,
Culture, Education and Youth*

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Dear Professor Nicolle, Dear Professor Hekking,

I thank you for your letter sent on 2nd April 2020 regarding the impact of COVID-19 on private Higher Education institutions in Europe. I appreciate very much your feedback on the difficulties that the sector is facing in the current context.

Certain challenges such as the COVID-19 are common to all Member States and call for cooperation, with countries working together and learning from each other.

The Commission is working closely with EU Education ministries, Erasmus+ National Agencies, representatives from higher education networks and student organisations to provide solid support to the EU's Higher education institutions, their staff and students during these trying times, so as to best complement the various actions taken at regional and national level. I will invite the ministers of education, with whom I am in regular contact, to address private higher education institutions in their countermeasures against the economic effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

There are also a number of EU-level instruments, which may complement the national support provided to higher education institutions. Private higher education institutions are eligible to apply for the European Structural Investment Funds under the Operational Programmes of their respective countries. You may find more information by accessing the following [link](#). On 2 April, the European Commission proposed numerous changes to the cohesion policy rulebook in order to mobilise €37 billion of unused funds for various measures alleviating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes investment in IT equipment to close the digital gap so that no student is left behind.

It is also pertinent to note that the European Investment Fund has just launched a Call for Expression of Interest, addressed to "Financial Intermediaries", to invest in Skills & Education. You may access this call at the following [link](#). Beyond traditional banks, the scheme explicitly targets Higher Education Institutions directly to act as an intermediary benefiting from the EU guarantee.

*Prof. Jean-Michel Nicolle
Prof. Klaus Hekking
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This new scheme is a pilot for the Social Investment Window under InvestEU and targets the supply and demand side of the education and training sectors. It covers individual support such as student loan schemes, as well as institutional support.

When it comes to the Erasmus+ Programme, we have launched a series of measures to address the impact of COVID-19 on students and institutions. Higher education institutions are encouraged to be as flexible as possible in helping students achieve the outcomes indicated in their learning agreements, regardless of the students' location, through remote studying arrangements with the use of digital tools. This flexibility will in particular help students who have returned to their home countries to finish their courses at their host institution and to have the ECTS credits obtained through remote studying arrangements fully recognised. This is an approach that we would like to continue in the future Erasmus Programme, as we are planning to introduce the concept of blended mobility, whereby a period of short physical mobility may be combined with a virtual mobility component. More information is available on the Erasmus+ website.

We hope that you will be able to make use of these measures in tackling this difficult crisis. I invite you to share them with the members of your Union.

I would like to once more thank you for reaching out and I wish you and your member institutions great strength ahead.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mariya Gabriel', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Mariya Gabriel