

## **Erasmus Policy Statement (Overall Strategy)**

The Institution agrees to publish this overall strategy (all three parts) on its website within one month after the signature of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education by the European Commission.

A strategic priority in the sphere of the internationalization of the UP (University of Plovdiv) is improving the level of international student and staff mobility in all scientific subject areas and expanding bilateral and multilateral trans-border cooperation within the framework of EU higher education area and beyond as key factors and instruments for enhancing the quality and innovativeness of the university's educational and research programs. This will contribute on the one hand to preparing experts in various fields at European level, capable of making flexible interdisciplinary decisions in their professional practice, corresponding to the challenges of the modern world, and on the other hand, to the development of a community of highly qualified staff with rich international experience for carrying out innovative scientific research in priority areas in the interest and to the benefit of society, to attracting investments, for creating and developing scientific research centres and creating an opportunity for clear and definite competitive advantages.

The UP carries out a consistent policy of expanding and strengthening its international contacts by concluding new or renewing existing educational and scientific cooperation agreements with foreign higher education universities and institutions both from EU and non-EU countries (Russia, Serbia, Armenia, India, Colombia, Mexico, etc.). An essential contribution for enhancing the tendency for opening towards European educational, scientific and cultural centres and the full integration of the UP in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the participation of the UP in the Erasmus+ programme. The University's partnerships result from prior established educational, scientific and cultural contacts – both collective and individual. The common interests and goals discussed in the process of negotiations naturally lead to concluding agreements. In these contracts the UP has always strived at providing a broad range of subjects and flexibility within the curriculum, achieving a geographical balance, ethnical and cultural diversity. In the future the UP plans to expand even more the range of its partners in order to satisfy the needs of its students and staff for quality scientific and cultural contacts in the numerous spheres of knowledge. In this relation the focus is on the more active cooperation with the countries outside the EHEA and on strengthening and balancing mobility flows with them. To this end appropriate means and various stimuli will be used for motivating more students and staff from the UP to study and train themselves in those countries, as well as for reciprocally attracting such from non-participating countries.

The most important objectives in planning student study mobility are: achieving high educational, intercultural and linguistic effectiveness, getting acquainted with the methods of teaching and evaluation in other EU universities; personal development through enhancement of international competencies and social experience, communication skills, adaptability and flexibility in a multicultural environment as well as facilitating employment prospects on the labor market.

The UP will try to offer mobility to students of all cycles of studies, and for the students remaining in Bulgaria will be invited renowned scientists from abroad, so that in this way

they will also be able to get acquainted with the achievements and tendencies in EU education and the so called Internationalization at Home will be achieved.

Special attention is paid to activating the placement mobility and affirming them as a key component of student training. In this type of mobility the objective is for the students to apply in practice the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their studies in given spheres of competence, to acquire new experience and professional skills in a real working environment, as well as soft skills (teamwork, adaptivity to new situations, interpersonal communicative skills, problem solving, etc.), which will ultimately improve their employability in the competitive environment of the EU labour market, including taking up a job abroad. Stimulating academic staff mobility, together with enriching their international experience, aims at regularly updating their professional competences; introducing new methods and approaches for teaching and training, exchange/transfer and distribution of good ideas, successful patterns and practice of quality interdisciplinary education, developing new and updating the existing courses and curricula, enhancing and expanding academic and research links.

Currently UP participated in 8 LLP projects, which helped a lot to promote European dimension in higher education, to reform curricula and to advance academic and administrative services. The participation in LLP projects contributes to the achievement of high quality teaching and research, as well as to the assurance of comparability and transparency of study programs and to the advancement of recognition procedures in line with the Bologna Process. Going forward, the university has identified a set of commitments in addressing the development and implementation of the lifelong learning strategies and projects, mainly in:

- Supporting academics in developing, embedding and enhancing projects' outcomes
- Developing effective partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to provide attractive and relevant cooperation opportunities for project-based work
- Embedding concepts of widening access and lifelong learning in the institutional strategy
- Strengthening the relationship between research, teaching and innovation activities in a perspective of project work
- Ensuring effective project management and capacity to manage EU grant contracts;
- Providing appropriate guidance and counseling services;
- Ensuring a wide dissemination of existing best practices to other universities, governments and stakeholders;

Establishing cooperation with key players from other universities and sectors acting as multipliers, to adapt the projects'

results for their institutional, regional and national contexts;

- Exchange best practice on key lifelong learning topics

Projects developed together with members from different countries provide comparative information and good practice examples on key topics of importance for universities. By drawing on the outcomes of these projects UP is able to develop well founded 'evidence-based' policy conclusions and recommendations as well as to support other universities through the broad dissemination of project results.

The main objective underlying the UP Development Strategy is asserting its position as a leading Bulgarian educational, research and cultural institution, globally recognizable, a space for modern scientific research and innovation, a desired and preferable partner. Participation in the Programme will contribute to the transferring and implementation of the achievements of the European educational and scientific experience gathered from all fields of knowledge. New routes of attracting more students to enroll and to complete their higher education, including people from disadvantaged groups will be looked for. The opportunities for international mobility will arouse the interest of students to enter higher education.

UP will stimulate the development of young researchers through increasing the quality of doctoral study programs and equipment to form better research skills; will try to realize joint contracts with industry and involve prospective students in research projects. The Programme-supported activities will contribute to the modernisation of the existing curricula, to elaborate on and introduce programmes and courses in foreign languages, as well as double and joint-degree programmes in collaboration with EU and non-EU universities and thus improving educational and employability outcome. UP will use ICTs and other new technologies, as well as continuing education, e-learning, requalification, virtual lectures, modular learning to provide more flexible and personalized learning experiences. UP will strive to increase the level of education by means of high quality agreements which facilitate mobility and intensify exchanges and cooperation between institutions, as well as to ensure efficient recognition of credits gained abroad through comparable and consistent use of ECTS. Crossborder cooperation will be facilitated by improving the access, training conditions and further professional opportunities for students and staff from other countries. UP will carry out a purposeful policy towards the development of innovative partnership with business in order to support, develop and distribute educational and scientific products; providing conditions for R&D activities and training for building up entrepreneurship, creative and innovative skills in students and researchers, including setting up their own spin-off companies, initiating infrastructure and science projects, as well as mutually beneficial contracts with other regional institutions and technological and research centers in Europe, which will additionally activate regional economic potential and will encourage innovative climate. Modern approaches and innovative decisions for carrying out stage-by-stage quality changes in the main activities of the PU will be used. An integrated governance system will be launched.

UP will activate all financial levers and mechanisms at institutional, regional, national and international level for modernization of the institutional infrastructure.