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**NOTE TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
ON THE ERASMUS+ ONLINE LINGUISTIC SUPPORT (OLS)**

Since its launch in October 2014, the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) has already benefitted more than 150.000 students who went abroad with Erasmus+, enabling them to assess their level of language proficiency, to improve it where needed – more than 50.000 followed an OLS language course – and to measure their progress upon return. This would not have been possible without your support, and we thank you for this. We also take this opportunity to inform you about the launch of new "Live Coaching" features that bring additional learning opportunities for your students, to recall a number of key principles for a good implementation of OLS, and to present future improvements.

1. A unique and innovative linguistic support tool

The OLS language courses are a unique combination of self-paced activities and interactive features. The OLS language courses allow your students, if need be, to improve their proficiency either in the main language of instruction or work they will use abroad or in the language of the receiving country. They can do it at their own pace, from anywhere and at any time. Students can personalise their learning to their own needs and preferences; they can skip the contents in which they are already proficient, to focus on the aspects of the language which they need to improve most. With such flexibility, every student can design their own learning path and set personalised goals.

Now with the new "Live Coaching" features (MOOCs, Forum and Tutoring sessions), students can also benefit from interactive live sessions and dedicated support from native speaker tutors, therefore maximising their progress in the language. While the online course is an ideal way to perfect reading comprehension, listening ability, grammatical revision and to consolidate vocabulary, the "Live Coaching" features help improve oral competence through live interactions.

Each week, with MOOCs, participants can attend short interactive thematic sessions on subjects which are relevant to them (flat hunting, social and health systems, presentation skills, etc.). The Forum, moderated by native speaker tutors, offers them a space where they can exchange their experience with other Erasmus+ students. During the tutoring sessions¹, students can interact online with a tutor in a very small group (max. six participants), and therefore benefit from individual support.

¹ The Tutoring sessions will become available in October 2015.

2. A non-selective instrument for linguistic support

With such opportunities to improve linguistic skills, we expect that it will contribute to reduce the need for Erasmus+ students to provide language certifications ahead of their selection by the sending HEIs, hence reducing to a minimum the requests for multiple language tests that students would need to go through before going on Erasmus. The first mandatory OLS assessment must not be used to select and discriminate students. Its objective is to assess the level of already selected students in their main language of instruction or work abroad, and to provide them with an opportunity to boost their level where needed, so that they can make the most out of this experience.

If students, already selected based on their merits and motivation, are invited by their sending HEI to take the first OLS language assessment sufficiently early before they leave on mobility, this should allow the students to follow online language courses where needed and to reach the level recommended by the receiving organisation by the start of the exchange abroad. Preliminary OLS results show that students who actively follow and engage in the online language course are able to improve their language level by at least one CEFR² level after two months, depending on their initial language level and assiduity.

In parallel, the Commission, together with National Agencies, will continue improving the allocation process of OLS licences to make sure that HEIs can already have them available in Spring, for students leaving in the first semester.

At the end of their exchange abroad, after having taken the final language assessment, students are able to quantify the progress they have made, and receive a detailed notification attesting their new language level. This also allows the European Commission to assess the overall impact of the Erasmus+ programme on linguistic proficiency, one of the key indicators in the Erasmus+ programme legal base.

3. An instrument based on mutual trust

The recommended level of language competence is stated in the Inter-institutional agreements and the Learning agreements, and thus agreed upon by the three parties. With Erasmus+, sending HEIs now commit themselves to ensure that their outgoing students have the requested language level, and such mutual agreement should be sufficient.

Sending higher education institutions are responsible for providing their students with the most appropriate linguistic support, be it through OLS or any other approach that can be funded through the organisational support, to ensure that their students get the recommended level agreed with the receiving institution by the start of the mobility. Therefore, sending HEIs are not required to send the results of the OLS language assessment to the receiving institutions. It is up to the students to decide whether they agree to disclose the results of their OLS language assessment to the receiving institution or not.

² Further information about the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is available at www.coe.int/lang-cefr.

4. New functionalities

We value very much the feedback from HEIs and students to help us continuously improving the OLS instrument and to make OLS procedures simpler and smoother, wherever possible.

In this regard, we propose as from September 2015 to automatically invite students having a level in the main language of instruction or work up to B1 level to follow an OLS language course, without the need for the sending institution to take any action in the OLS instrument.

For those having a level between B2 and C2, they will be able, if they wish so, either to follow an online course in their main language of instruction or work or in the language of the country, provided that such language is available in OLS. It will be up to the sending HEI to indicate this choice directly in OLS.

With the introduction of six new languages (Czech, Swedish, Danish, Greek, Polish and Portuguese)³ in the 2016 call, this should allow students to benefit even more from the OLS, and subsequently from their Erasmus+ experience.

The Commission has allocated a sufficient number of OLS licences to each National Agency for both language assessments and language courses, so that every single student who takes the OLS language assessment has the possibility to follow an OLS language course.

5. Useful resources

Useful resources for HEIs are available on the OLS website, www.erasmusplusols.eu. Answers to frequently asked questions are also publicly available at the following link: <http://erasmusplusols.eu/faq/>.

Additionally, the OLS beneficiary user guide, answers to technical questions, the graphical OLS toolkit as well as two OLS template presentations are available in the beneficiary back-end in the OLS website (first page after log-in). These documents will be regularly updated every time new functionalities are made available. This section also includes user guides for mobility participants for both the OLS language assessment and language courses, as well as answers to technical questions for mobility participants. Finally, a general presentation of the language assessment and guided tours of the language courses are also available on the same page.

New communication and promotion materials (videos, interviews, promotional trailers etc.) are currently in development and will be available on the OLS website in the coming weeks. We therefore encourage you to visit the OLS website regularly for new contents and updates.

Signed

Adam Tyson
Head of Unit

³ As from the 2016 Call, Czech, Swedish, Danish, Greek and Polish language courses will be offered at A1 level. Portuguese language courses will be available up until B2 level.