

Student Mobility Scheme Underway

Gilberto Bernardini, the European Physical Society's initiator and first President, listed the encouragement of the exchange of students and young physicists as one of the Society's goals. It is therefore a pleasing coincidence that the European Mobility Scheme for Physics Students (EMSPS) starts operation this autumn, at the time the Society celebrates its 25th anniversary. The scheme, established under the auspices of EPS and functioning with its continuous support, has generated substantial interest. Some 129 institutions from 26 countries (see map) are participating so far, and as of August 1993 more than 100 students will take advantage of the scheme in the first year.

The Need

Youth exchange in general, and student mobility in particular, are recognized means to further international understanding and to promote cooperation between countries in higher education (the basis of technological development and sound economic growth). For Europe, with its epoch-making political developments — in both the west and the east, and in the relations between these two regions — these objectives are of ever increasing importance.

At the dawn of modern physics, mobility of students and young scientists was fairly common; it became more difficult in recent times for political, academic, economic, and social reasons. Several supranational organizations therefore established conventions and programmes to reverse the trend. In particular, the European Community (EC) founded its pioneering ERASMUS programme, recently extended to the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, and complemented by the TEMPUS programme for east and central Europe (E&CE).

The Scheme

The EMSPS is a mobility scheme covering all universities (and equivalent institutions) from the whole of Europe that grant a degree in physics. It is based on a convention, adopted by the Council of EPS in 1992, to which the universities are invited to adhere. The scheme aims to allow physics students to spend a mobility period of study in another university, called the host institution, and to ensure that this period will be recognized academically when the student returns to his or her home institution. The EMSPS is mainly intended for undergraduate studies so that

students may acquire, during their basic studies, an equivalent education abroad in a different linguistic and cultural environment. A mobility period during more advanced studies (for degrees such as the UK's M.Sc., the French D.E.A., and their equivalents, or for course work during doctoral studies) is also possible. Students may then profit from special courses which are not available at their own universities.

Students entering the mobility period must have successfully completed at least the first year of undergraduate studies, normally also the second year, so most will participate during the third or subsequent years of study. The mobility period is typically one semester or one academic year.

Recognition of studies by the home institution is a key element. This is ensured by having academic responsibility remain with the home institution (which grants the final degree). Home institutions therefore select students, agree on the choice of host institutions and on the programme of studies and, most importantly, establish the conditions for the recognition of studies.

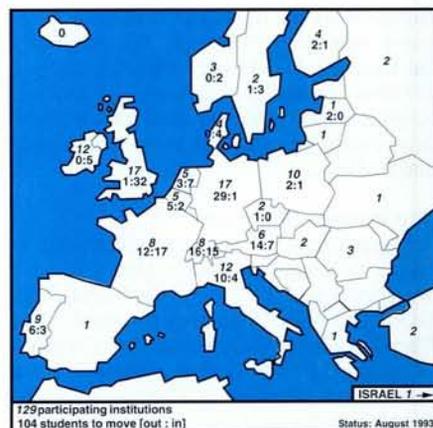
Simple and Flexible

The EMSPS Mobility Scheme aims to function as simply as possible, and with a high degree of flexibility so that any student wishing to spend a mobility period abroad can find a place in a suitable university. Coordinators in each participating university therefore play an important rôle. On the European level, a Mobility Committee sees to the proper management of the scheme and helps solve problems that may arise.

Owing to the large number of universities participating in the scheme, the necessary information on all academic and organizational matters is provided by the computerized remote-access EMSPS-Database run by the Physics Department of the University of Manchester. Once complete, it will contain extensive and up-to-date information on European physics curricula and will thus be of considerable interest in contexts other than student mobility. Access to the database is unrestricted [instructions for access were published in *Europhysics News* 24 (1993) 20].

While the administrative overhead will be kept very modest, operating the scheme nonetheless requires significant financial support, notably for student grants. ERASMUS has accepted the scheme as an Inter-University Cooperation Programme (ICP) so students moving within EC countries and from EC to EFTA countries (or vice versa)

The Mobility Committee after its meeting in Gent in April 1993. Details of the members, most of whom are Regional Coordinators with some acting as Programme Coordinators for ERASMUS and TEMPUS, are listed in the Directory on page 136.



The European Mobility Scheme for Physics Students. A map giving, for each country, the number of participating institutions (-) and the numbers of outgoing and incoming students [-:] for 1993/4.

may apply within the scheme for ERASMUS grants (89 have done so for the coming academic year).

A Mobility Foundation

Support for student mobility to and from E&CE is in principle available from the EC's TEMPUS programme. An EMSPS application for TEMPUS support in 1993/4 has been approved recently, although unfortunately funds were only available for two participating countries (Hungary and Latvia). It is somewhat disturbing that student grants for the region with the most important needs, namely E&CE and the former Soviet Union (FSU), are particularly difficult to obtain, or non-existent. Help from individual universities, national physical societies, and other sources would therefore be welcome.

The 25th anniversary of EPS could be the occasion to set-up a special fund at the disposal of EPS for helping students from E&CE and the FSU, and from the two participating countries belonging to the eastern Mediterranean region. It must be made clear that the objective of the scheme is a mobility period of limited duration, with the student returning home, and in no sense represents an organized brain drain.

As expected, student flow is rather unbalanced with respect to home and host countries, being particularly strong towards the United Kingdom. There is, however, some exchange towards more "peripheral" countries. All the participating universities are not yet involved in student exchange so more effort is needed to promote the opportunities. However, the level of exchange envisaged for the first year of operation is overall quite remarkable; it augurs well for the future.

Universities are continuing to join the EMSPS, which remains open on a continuous basis. Letters of adherence for participation from 1994/95 on should be submitted to the EPS Mobility Committee before **30 September 1993**, especially if the institutions concerned wish to be included in the next application to ERASMUS. Please contact the Chairman, Mobility Committee, EPS Secretariat, BP 69, CH-1213 Petit-Lancy 2 (fax: +41-22-793 13 17; email: epsmob@cervm.cern.ch) for further information.

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