

European Mobility Scheme for Physics Students

Those informal, but essential, mobility arrangements that allowed a student to study in a physics department in another country with full academic recognition, have become rarer, restricted geographically and formalised: with EPS's help they could become more widely available.

When student numbers were smaller, curricula less rigid and the scientific community less diversified it was not uncommon to find means to study elsewhere on one's way to a first degree. As national education systems thrived and walls went up it became more difficult. Some organizations reacted to the new realities with various mobility schemes, notably UNESCO and the Council of Europe with conventions established several years ago, and the European Community with its Course Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) set up as a six-year pilot project for five disciplines within the EC's ERASMUS Programme (physics is not included and the number of participating institutes is limited to an "inner circle" of 80: those in the "outer circle" receive information on progress).

Times have changed even more and with them the need to help link EC and EFTA countries and integrate physics communities from central/eastern Europe. The EC responded in 1990 with a programme resembling ERASMUS called TEMPUS, and with an enlargement of ERASMUS to allow participation by EFTA countries in 1992. But it remains unlikely that a supranational organization will be able to put in place a mobility scheme open to all of Europe's institutions within the near future.

Swiss Mobility Scheme

Some local initiatives (see *Europhysics*

News 21 (1990) 182) have emerged and a successful one is a mobility convention for physics that was finalized by all of the nine Swiss universities and their equivalents in May 1990. It aims to allow study periods of typically one year with full academic recognition by the home institute. In the first year of operation (1990/91) there were already 10 participating students representing a significant proportion (4%) of the country's annual intake in physics.

The Swiss scheme appears to work well because, although based on the ECTS scheme whose administrators remain in contact, it is somewhat simpler, more flexible and more manageable owing to some essential guiding principles calling for a fair measure of mutual trust. They include:

- a clear division between the "home" and the "guest" institute's responsibilities (the guest offers courses and organizes exams according to requirements set by the home institute which selects students);
- the payment of fees to the home institute which awards the final degree.

A European Convention?

Professor Ernst Heer from the Physics Department, Geneva University, who helped formulate and implement the convention, has approached the Society on behalf of the Swiss coordinators to see a similar scheme could be established for the whole of Europe.

Following discussions, the Executive Committee meeting on March 22 decided to set up a Working Group (I. Abonyi, J.C. Dore, E. Heer, E.O. Folberth, C. Leubner and G. Thomas) to examine the issue. As a first step, a short questionnaire calling for expressions of interest will be sent to physics

departments (either by the Secretariat after contacting national societies or directly by the national societies). The aim is to have sufficient information available for a discussion in Council in May, and hopefully a functioning European scheme in physics for autumn 1992.

The various and often not inconsiderable problems appear surmountable. Aside from formulating and ratifying a workable convention, one needs to consider language competence, housing arrangements, limits on the number of guests accepted, programme coordinators, whether recognition is by transferring credits or by agreeing exams, and the ability to profit from mobility grants available elsewhere. It seems important that the scheme is run by scientists and has a central database accessible to students that contains "information packages" giving details of the courses being offered.

Interest: If you (or your Department) wishes to express an interest in a European mobility scheme for physics students and you (it) has not received the questionnaire, please contact G. Thomas, EPS Budapest Secretariat (see inside front cover).

Information: for further information, please contact:

G. Thomas, EPS Budapest Secretariat, or Prof. E. Heer, Dépt. de Physique, 24, quai Ernest-Ansermet, CH-1211 Geneva 4
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Renseignements complémentaires:

Prof. C. Joseph, IPN, CH-1015 Lausanne, tél. +41 (21) 692 23 62.

Les candidatures avec curriculum vitae et liste de publications sont à adresser avant le **21 mai 1991** à M. J.-C. Bünzli, Doyen de la Faculté des Sciences, Collège propédeutique, CH-1015 Lausanne.

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