What is the European Student Card Initiative and what is the state of play

The European Student Card Initiative is part of the European Commission's broader vision for a European Education Area, which aims to make it common place for students to go on mobility and easier for them to do so. Mobile students will be able use their own student cards when abroad through the implementation of a European student eID for online cross-border authentication of students' status and academic records.

There are several parts to the initiative:

- The digitalisation and standardisation of the administrative processes that higher education institutions and participants (learners and staff) need to undertake in order to complete a mobility, which are currently heavily reliant on emailing scanned copies of signed papers. This happens via the two core components of the initiative: the **Erasmus+ App** and the **Erasmus Without Paper Network**.
- Secondly, providing students with a European Student Card (digital or physical), building on existing ones, to give them easier access to student facilities and discounts while abroad.

A **European Student Identifier** is necessary for students to benefit from all these services.

The digitalisation part is ongoing, as key Erasmus+ documentation such as the inter-institutional agreements and the learning agreement are starting to be exchanged digitally via the Erasmus Without Paper Network. The mobile Erasmus+ App has been launched and will be enhanced with further features, such as the option to access and sign the online learning agreement, in September 2021. The European Student Card will start a new wave of roll out as of autumn 2021.

What is the European Student Identifier and why is it important?

The European Student Identifier (ESI) is a digital identifier to uniquely identify students when they access student mobility services online (eg.: Online Learning Agreement or the Erasmus+ App). The ESI supports and eases international student mobility and transnational cooperation of higher education institutions, because it identifies the student without any doubt. The European Student Identifier is based on the student identifier that the Higher Education Instituions (HEIs) are already using to identify their students, the original student ID of the student, so there is no need for students to memorise any new student ID number.

Why is the ESI important?

The ESI is of paramount importance to build a robust student authentication system, in that it plays a key role in ensuring electronic systems correctly identify students and grant access rights accordingly. This is particularly true for whitelisted HEIs, as currently they have no alternative ways to release academic attributes[1].

From late August 2021 onwards students who cannot authenticate with an ESI will not be able to access the Erasmus+ student-facing mobility service systems, such as the Erasmus+ App or the Online Learning Agreement. Furthermore, this will also impede several steps of the electronic exchange of data (via the EWP Network) that ECHE holders are requested to connect to. The ESI being a key element used for student identification means that it is being "carried" as an element of the various APIs to ensure consistent identifications at any point of the mobility journey - so if that is missing it would hamper the data exchange chain.

ESI is being used as a means of student identification in all systems that have been built for the digital Erasmus+ infrastructure, including the Erasmus+ User Management System and its Beneficiary Module. Using ESI is crucial for all HEIs to be able to provide mobile students with an identification that will be used during the entire mobility journey to identify the student both at the sending and at the receiving institution.

The ESI is normally generated electronically and maintained and stored by the higher education institution, in its student registration system. For universities on the whitelist, the MyAcademicID platform will store this number. Students (or IROs) do not need access to this number, since this is a technical code that is being carried within the network when the student uses MyAcademicID for logging into any Erasmus+ mobility service systems (like the Online Learning Agreement, Erasmus+ App).

What is the role of authentication and why is it important?

The main goal of student authentication is to guarantee a trusted, digital student identity that allows for seamless access to a wide range of services: from applying for mobility under Erasmus+, to the management of academic records, access to university services, online discounts and more – and all of this within a secure and reliable eID management framework.

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[1] Relevant attributes are the ESI, schacHomeOrganisation code, affiliation and others.

Linking local authentication with global access to services allows students to smoothly navigate the digital world and safely and seamlessly authenticate their student status across borders and across institutions. Secure student authentication is a necessary precondition of the digitalisation of Erasmus+ processes.

How does authentication work in the European Student Card Iinitiative (ESCI)?

The recommended way for students to authenticate to services across borders in ESCI is via eduGAIN, ran by the National Research and Education Networks (or NRENs - see the list here: https://www.geant.org/About/Membership/Pages/MAandGAreps.aspx#NM).

If it is impossible for an HEI to benefit from the scalability and technical know-how these NRENs afford their users, an alternative technical solution has been developed called the "Identity provider of last resort" (or "IdP of last resort"), which is required in order to ensure no entities and students are left out. Erasmus+ National Agencies provided the European Commission the whitelist per each country associated to the Erasmus+ programme. There are around 500 institutions on the whitelist across the Erasmus+ programme countries.

How does this IdP of last resort work?

The IdP of last resort is managed by GÉANT, the MyAcademicID Operator, and it will be deployed in the framework of the currently running EDSSI project coordinated by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

The MyAcademicID Operator will in early August 2021 invite the contact person[2] from each whitelisted ECHE holder to register on the MyAcademicID Platform, which handles identification and access management. This task is most suitable for International Relations Officers (IROs) or colleagues within higher education institutions who have an overview of outgoing mobile students. In the process of registration, it would be advisable for the IROs to NOT use their personal accounts for authentication, but use a functional email address, if it exists, in order to ensure business continuity.

Erasmus+ students from the whitelisted institutions will be invited by IROs to register on the same platform, where their identity will be validated by the IRO. The MyAcademicID Operator will subsequently generate a

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[2] The email address that will be used is that of the „Organisation contact person" in the Organisation Registration System (ORS).

European Student Identifier for this student and store it directly in the MyAcademicID platform[3]. This will enable those Erasmus+ students to have access to the Erasmus+ student-facing digital infrastructure. After the application of the student is approved by an IRO, when they log in using Google or their national eID, they will be automatically recognised and their ESI will be retrieved from the MyAcademicID platform and made available to the relevant service (e.g. Online Learning Agreement).

This process of registration and validation of mobile students will not take place at the same time for all mobile students, but gradually as from September, just before each individual student is due to make use of the Erasmus+ digital infrastructure for the first time.

Detailed instructions for ECHE holders on how to register as an IRO on the MyAcademicID platform can be found here: https://wiki.geant.org/display/SM/IRO-Registration

Instructions for the IROs on how to approve or reject student applications for their institution are here:

https://wiki.geant.org/display/SM/IRO-Managing-Student-Applications

When the IROs complete the registration process, they will receive a registration link that they should make available to the students of their institution in order to apply for ESIs. For each whitelisted HEI there is going to be one registration link for their students. The registration link can be shared with the students by any means available to the IROs (e.g. email, public web page for students participating in the Erasmus+ study mobility, etc.).

Further instructions on student registration are outlined here:

https://wiki.geant.org/display/SM/Student-Registration

If there are any questions regarding the process of issuing the European Student Identifier, ECHE holders and their IROs should contact their National Agency, which will aggregate the requests and pass them onto the European Commission and GEANT. For more general questions regarding the connections to Erasmus Without Paper Network, a helpdesk for higher education institutions is available at the following address: dashboard@uni-foundation.eu

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[3] See the privacy notice here https://wiki.geant.org/display/SM/Privacy+Notice.

What is the timeline for the Idp of last resort deployment?

- ✓ July 2021: deployment of the technical solution by MyAcademicID Operator.
- ✓ Early August 2021: Invitation sent by MyAcademicID Operator to whitelisted ECHE holders to register onto the MyAcademicID platform
- ✓ By end August 2021: International Relations Officers of whitelisted HEIs enrolled into MyAcademicID platform and ready to validate their students' identity
- ✓ From September 2021 onwards: Students are gradually invited by IROs to register to get their European Student Identifier.

What will happen if ECHE holders miss the August deadline?

The MyAcademicID Operator will not be able to issue the European Student Identifier to the mobile students of the whitelisted institutions and they will not be able to take advantage of the benefits listed in the section "What is the European Student Identifier and why is it important?".