

## ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS) 2021-2027

What would you like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does your participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into your institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue.

The University of Applied Health Sciences in Zagreb (Zdravstveno veleučilište) is the oldest higher education institution in Croatia offering professional study programmes in nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, environmental health engineering, laboratory medical diagnostics and radiological technology, at undergraduate and graduate level.

The mission of the University is to organize top quality study programmes for health professionals and thus contribute to improving health and ethical standards, quality of health services, reducing health care spending, improving human relations in health care and protecting patient rights. To achieve its mission the University strives to offer study programmes which are harmonised with the European standards and based on modern and quality teaching processes using the latest medical and information technologies.

The University's vision is to remain not only the largest and most influential institution in the field of health care education, but also to continuously confirm and justify its current position as the leading higher education institution with a rich tradition in the education of health professionals, recognized for its excellence in Croatia, the countries of the region and Europe. In order to achieve this, and as a part of its internationalization strategy, the University strives towards quality cooperation with other similar higher education institutions in the EU and non-EU countries which would be based on high mobility of students and teaching staff, development of joint study programmes and joint professional and applied scientific projects and research.

Therefore, in order to support its mission and vision, the University recognizes internationalisation as one of its strategic goals. It is one of the mechanisms of increasing the overall quality of its educational activities, further boosting modernization and increasing international competitiveness.

Participation in the Erasmus+ programme is key to the University's internationalisation strategy and it enables it to pursue and implement the following:

- Active promotion and support of mobility and increase in the number of mobility participants

The University recognizes mobility of students and staff as one of the key drivers of its internationalisation and modernisation. Mobility brings benefits both for the individual participants and the University itself. It further enhances their professional knowledge, competences and skills, improve their linguistic competence (improving on their existing knowledge or maybe even learning a new language), develop open-mindedness, flexibility, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and a sense of European identity. In addition to this, it enhances their competitiveness and employment prospects when entering the labour market. The University places a lot of importance on the traineeship mobility since it offers professional studies, therefore, development of practical competences is of key importance. Mobility of staff is readily supported and acknowledged as an opportunity for professional development. Mobility of teaching staff results in the improvement of their academic and teaching competences and thus increases excellence in teaching, enables the transfer of best and innovative practices into the University and improves the quality of the curricula. It increases staff foreign language competences, motivation and satisfaction with their work. Mobility of staff encourages expansion of academic collaboration and the dissemination of knowledge. In order to further enhance mobility, the University will digitize mobility procedures thus facilitating the organization and

implementation of mobility. Also, measures for greater inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities will be undertaken.

- Increase in the number of international partnerships

Having set up inter-institutional agreements with international partners is essential for implementing mobility activities. They establish a framework for the organisation and management of mobility and also for quality requirements which need to be observed. They should be based on compatibility of academic profiles and areas of mutual interest. The University not only works towards increasing the number of newly signed contracts and thus expanding its network of international cooperation, but concurrently tries to maintain and strengthen the cooperation activities with the existing partners. Besides enhancing mobility, through inter-institutional agreements the University may build its own network of partner institutions to implement international research collaboration projects.

- Participation in European and international cooperation projects

Involvement in cooperation projects is also one of the cornerstones of the University's internationalisation. The Erasmus+ programme provides opportunity for the University of Applied Health Sciences to participate in joint projects which would aim at cooperation and exchange of practices for the purpose of capacity development, modernising curricula, introducing innovative teaching practices and educational excellence, fostering quality improvements, better attuning the level of key competences and skills for health professionals for the global labour market – producing sustainable and reusable results.

- Development of joint curricula/study programmes

The introduction of joint curricula or joint study programmes increases the international visibility and reputation of the University. Their development would lead to a more internationalized and innovative curriculum and, therefore, widen the University's educational offer. This would hopefully lead to increased student mobility through which students would acquire cross-cultural competences which in turn raise the students' employability. Through the organization and implementation of joint curricula or study programmes, the University would strengthen and deepen cooperation with its consortium partners. Together with introducing courses in the English language, developing joint curricula or study programmes, the University would boost internationalisation at home.

- Introducing courses in the English language

Providing instruction in a foreign language (in this case English) helps both students and staff improve their foreign linguistic proficiency. By offering such courses the University becomes more visible and attractive to incoming students and faculty members additionally increasing the number of incoming mobilities and generating opportunities for students and staff to participate in professional and scientific research.

Through participation in Erasmus+ programme the University will be able to actively contribute to the policy objectives of the European Education Area:

- Spending time abroad to study and learn should become the norm – the University aims to actively boost and promote mobility, and remove obstacles for participation, in order to increase the number of mobilities by emphasizing its benefits and providing support throughout the entire mobility period to mobility participants. The University currently deliberates introducing the possibility of doing traineeship abroad at a partner institution which could be embedded in the curricula.
- School and higher education diplomas/study periods abroad are automatically recognised across the EU – the University is committed to supporting the efforts to ensure automatic recognition – first by implementing full automatic recognition of ECTS credits and grades gained by students during mobility periods abroad without using any additional administrative processes. The University fully implemented ECTS credits and uses the documentation necessary for implementing the mobility (Learning Agreements, Transcript of Records, Course Catalogue), and issuing Diploma Supplements. The University will also work on advancing its recognition practices in terms of recognizing diplomas from

comparable foreign study programs by introducing less complicated procedures and more transparent criteria and creating a framework for achieving automatic recognition.

- Speaking two languages, in addition to one's mother tongue, is the norm – foreign language classes are an obligatory part of the curricula at the University of Applied Health Sciences. That is why the notion of multilingualism is especially emphasized for the participants of mobility which are encouraged to work on and enhance their linguistic competence, especially students, through their use of the OLS tool. The University also organizes foreign language courses for its staff and is working towards introducing courses which will be held in the English language.
- Educational excellence is a reality for all, irrespective of people's socio-economic background – the University readily supports equal access and opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds. It will actively promote and encourage the participation of participants with fewer opportunities and facilitate their inclusion in the Erasmus+ mobility activities.
- People have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans and of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity – the mobility and cooperation projects that the University will implement will enable individuals to experience diverse culture, discover foreign cultures and broaden their perspectives. Alongside being aware of the diversity among different countries they still develop this sense of European identity.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

With regard to strengthening and achieving excellence in its internationalization processes the University of Applied Health Sciences will actively pursue participation in Key Action 1 - Mobility of higher education students and staff and Key Action 2 - Partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices.

The University views mobility as a key element of internationalisation which will be supported and implemented according to the principles and priorities of the Erasmus+ programme. The programme will be regularly promoted (through info days, the University's official website, staff meetings, etc.). The University has published and it regularly updates the Course Catalogue (it is currently working on a more user-friendly version) based on the model provided in the ECTS Users' Guide and it has published information on the grading system and conversion of grades. The University has already set up clearly defined activities and deadlines necessary for each stage of the mobility – prior to, during and after mobility – and they are readily available to interested participants. When selecting participants for mobility, the procedure applies a clear, fair and transparent procedure which is thoroughly documented and provides possibility for a complaint procedure. Starting from the selection stage, the principle of equal and equitable access is employed – there is no discrimination based on the participant's background. Mobility opportunities for participants with fewer opportunities are emphasized during the promotion stage of the mobility and those students or staff will be readily supported throughout their mobility period - as will be the case for all other participants. In order to enhance mobility of such participants, they will be presented with supplementary support such as the top-up grants, or for example, providing extra time during exams, for coursework, etc. All the mobilities are carried out within the framework of up-to-date inter-institutional agreements with partner institutions which identify shared quality requirements for planned mobilities. The agreements are based on the compatibility of educational programmes and shared interests. Before mobility the Erasmus team provides all the necessary support to well prepare participants for their mobility – this concerns the procedures related to visa, health insurance, accommodation, grading system, selection

procedure, contact details. The University also makes sure that mobility participants possess an adequate level of language proficiency and demand a minimum required level of proficiency at the application and selection stage. The staff have the opportunity to learn the English language through courses provided at the University, and students, who have language courses as part of their curriculum, are encouraged to improve their language knowledge using the OLS tool not just for the main language of instruction but also any other language. All of these provisions will be applied to the new types of mobility such as virtual mobility and blended learning, and short-term doctoral candidate mobilities.

The mobility is based on Learning Agreements for students or a Mobility Agreement for staff which are always validated before the start of mobility by all three parties (student/staff member, sending and receiving institution). The Learning Agreement is fundamental in the recognition of mobility periods and the University strives to fully evaluate and recognize the mobility period of students and staff and to especially respect the principle of full automatic recognition. The recognition is based on the Transcript of Records that the receiving institution provides. The students often consult with a mentor or a member of the teaching staff during the process of choosing courses or traineeship practice. The satisfactorily completed study or traineeship is included in the Diploma Supplement which the University of Applied Sciences issues both in Croatian and English. The University is committed to ensure better recognition for staff mobility – both for the teaching and training activities.

To further encourage mobility of staff and students, the outgoing students and staff will be asked to share their mobility experience to help promote the benefits of the programme. One way would be to publish their testimonials at the official website (something that the University already implemented), they will be invited to take part in the info days on Erasmus+ programme (engage in “ambassador” activities).

In terms of incoming mobility, the Erasmus staff provides active support to all the incoming participants (particularly students). There are contacts that can provide information and active assistance for accommodation, obtaining visas and insurance. Information on all of these matters is published on the University website and in the Welcome guide intended for incoming students. Upon their arrival the Erasmus staff holds a welcome and orientation meeting with the incoming students to instruct them on their schedules, obligations and all other relevant aspects of their stay (academic and administrative). Incoming students are given the same academic treatment as the local students and have access to the same facilities. They are charged no fees for tuition, examinations or access to different facilities. They might only pay small fees as insurance, use of photocopies, and the like, basically those charged to local students as well. During their stay they are always provided with a mentor who supports them and provides guidance in academic and practical matters. The students are given opportunity to fully participate in the academic and social activities - they are invited to join, for example, humanitarian actions that the local students organize and also to participate in various social events at the University as well. In the upcoming Erasmus+ programme, more emphasis will be given on encouraging incoming students to act as ambassadors for the Erasmus+ programme (something that the University has previously done on several occasions). The University is also considering introducing a buddy system to further support incoming students. At the end of their mobility they are provided with the Transcript of Records, issued in due time (as agreed in the inter-institutional agreement). In case of traineeships the students obtain a Traineeship Certificate.

The mobility processes will be digitally managed, in line with the European Student Card Initiative, which the University readily supports and has already taken steps for its implementation. The University views digitalization as a way of modernizing itself and will readily use all the features of this initiative.

Participation in projects under Key Action 2 (Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices) will make it possible for the University of Applied Health Sciences to establish partnerships and cooperation with institutions in the same or similar field of education in order to share best practices, create new and innovative curricula, initiate the development of joint studies, and thus create more attractive educational programmes. The University will make sure that such projects, together with mobility, contribute towards the realization of the University internationalization strategy. The partners are chosen based on the shared interest

and common objectives that the University would also like to pursue. The University will also select projects that would deliver sustainable outcomes for all the involved partners, and especially after the end of the project - the ones that would increase the quality of the educational programme, introduce innovative teaching methods, and overall strengthen and widen cooperation with partner institutions. The projects should benefit not only the University but lead to greater development of policies for the European Education Area.

Response to the demands of opportunities to participate in the cooperation projects will be supported by the University both for students and staff who wish to participate. The University already encourages staff to take part in various types of research. The projects and their results will be duly disseminated, through presentations or through the designated webpage, and the results will be published on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform.

The University has an Erasmus team which is in charge of the management of the Erasmus+ programme. There are also dedicated teaching and non-teaching staff with specifically set tasks in the implementation of the programme. Implementing the European Student Card Initiative and digital mobility management will also lead to modernisation of the University's procedures and activities.

These two actions directly support the University's modernisation and internationalization policies as they will help build the University's capacity for international activities and further boost international engagement. The successful mobilities of students and staff and dissemination of the experiences will increase the number of future mobilities, and hopefully increase the number of participants with fewer opportunities. The mobility will increase overall students' professional, cultural and linguistic knowledge, making them more competitive in the labour market and enhancing their chances of employment. They will serve as best ambassadors of the programme and provide motivation for future programme participants. In the future this might lead to mobility being the rule or even being embedded in the curriculum. Mobility will also encourage the search for new partners to be included in the mobility scheme, which in turn might be a good starting point for developing new types of cooperation – different professional and scientific research. Staff mobility leads to transfer and implementation of new ideas, the mobilities might result in new partnerships, enter into projects – especially joint study projects. The results of such activities inevitably lead to the exchange, development and sharing of innovative practices, those practices might lead to design of new curricula and teaching methodologies. All of these aspects add to the modernisation of the University and its activities, making it more attractive to students, staff and international partners and increasing its international dimension.

What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.)

The University expects to increase the number of mobilities of both students and staff (incoming and outgoing), and particularly of students with fewer opportunities in line with the Erasmus+ programme priorities. For the next Erasmus+ programme period, it expects to have at least 10% of staff and students taking part in the programme.

Through the implementation of the principles of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education a higher quality of programme implementation is expected – faster procedures for completing and signing inter-institutional agreements, easier administration of mobility documentation, faster communication with mobility participants (through digitalization of the processes). All of this will be monitored upon implementation. The University also expects to fully respect automatic full recognition of ECTS credits starting from the first year of the new programme –

the results of which will be analysed upon the end of each project cycle and be based on the number of students with recognized credits gained during mobility.

The involvement of participants with fewer opportunities will be closely monitored and through extensive support an increase in the number of participants is expected.

The University will also work towards even more comprehensive and efficient support for mobility participants in all the activities related to the organization of mobility, and will evaluate the quality of this support using the Participant Report after the end of each mobility. The dissemination activities will also be enhanced in order to increase the number of participants in mobility.

The University will implement a system for better recognition of staff mobility and aims to develop an official document outlining the principle for recognition and by the end of the first year of the participation in the new programme.

One of the targets of participation in the programme is also to steadily increase the number of partners which will be evident in the number of inter-institutional and partnership agreements signed (which we expect to increase by 1 to maximum 3 new agreements annually).

Through KA2 action the University will seek to increase its participation in various projects and will, if possible, try to apply for a project (whether as a coordinator or partner institution) on a yearly basis. This should increase the quality in the preparation and implementation of future projects. The University will strive to engage in projects which would aim at cooperation and exchange of practices for the purpose of capacity development, modernizing curricula, introducing innovative teaching practices and educational excellence which will lead to educational quality improvements evident in the overall functioning of the University. These will be regularly analysed and monitored to check the impact of the project and the sustainability of the results.

The mobility projects and cooperation projects will hopefully lead towards the development of joint courses or joint study programmes for which courses in the English language will have to be introduced. Regardless of the joint courses/study programmes, the University will prepare the setting for the introduction of foreign language instruction which will hopefully attract more students and staff.

All of this will contribute to a target of achieving higher education study programmes with modern, dynamic, and highly professional environment having the capacity to provide top quality education and operate successfully at an international level.