

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE YEARS 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 Opole is a regional university, which makes every effort to ensure that its importance matches the aspirations and quality of the undertaken actions. In order to develop the quality of research and teaching and to function responsibly in the social environment, the university strives to be an important hub of the international academic network. Under the university's strategy for the years 2015–2020 and now in preparation Development Strategy of UO for the following years: 2021–2027 (one of the four specific policies of this strategy is the international affairs policy), internationalisation is a key tool for continuous modernisation of the university. This is reflected in above-average statistics on internationalisation, both in terms of exchange and mobility projects, as well as on the international study programmes opened and in terms of foreign students.

The UO is a public and comprehensive institution of higher education, implementing the process of educating students within eleven faculties, as well as scientific research within nineteen institutes. Some faculties offer Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes taught entirely in English and with a significant share of foreign students, whose number is close to 10% of the total number of students. The UO is an active participant, leader and partner in international projects. Internationalisation through student and staff exchange programmes is both a realisation of the university's capabilities and a way of its further development. The UO participates intensively in the Erasmus+ programme, and each field of study has a number of active cooperation agreements.

At the University of Opole, it is assumed that scientific development in individual disciplines is possible only in contact with world science and at an international level. This means that staff members must participate in scientific life abroad – by participating in conferences, international research

projects, publishing and lecturing in a foreign language, and above all by building personal professional networks. The participation of the UO in the Erasmus+ programme has a strategic dimension for the development of science – it allows to develop human, cultural and social capital.

Established and maintained relations with foreign scientific centres serve the purpose of the UO's systemic scientific development. Projects based only on exchanges are developed into scientific and educational projects allowing for the achievement of added value.

The research modernisation of the university is carried out parallel to – and through the development of the quality of the educational process. By opening courses and study programmes in English (and accepting students from exchange programmes), academic teachers and local students face more difficult challenges than usual; they develop both in terms of substance and communication skills and, as part of their daily duties, run an active scientific life in contact with global science by preparing lectures and conducting discussions in English on the basis of literature from the global scientific circulation. Students from all over the world, who participate in classes, give the discussion and work additional dimensions. Moreover, the internationalisation of studies leads to the systematic improvement of the quality of student service and the adaptation of university administration to international academic standards. The UO introduces system solutions thanks to which students of all fields of study are confronted with a foreign language of instruction (Courses in a modern foreign language in the last semester of studies).

For the UO, internationalisation is a way to compete effectively with academic centres of recognised reputation and organisational status: first and foremost in the academic dimension, but also in gaining students who present ever higher challenges to academic teachers. Strong international connections and the resulting development opportunities for the staff and students are a convincing argument for taking up employment or studies in Opole, which is the capital of the smallest voivodeship in Poland. Internationalization also plays a culture-forming role for the city and the region, as the presence of foreign students and staff is systematically used for the benefit of the local community and by means of open events and cooperation with the city and regional institutions leads to "internationalisation at home" of Opole and the Opole region, which are historically multicultural, combining the Silesian, German, Polish and Czech heritage.

The fulfilment of the so-called third mission of the university is also a strategic goal for the UO and its social responsibility is realised not only towards the local community, but also globally. International projects are conducted responsibly and in response to global challenges. Particularly in cooperation with the partner countries (but also with the programme countries), the UO tries to recognise less privileged partners, while at the same time ensuring that cooperation is carried out at the highest substantive level. It also has a pragmatic dimension – it aims to encourage talented and motivated students to come to the UO.

For the UO's internationalisation strategy aimed at creating an international university, participation in Erasmus+ projects is a key tool. It allows to develop international study programmes, international scientific activity and indirectly increase the quality of education and administrative services, as well as to carry out the social mission of the university. Therefore, the activities implemented within the framework of Erasmus+ projects are always subordinated to achieving the basic strategic objectives of the university and are carried out in a justified, transparent and subject to evaluation manner. Activities that contribute directly or indirectly to scientific development will be considered strategic; as well as activities to promote scientific and educational international recognition of the UO.

The participation of the UO in the Erasmus+ programme has an important local dimension for the university: the presence of foreign students and staff is a challenge for integration, and the university aims to provide conditions for a significant presence of visitors. To this end, the educational offer, administrative services and multidimensional integration activities are constantly being improved. These activities are implemented and significantly expressed in the UO international Week, which is a cyclical event, which brings together the realisation of scientific and educational goals, and strengthens international relations and position of the university.

The continuous deepening of the integration of mobility into the education system and its administration is a strategic action as it strengthens the full participation of the UO in the European Education Area. It is equally important for the UO to fully recognise the participation of academic, teaching and administrative staff in Erasmus+ projects. The last but not least, but also an important objective of participation in the programme is the very promotion of internationalisation within the UO as an important element of its development strategy.

The reinforcement of Erasmus+ actions, including European Universities networks, is an effective tool for taking concrete steps towards full participation in the European Education Area. Being one of the five Polish universities in the project Fostering Outreach within European Regions, Transnational Higher Education and Mobility within the FORTHEM consortium allows to develop new teaching solutions by gathering specialist knowledge, introducing new physical and virtual forms of student and staff mobility. This contributes to increasing social engagement and promotes civic involvement of students. Together with the FORTHEM Alliance partner universities and other key Erasmus+ partners, it is possible to train active and qualified European citizens, contributing to a more competitive and innovative European Education Area.

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.

The basic form of the UO's participation in the Erasmus+ programme comprises activities aimed at the exchange of students and staff, both for studies and traineeships as well as for the purpose of teaching and training. It is a fundamental and indispensable form of internationalisation, as indicated in the development strategy of the University of Opole. Equally important for the assumed goals of internationalisation are projects that generate added value through the implementation of mobilities, especially those that allow for the permanent development of programmes of studies and intensification of research. Therefore, the UO will participate in Partnerships for Excellence and other cooperation programmes.

Incoming students allow for "internationalisation at home" and give the opportunity for international contact to local students and local lecturers. Thus, they contribute to the scientific development of the staff and increase in the level of education at the university. Without incoming exchange students in many fields of study, courses taught in a foreign language would be a bit artificial, and in the presence of students from exchange programmes, a change in the language of instruction becomes additionally justified. Visits of students from the partner countries, as well as from other programme countries, provide an opportunity to promote the university's educational offer. Even now, a certain percentage of candidates for full study programmes at the UO are former Erasmus+ scholarship holders who became acquainted with the University of Opole during their studies abroad and decided to obtain a diploma from our university.

Students' mobilities for studies and traineeships make it attractive to study at the UO, which is a regional academic centre and cannot offer the advantages of a larger university and a larger city. Enabling students to study abroad also improves their self-assessment, increases their potential and strengthens their position on the labour market, not to mention the fact that it is an important element in developing the quality of education at the UO.

Incoming staff mobility allows for a real increase in the internationalisation of studies, and thanks to the strategic measures taken by the UO (opening study programmes and courses in English), the demand for foreign experts visibly increases. Thanks to the visits and the possibility of personal contact and free exchange of experiences and visions, it is possible to prepare joint educational and research projects.

Outgoing staff mobility for training or teaching purpose allow to achieve two types of assumed goals: they develop human, cultural and social capital of the university staff, contributing directly to the development of staff for the international university. Secondly, staff mobility allows them to pursue institutional objectives: to establish cooperation, to implement joint research and teaching projects, as well as to build a significant presence of the UO abroad. For the UO, staff visits to partner universities are therefore of very high value and that is why the International Mobility Section in the Office for Research and Project Management attaches great importance to the high quality of information and promotional materials, presentations and videos that university representatives take with them. Therefore, the mobilities are closely monitored and their usefulness and effects are evaluated in view of the convergence with the strategic objectives of the university.

Research, teaching and networking cooperation is a strategic objective in itself, due to the key importance of the development of research and teaching at international level. Projects under Action 2 Strategic Partnerships aim to implement good practices in higher education, focusing on the modernisation of the educational offer and consequently the improvement of the teaching quality.

In the coming years, the participation in the FORTHEM project under the Key Action 2 will be a model strategic action of the UO. Implementing its three key missions, Mobility Mission, Labs Mission and Outreach Mission, the FORTHEM Alliance seeks to institutionalize an environment of permanent and deeper academic cooperation and to build up a joint campus, allowing seamless physical, virtual and blended mobility and joint teaching. Since student and staff mobility is an essential part of FORTHEM activities, a growing part of our university's learning mobility activities (KA1) will be implemented in connection with KA2, under the European University Project.

The following concrete actions of the three FORTHEM missions strengthen the Institutional capacity to achieve strategic aims for internationalisation, both in line with development of teaching and the social mission of the university:

- Implementing new innovative forms of long-term and short-term student and staff mobility, including an increase in virtual and blended mobility. It will allow to increase the inclusion of potential participants and the scale of the programme by adapting to the diverse abilities of the participants – in particular the students already working or for other reasons unable to participate in a mobility, e.g. for a whole semester.
- Launching FORTHEM Campus – concept with jointly organised semester-long programmes on rotating hosting campuses for students from all seven universities, which will increase the intensity of international contacts both for the participating students, and the UO employees providing student support.
- Developing new English-medium modules in fields of special expertise and new joint degree programmes in relevant for Europe areas, which will directly contribute to the improvement of the quality of education and will create a new dimension of conditions for the development

of the staff set out in the strategy enabling the 3. mission of the university to be significantly executed.

- Increasing students' internship opportunities and volunteer work projects to facilitate personal development in an international environment and pursue the social mission of university.
- Developing digital competences of academics with jointly implemented training.
- Encouraging the sharing of good practices related to innovative pedagogy.
- Strengthening the linkage between education and research with the help of FORTHEM Labs.
- Multiplying the connections, concrete cooperation projects and knowledge circulation with societal partners within Outreach and Lab Missions.

Besides the three main actions within the Erasmus+ programme, project preparations in the Jean Monnet Programme have also been started at the University of Opole. It began with applications for Jean Monnet Chairs – teaching positions for university professors specialising in the field of studies concerning the European Union. By gradually gaining experience in applying and carrying out these actions, the University of Opole will open up to new opportunities in this area with the intention of developing the scientific potential of the university with the use of this tool.

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.) You are encouraged to offer an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

The participation of the University of Opole in projects of the above mentioned Erasmus+ actions brings benefits to persons taking part in them in both institutional and individual terms. The main objective for which students perform mobilities for studies and traineeships is to develop skills related to their field of study and to increase competitiveness on the labour market, both in their home country and abroad (also thanks to making new international contacts). Additionally, thanks to the mobility, students can develop their language skills and learn about other countries and cultures, which in the context of the importance of the process of internationalization (both in the personal and institutional aspect) is one of the key elements to achieve it. Students who once took the opportunity to go on a mobility under the Erasmus+ programme use that opportunity again, often consuming all the available mobility capital. The UO's policy of promoting mobility opportunities

is based on observation and experience. It assumes that a student who has completed international mobility in the course of their education takes full advantage of the academic and personal development opportunities offered by the university. In the context of benefits resulting from student mobility in the university dimension, more and more often foreign students, after completing a semester or academic year at the UO, return to pursue the next cycle of degree studies or take up a placement. Such actions prove students' satisfaction with their earlier stay at the UO and confirm the necessity of constant care for the quality of short-term studies.

The main factors motivating the university employees to take part in the programme are primarily the development of their own professional competences and teaching skills, the acquisition of practical teaching skills and the possibility of professional development. It is also important to increase awareness in the context of sociological, linguistic and cultural diversity and to establish new or expand existing professional contacts. For the vast majority of staff members, it is also important to create results with added value, such as study programmes preparation, creation of joint courses or modules, building up academic networks, research cooperation, etc.

These individual motivations are translated into the objectives achieved by the institutions: an increase in the human, cultural and social capital of individuals facilitates the development of education and research.

In the operational way, the UO sets itself the following objectives to be achieved between 2021 and 2027, as well as ways of evaluating them based on specific indicators:

- Expansion of exchange experience among students: The University of Opole aims to send out the largest number of students from as many fields of study as possible. The indicator will be the implementation of new types of mobility within the FORTHEM project, including short-term trips. In quantitative terms, the aim is to achieve an increase in the number of outgoing students. The latest annual statistics for mobility amount to about 100 SMS outgoing and 50 SMP outgoing. The FORTHEM Alliance is committed to increasing international mobility, including physical, blended and virtual mobility, to involve 30% of students and staff by 2022 and 50% students and staff by 2025 which means about 3800 students and 600 staff participants of the University of Opole. The mobility within KA103 is to be maintained at the current level +15% – translating into CA 115 SMS and 55 SMP outgoing mobilities.
- The highest academic value of student mobility: The aim is to organise outgoing mobility as to provide the best conditions for the outgoing students' development – mobility to even better academic centres is promoted and participants are highly motivated and well prepared to seize the opportunity for personal development with the help of mobility. The indicator will be high scores of mobility applications and the implementation of pro-quality nomination procedures at faculties.

- The highest academic value of incoming student mobility: The aim is to receive the highest possible number of students of the highest academic quality, and at the same time to reduce the number of incoming students whose motivations and potential are subject to reserved doubts. The indicator will be the pro-quality enhancement of bilateral agreements.
- Growth in diversity: by accepting a diverse group of students, with recruitment as inclusive as possible, taking into account the basic categories of exclusion, such as gender, social class and global differences in prosperity. The quantitative indicator will be the growing number of countries from where students are coming from, the reduction of mass mobilities from one academic centre, the admission of bigger numbers of students from less privileged countries – especially under Action 107. The recent annual mobilities with partner countries (KA107) amount to around 100. The UO is committed to sustain the scale, and more importantly the diversity of the project, letting the variety of world's staff and students in the UO classrooms and sending UO staff and students around the world.
- Optimisation of 'home internationalisation': the aim is to make effective use of the presence of incoming students for the development of the UO students and staff, as well as the local community. The indicator will be the number of integration activities and continuation of the organisation of the UO International Week.
- Expansion of exchange experience among staff employees: The aim is to send as many employees as possible from as many units. The current rate of staff mobility for teaching purposes in relation to the total number of employees of the UO is about 15%. The University of Opole intends to increase this rate.
- Effective outgoing mobility of the UO staff: The aim is to implement staff mobility with effects in line with the Erasmus+ programme strategy and such mobility that has a high level of conversion to further cooperation and a high chance of durability. The indicator will be the clarification of the criteria for recruitment of employees, taking into account the achievement of the objectives and further monitoring of the implemented mobility. The latest annual statistics for mobility amount to about 110 STA outgoing and 50 STT outgoing. The mobility within KA103 is to be maintained at the current level +15% – translating into CA 125 STA and 65 STT outgoing mobilities.
- Effective incoming staff mobility: The aim is to realise the highest possible number of mobility of incoming staff with the best academic potential. The indicator will be the development of guidelines for establishing cooperation and inviting guests, taking into account the evaluation of their programme convergence with the Erasmus+ UO strategy.
- Appreciation of the importance of mobility in the evaluation of the UO staff: The aim is to widely recognise the mobility of the UO staff by introducing institutionalised recognition of mobility

in staff evaluation, The indicator of achieving this objective will be a significant share of mobility in the evaluation of staff and at the same time the evaluation of mobility in terms of achieving outcomes in line with the UO Erasmus+ strategy.

- Integration of education of short-term students: The aim is to fully integrate the service and recognition of education within exchange programmes with local programmes of studies. The indicator of achieving the goal is full service for incoming students in the USOS system, access to full information related to studying and the number of courses available for mobile students, which allows to construct learning agreements (LA) in a comprehensive manner.
- Expansion of Erasmus+ programme among the UO students and staff: The aim is to disseminate the knowledge about the Erasmus+ programme and its implementation at the UO as well as consolidation of these activities in the university's strategy. The indicator will be realised dissemination meetings and presentations content explaining the relationship between the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme and the university policy, and the potential benefits for students and staff and the institution as a whole.

The FORTHEM Alliance is committed to increasing international mobility, including physical, blended and virtual mobility, to involve 30% of students and staff by 2022 and 50% students and staff by 2025. However, the joint goals of FORTHEM are not only quantitative (as presented above). Driven by a strong belief in the benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism, we will try to ensure that all collective and individual mobilities are meaningful pedagogically and professionally and can be implemented as seamlessly as possible.

Active use of Erasmus+ programme, including the new short-term mobility for students and new blended mobility support will be a crucial tool for reaching these aims. In addition to the surge in the number, the aim is to achieve the quality and universality of the mobility of students and staff. Membership in the FORTHEM Alliance assumes a significant impact on the achievement of the following objectives within the framework of the Erasmus+ programme:

- Increased virtual exchange and virtual mobility activities
- Increased civic engagement and employability of students
- Closer cooperation with local schools, "bringing Europe in our classrooms" and local employers
- Tested models for creating solutions for societal problems using research-based data
- Increased number of joint degree programmes

Taking into account the principles of transparency and equal access to participation in the programme, transparent recruitment and implementation procedures for both student and staff mobility have been introduced at UO (for both KA103 and KA107 projects).

Coordination at the level of individual faculties and institutes of the University of Opole is carried out by the faculty coordinators of the Erasmus+ programme. They are responsible, inter alia, for establishing international contacts, discussing details of cooperation, preparing (together with Erasmus+ mobility officers) inter-institutional agreements with partner universities, and coordinating the implemented mobility. Coordinators' contacts with international partners are made via e-mail, telephone contact and face-to-face meetings, which are possible thanks to the mobilities of Erasmus+ mobility officers and Faculty Coordinators to individual partner universities. The University of Opole is open to the prospect of gaining new partners for cooperation. Not only the coordinators can propose a new study programme, a university with which they want to conclude a new agreement. Every student or employee representing particular faculty/institute, who has not found a university that would meet their expectations among the agreements in force in a given unit, can report a willingness to sign a new agreement with a foreign university. Inter-institutional agreements are prepared on the basis of the programme guidelines and strictly define the conditions of cooperation between institutions. The conditions of each agreement prepared Erasmus+ mobility officers are included in the agreement with the Faculty Coordinator in a given unit and specify the number of students/employees, duration of stay, field of study, language requirements, deadlines for sending nominations and applications, information on the evaluation system and all information concerning additional requirements. The content of the model agreement is updated as necessary.

The Office dealing with Erasmus+ mobilities is open from Monday to Friday from 7:30 to 15:30. The office employees provide all information and assistance to project beneficiaries (both incoming and outgoing participants) by phone, e-mail or personal contact. Each student selected to participate in the exchange receives an Erasmus+ Student Card, which defines the rights and obligations of a student participating in the Erasmus+ Programme. During the mobility, office staff are in constant contact with the student, e.g., they remind participants to prepare and send any changes to the learning agreement in due time and to complete the formalities related to their stay. As far as teaching issues related to changes in the class/traineeship programme at the host institution are concerned, students receive support from the Coordinators, and changes to the LA sent by e-mail are forwarded by internal mail to individual Coordinators and Deans so that the student can obtain all necessary signatures. The Erasmus+ mobility officers, on the basis of the Acceptance Letter from partner universities, issue appropriate certificates to the National Health Fund in order to obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) valid for the whole period of mobility. A similar certificate with additional information about the amount of the planned grant is issued to students applying for a visa for the purpose of mobility. Incoming students receive support from the University of Opole in the form of accommodation in the modern hall of residence – Niechcic Hall. In order to receive accommodation, an application form is required and a monthly fee paid. There are double and triple rooms. The exception is the first floor, fully adapted for the disabled, where there are twin rooms with bathrooms with specially adapted toilets, shower cabins and washbasins. The hall

is situated in the centre of the university campus, which also houses the Institutes where the classes are held. Under the funds for organisational support, all students coming to the UO within the Erasmus+ programme have the opportunity to complete a semester of the 30-hour Polish language course, for which they can receive 3 ECTS points. Additionally, an intensive English course "English for Academic Purposes" is organised for students coming within the KA107 project. The university campus is located in the city centre so students can move between university facilities on foot and do not need to use public transport.

In the last year, the UO became involved in projects under Action 2 (Strategic Partnerships – both as a leader and partner), European Universities. This is a further stage of opening to a different model of cooperation with partner universities (based on contacts developed in the area of mobility).

In the period of the new budgeting for 2021–2027, the UO plans to continue cooperation with foreign partners in the field of mobility as well as to develop the initiated cooperation in the area of projects implemented in consortia under Action 2. Not only does it concern applying for new projects under other consortia, but also continuing cooperation within existing partnerships in order to raise new funds for developing the project results achieved so far. It is also planned to involve new units of the UO, not participating in projects of Action 2 so far.

The FORTHEM project in this edition is scheduled to run until 2022, but the alliance is expected to continue to operate in similar and other types of actions, including participation in Horizon 2020. Participation in this project guarantees the durability of the Erasmus+ strategy of the University of Opole due to the involvement of numerous strong partners and close cooperation with them.