



M.A. EYS

EUROPEAN YOUTH STUDIES

MA European Youth Studies

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The M.A. European Youth Studies (M.A. EYS) will be a fully accredited and genuinely transnational and intercultural higher education 120 ECTS postgraduate qualification in interdisciplinary European youth studies, thereby filling an education and qualification gap at national and European levels. It provides an anchor for the convergence and consolidation of structured dialogue between research, policy and practice, contributing to the development of policy-relevant research, evidence-based policymaking and informed, reflective practice. Through its students' Master's theses and practice portfolios, the M.A. EYS will generate new knowledge and understanding of young people, and increase the pool of potential specialists eligible to continue on to doctoral studies and/or further professional qualifications in the field.

Ultimately, this Master's degree should set quality benchmarks and a reference point for improving and sustaining the supply of qualified personnel required in the coming decades to take forward the development of European youth research able to inform more intelligent, knowledge-driven policymaking and contribute to high quality, evidence-based practice in the youth sector as a whole.

European cooperation in higher education degree courses has typically meant the provision of added-value content and mobility for students already registered on existing courses at the participating institutions. The M.A. EYS goes a step further: it nurtures a dedicated group of students by offering a purpose-designed curriculum that will be delivered as a 'blended learning package' in residential seminar blocks, by e-learning and in conventional face-to-face format during a 'mobility' semester spent at one of the accrediting universities. The M.A. EYS teaching and learning context is thereby inherently intercultural, its students bringing focused international experience into participating university settings. It will explicitly seek to attract a balanced composition of students from throughout Europe and potentially beyond, drawn from emergent youth researchers, experienced non-formal youth educators/trainers and youth workers, and public administration and youth services staff. Applicants with mixed and varied educational and professional qualifications and experience are particularly invited to apply with a view to encouraging a critical and creative blend for intellectual, personal and professional development in the course community.

Key challenges include, firstly, maintaining quality alongside enabling open access and recognition of prior experience, and secondly, assuring complementarity and progression with respect to other kinds and levels of learning opportunities for specialists in the youth field.

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1. Project Objectives

The project's overarching aim was to establish a transnational and intercultural master's programme in European Youth Studies (M.A. EYS), to be jointly developed in a specialist consortium of European universities as a fully integrated joint degree.

The primary intention of this full Bologna M.A. in European Youth Studies is to raise the quantity and quality of the human resources available to youth research, policy and practice in Europe; a professional enhancement in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU Youth Strategy and the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative. It also contributes to the modernisation of higher education by delivering an integrated course for an international and multilingual student body. Furthermore, the M.A. EYS stands as a model European programme, charting the waters for other initiatives that might subsequently tackle similar inter-institutional complexities.

One goal of the M.A. EYS is to set quality benchmarks in postgraduate education in interdisciplinary and transnational youth studies. It aims to create constructive operational bridges between the often segregated discourses of youth research, policy and practice in order to support collaboration, release creative potential, and generally raise the quality of educational and social services targeting Europe's young people. It aims to promote career flexibility and mobility, as well as asserting the value and utility of evidence-based policy and theoretically informed practice.

The blended learning strategy provides the foundation for a coherent curriculum and an integrated personal and professional learning experience to a dispersed and multi-national student body. The modular curriculum structure and wide-ranging pedagogical methods built into the programme seek to make the most of the cultural capital, accumulated experience and linguistic competences of both faculty and students. The intercultural and multilingual content and pedagogy and an international composition of students and the faculty will encourage understanding and working with multidimensional difference. The concordance between content, pedagogy and teaching/learning relations is fundamental for the integrity of the course and its impact.

The M.A. EYS aims to make a tangible contribution to the recognition of prior learning and experience within the frameworks developed via the European Qualification Framework and the broadly corresponding National Qualification Frameworks.

The quality assurance mechanisms of the M.A. EYS are inclusive: they foresee both student involvement and involvement by external experts via an advisory board whose members represent the full range of stakeholders in the youth field.

2. Project Approach

The M.A. EYS project brought together formidable teaching and research expertise from all parts of Europe to create a unique "Bologna 120 ECTS" Master's degree in European Youth Studies, a specialist and interdisciplinary field that emerged in the 1990s in response to the rapidly changing European social demographic and its implications for the study of youth issues and for young people's lives.

Theoretical approaches to youth studies have increasingly been of an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary nature; the move towards cross-discipline perspectives reflects a search for integrated and holistic frameworks of understanding in highly complex societies in a globalising era. Empirical studies of young people commonly use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the increasing relevance of comparative and intercultural research brings new challenges for anyone wishing to improve the quality of information about youth in Europe both in its own terms and in relation to other parts of the world.

Youth studies necessarily have policy relevance, and much contemporary research is driven by the concrete need for policy-related data combined with theoretical insight. Today European countries exchange and co-operate in development and implementation of youth policy and action, thus extending the scope for conceptualising policy relevance and for building constructive links between research and policymaking. Those who work directly with young people – in education, vocational training, non-formal/informal youth education and youth work, leisure and sports activities, social and health services, the provision of information and advice, the offering of counselling and guidance, voluntary activities and youth organisations – frequently make use of research-based knowledge to inform their practice, and themselves contribute to the knowledge base. The continuous search for quality in professional and voluntary practice is now becoming harder as education providers and social services restructure their content and their working methods to gear them to the changing contexts in which young people in Europe are growing up and experiencing young adulthood.

The M.A. EYS has been designed to be a high-quality postgraduate qualification that is genuinely international and interdisciplinary in concept and practice, one which aims to bridge research and action, theory and practice. Ultimately, the course should set the quality reference point and benchmark for improving and sustaining the supply of quality learning material and qualified staff required in the coming decades to take forward the development of European youth research that is also capable of informing policy, promoting intelligent, knowledge-driven policymaking, and inspiring high quality, evidence-based practice in the youth sector.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project set out to develop a master's programme in European Youth Studies (M.A. EYS) and both the curriculum specification and pedagogical principles have been fully specified and delivered.

The M.A. EYS is designed as a modular programme for 4 semesters in 2 years full-time study. The curriculum comprises 120 ECTS (credits according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), made up of 5 mandatory core course modules (@ 10 ECTS), 3 elective course modules (@ 10 ECTS, taken during the mobility semester), and three further mandatory modules: a professional practice module (10 ECTS), a self-assessment (personal and professional development) module (10 ECTS) and a thesis module (20 ECTS). Student workload is estimated at 3 000 hours.

The five mandatory core modules cover (1) theoretical foundations: social, cultural and educational perspectives; (2) European youth research; (3) Europe and youth policy; (4) intercultural and comparative research methods and (5) communication, management and leadership. Overall there is a balance in the course architecture between an academic theoretical strand and elements that meet students' developmental needs and prioritise local relevance and application. These elements support the two major student products, the 'academic' thesis and the reflective portfolio.

A pilot 'Short Course' including a residential component was implemented to developmentally test aspects of the M.A. EYS curriculum architecture, activities and pedagogy. This was generally successful but also provided useful formative feedback towards the development of the full programme.

There is also a carefully finessed language policy in the M.A. EYS. English is in general the common language of course instruction and administration, although in appropriate circumstances students' written work can be delivered in English, French and German; written work in further alternative languages can be allowed for specific modules providing it falls within the faculty's linguistic competence spectrum. In block seminar group discussions and peer-group exchanges, students decide on an ad-hoc basis in which language/s they will interact, with the proviso that the choice of language in such settings ensures the inclusion of all participants involved. As a general rule, course material and student work include multilingual literature references.

The M.A. EYS curriculum does not comprise a combination of modules independently developed and delivered by individual partner universities. The course is based on a genuinely transnational and interdisciplinary architecture presupposing integrative conceptualisation, development, design and delivery. These features of the consortium's development of the programme will be carried over into its delivery.

4. Partnerships

Conceptualised specifically as a European-level qualification accredited by a network of European university partners, the potential of the M.A. EYS continues to be strengthened by the support of key international institutional and professional players. The current advice and support network comprises the European Commission/Council of Europe Youth Partnership, the European Youth Centres run by the Council of Europe's Youth Department, the European Youth Forum, ISA's Research Committee 34 (Sociology of Youth) and ESA's Research Network Youth and Generation.

The consortium came together in early 2006. Before this EU-LLP-Erasmus curriculum development project grant was awarded in mid-2009, its members contributed their time and expertise on a voluntary basis. Resources for consortium meetings, development work and for administrative support were provided by small-scale patchwork funding from partner universities (Innsbruck, Kuopio-Mikkeli/Finland and Luxembourg), from the European Commission/Council of Europe Youth Partnership and from the Youth Unit of the Luxembourg Ministry of Family and Integration; the Danube University of Krems provided a net storage system for the sharing of digital documents, which was transferred to Innsbruck in mid-2009. The Austrian Ministries of Science and Research (BMWf) and the Ministry of Health, Family and Youth (BMGFJ) donated significant funds for 2008-09 to cover meetings and part-time administrative assistance.

The LLP-MA-EYS grant then covered 75% of the curriculum development project's costs through to autumn 2011; consortium partner universities were contractually expected to contribute 25% of the project's costs during this period; associated partners participated on a self-funding basis.

However, if fully budgeted in real terms, the course development and initial launch of a Master's degree amounts to at least 500 000 € – much more than the maximum possible Erasmus budget. The inevitable shortfall was made up in part via additional contributions in kind from the partner universities, most particularly in the form of staff time, at levels appropriate to their specific roles and tasks. Moreover, the project consortium actively searched for further sources to cover activities that were not funded via the LLP-MA-EYS grant, including student participation in the project's 'Short Course' which was supported by the Youth Partnership complementary to the LLP-MA-EYS grant. Additional funds were secured to obtain the rights for an open access digital library on European Youth Studies.

5. Plans for the Future

The M.A. EYS programme explicitly requires a balanced composition of students from throughout Europe and potentially beyond, drawn from emerging youth researchers, non-formal youth educators/trainers and youth workers, and public administration and youth services staff. Applicants with mixed and varied educational and professional qualifications and experience have been declared to be of particular interest in favour of a critical and creative blend for intellectual, personal and professional development in the course community.

The consortium's first estimates suggest a potential target group of some 1 200 suitable candidates in Europe who would benefit from a programme of this kind. The high interest generated by the project's part residential 'Short Course' – a 10-ECTS sample of the M.A. EYS curriculum in blended learning modality – has confirmed this.

The first phase of implementation foresees an annual intake of 30 students and hence a regular student body of 60 students in any one academic year. The consortium will conduct an integrated recruitment and selection process. For those applicants without conventional entry qualifications (that is, not holding a first higher education degree in a relevant discipline), procedures to accredit prior learning (APL) will be developed and, if appropriate, an access course designed.

Key challenges include, firstly, maintaining quality alongside enabling open access and recognition of prior experience, and secondly, assuring complementarity and progression with respect to other kinds and levels of learning opportunities for specialists in the youth field.

The M.A. EYS should lead to acquiring high-level theoretical and practical knowledge, understandings and applications relevant to youth studies as a specialist research field; comparative and intercultural research methods; national and European youth policy in the European institutional context; the development of management, leadership and teamwork capacity; problem-solving competence for implementation activities; and intercultural, social and communication competence development. Graduates should also have learned how to 'translate' between research, policy and practical issues, concerns and contexts. They should be qualified for broad-based professional careers in academic, educational, social, administrative, management and human resource development contexts, including European and international organisations, NGOs and companies.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The M.A. EYS contributes to a variety of European Union policy areas, including

Youth in Action

The European Commission White Paper on Youth (2001) gives priority to 'gaining more information and a better understanding of youth'. The M.A. EYS strengthens the knowledge, competence and human resources base for youth studies in Europe; it contributes to fostering structured dialogue between research, policy and practice. The action programme Youth in Action (2007-2013) takes up the White Paper priorities; the M.A. EYS hence contributes to achieving overall programme aims.

Research and development

The M.A. EYS will improve the quality of human resources with respect to the technical and social capacity for working in transnational, comparative and intercultural youth research, including research with relevance for policy and practice.

Employment

M.A. EYS graduates should benefit from improved employment prospects and wider career perspectives in the youth field as a whole and in the educational and social sector more generally, including at European and international level. The curriculum objectives privilege generic and transferable competences relevant to emerging occupational profiles that cross the boundaries between research, policy and practice.

Recognition of qualifications

M.A. EYS recruitment/selection principles and procedures will endeavour to open access those whose knowledge, skills and experience are not accurately reflected in their formal qualifications. Once underway, specific measures for the accreditation of prior experience and learning can be developed according to the scale of demand.

Equal opportunities for men and women

M.A. EYS module development teams developed a gender-sensitive screening of content and methods. A consistent delivery of the programme will ensure equitable representation of women and men amongst students and faculty, include gender-proofing in monitoring and evaluation procedures, and will facilitate participation in residential seminars and mobility semester for students with family responsibilities.

Fight against racism and xenophobia

M.A. EYS recruitment/selection and teaching/learning will aim for equitable representation from different countries, cultures and ethnic groups amongst students and faculty; it will endeavour to include intellectual and cultural diversity of information and ideas in the development of module content and preparation of course literature and materials.

Co-operation with third countries and the competent international organisations

M.A. EYS is open to all. It will offer a perspective for strengthening international co-operation in youth research, policy and practice via alumni networks and the involvement of Third Country universities in the faculty and programme. Consortium members are active in a range of professional networks (ISA, ESA, ASEA-ASEM, ICNYP) and are recognised international level experts and advisors in their specialist fields (UNESCO, UN Youth Unit, ILO, Council of Europe).

7. Integrating research, policy and practice

The M.A. EYS Consortium has developed an integral thematic Reader that is intended as the first of a series of publications reflecting upon the rapidly changing world of young people in Europe and seeking to contextualise and understand those changes. The content of this Reader has been designed to serve as a reflective starting point not only for prospective students of the M.A. EYS as an interdisciplinary postgraduate course, but also for youth researchers, policy makers, practitioners and all those interested in youth studies.



The Reader reflects the primary objective of the programme to create the ground for conceptualising European youth studies as an emerging Europe-wide integrated field of youth research, youth policy and youth work. These three vantage points, as distinctive arenas for professional thought and action, constitute the corners of what has been described as a 'triangle' that references a policy/practice/research dialogue in which the whole would be substantially greater than its parts, each area of expertise benefiting from bringing its discourse into closer collaboration with the other two. Our vision is that youth research, policy and practice can mutually enrich each other theoretically and practically and broaden our understanding of young people while sharpening our efforts in support of their struggle to manage uncertainty at present and negotiate their life transitions into the future.

The first three sections of the Reader include papers representing the issues in and approaches to youth research, youth policy and youth work while the fourth section features papers building bridges between the previously separated fields. An introductory chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the diversity in European youth studies as an emerging specialist field of knowledge and skills.

The Reader is published under a creative commons license and available on our website at <http://www.youthstudies.eu>.

It carries the ambition of the joint degree course to move away from canonical academic disciplines and isolated professional areas towards a new integrated field whose main intrinsic features are intellectual and professional border-crossing and European multi-dimensionality. We invite all actors in the youth field to contribute to and reflect upon this integrating process.