

# ERASMUS+ 2021 – 2027

## Enriching Lives, Opening Minds

### ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

#### 1.1 Erasmus activities included in EPS

In this section, you need to tick the Erasmus activities covered by your Erasmus Policy Statement. Please select those activities that your HEI intends to implement during the entire duration of the Programme.

##### Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility:

The mobility of higher education students and staff ☒

##### Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) - Cooperation among organisations and institutions:

Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices ☒

Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities ☒

Partnerships for Excellence - Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees ☒

Partnerships for Innovation ☒

##### Erasmus Key Action 3 (Ka3):

Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3) - Support to policy development and cooperation: ☒

#### 1.2 Erasmus Policy statement (EPS): your strategy

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency. 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?

Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) is one of the largest public institutions of higher education in Lithuania with an ambition to increase its international presence, and ensure that all of its partnerships and initiatives adhere to its institutional strategy focusing on refining, modernizing, initiating and adapting the best practices. Moreover, we are dedicated to ensure transparent, open, inclusive, and environmentally conscious campus life, the process of studies and research, while also engaging as active actors in the local and regional society.

VMU is strongly committed to its involvement in the processes that take place in the European Education Area and the EU initiatives, where it sees its potential, primarily in academic quality, but also in its international networking activities, competitiveness, profiling and visibility. Expectations of VMU from participation in the Erasmus programme are mostly related to the expectations of successful implementation of objectives and tasks laid down in the university's strategy.

The focus on the more extensive and in-depth internationalisation of our campus life, studies and research is the key priority among other strategic aims of VMU. In line to those aims, VMU has set 3 main areas of action for internationalization until 2027:

### **Strategic partnerships and global networks for the higher international visibility and reputation**

- **Modern, interdisciplinary, high-quality studies and research initiatives with national, regional and global impact**
- **Global Campus with environmentally friendly infrastructure for inclusiveness, diversity, and openness**

#### **1. Strategic partnerships and global networks for the higher international visibility and reputation**

Strategic partnerships and global significance of our work makes the university visible globally, as well as results in social and cultural impact. VMU is the leader and coordinator of many important international events, discussions, and initiatives on policy issues, especially those with regional and global impact. It is a trusted and valued international partner for a variety of important academic and cultural projects. VMU immediately reacts and provides solutions for national, regional and global academic, technological, cultural, and social challenges. We prioritize the most effective partnerships in Europe and globally for diverse academic activities in the framework of Erasmus+ and other programs and schemes by paying greater attention to the quality of a partnership, interest of particular study programs or the areas of research excellence rather than to the number of partnerships (quality over quantity). We will continue to strengthen our European partnerships (University alliance – T4E Alliance) for diverse aims in studies, research and cultural activities or university infrastructures. We commit to work further with our str

- Neighbors in Baltic Sea region (Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Germany and Scandinavian countries) will be of importance due to the long history of cooperation and the emergence of new activities;
- European partners (European University – T4E Alliance) and others;
- Eastern Partnership and Central Asia countries: Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc. for student and staff exchange, capacity-building projects;
- South-East Asia (Japan, China, The Republic of Korea) for studies and research projects;
- Close cooperation with international organizations (UNESCO, UN, OECD, etc.);
- Close cooperation with foreign cultural institutions through VMU's centres and institutes, including but not limited to the Centre for Asian Studies, The Centre of Francophone Countries, etc.;
- Close cooperation with the national and foreign embassies, Lithuanian diaspora abroad.

VMU strives for more efficient presence abroad: different types of infrastructure have been created to serve academic purposes, including the centres of Baltic studies and/or VMU information centers in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, China, etc. We continue to share our knowledge and expertise: our teachers have been involved in supporting our partners in diverse capacity-building projects as well as providing expertise in quality assurance, teaching methods, multilingual skills, and digital/ on-line teaching support. We expand our activities in The World Lithuanian University – our project for the benefit of the World Lithuanian Community/ Diaspora as well as develop networks of VMU alumni in foreign countries, including all Erasmus incoming/ outgoing students.

## **2. Modern, interdisciplinary, high-quality studies and research initiatives with national, regional and global impact**

VMU has a reputation as a university with a globally oriented, free-spirited, and liberal mindset. Studies at VMU are based on the principles of liberal arts and science, and students can obtain the all-round education (Education 360°), including multilingual and multicultural skills. Graduates are knowledge-entrepreneurs, prepared for leadership and service in an increasingly interdependent world. University's community continues to share a strong commitment to quality education and modernization, primarily on expanding digitalization skills, knowledge, infrastructure, and processes. After the merger with two universities (Aleksandras Stulginskis University and Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences) in 2019, VMU enlarged its capacity in all fields, thus resulting in the development and consolidation of the academic potential for strong interdisciplinary and innovative study programs and research. Mobility, interdisciplinarity and inclusion will be the norm on our campus. The learning community will continue to develop and strengthen the key competences for the lifelong learning; digital skills, multilingualism and intercultural competencies; common values and inclusive education.

The main focal pillars for the studies will include:

- **Development of joint, double degree and on-line international programs and courses**
- **Quality assurance and recognition**
- **Mobility as a norm**

In the field of research, VMU is highly experienced in working across multiple disciplines. We encourage our groups of scholars to cooperate across-the-board and explore the new ways to enhance networks locally, regionally and globally. We will focus on closer cooperation with business and industry for knowledge economy and innovation. This new stage will highlight the focus on the international collaborative research, as we have an ambition to develop a framework for European knowledge and innovation for sustainable ecosystems, driving excellence in research and contributing to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EEA and globally. We will rely strongly on our European University alliance's activities.

The main pillars of the focus for the research will include:

- Excellence in research (especially in the areas of humanities and arts, social science, natural science, and agriculture);
- Significant impact (social, technological, cultural, and political impact on both the national and global levels);
- Intensified collaboration with diverse sectors (especially business and industry, but also schools, NGOs, cultural institutions for better understanding of their issues and reflecting by sharing tangible solutions).

### 3. Global Campus with environmentally friendly infrastructure for inclusiveness, diversity, openness

VMU strives to create a campus that would be open, inclusive, convenient to use and live in, cultivate talents in sports and culture, and designed to develop a variety of our community's skills and competences. We want our community to become more interculturally, environmentally and socially aware, which would help everyone feel at home wherever they are. The main actions to implement this aim include the development of:

- Multicultural spirit of life
- Development of collaborative international community (attraction and integration of international students, lectures, researchers, and other staff)
- Fostering inclusiveness, diversity, and openness
- Attractive and comfortable living conditions
- Cultural and sport infrastructure

Within the last few years, VMU has taken important steps to increase access to VMU for international students and PhD candidates. We are also working to attract teachers and researchers from other countries to join our campus and boost the quality of studies, research, and global impact. We believe that the presence of the global community enhances our campus life with diversity, inclusiveness, and tolerance. VMU puts a lot of effort to support and motivate the academic and administrative staff by providing favorable conditions for them to develop and strengthen their digital skills, language, professional and intercultural competences as well various mobility opportunities. Shorter or longer international visits and exchanges will ensure the "internationalization" of our campus.

All these measures established to develop the Global Campus will increase the quality of studies, the number of joint and double degree and on-line programs as well as foster various forms of incoming and outgoing Erasmus mobility of students and staff. By creating an active intercultural environment and maintaining active relations with international partners, on the institutional level, the implementation of the Erasmus program will enable the university to educate strong, broad-profile specialists with an international experience and more socially and culturally aware and ready to meet the needs of the global labor market both on the national and at the international level, foster more active exchanges of students, as well as academic and non-academic staff.

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.

VMU takes part in Erasmus programme since 1999. Over 20 years of experience allowed us to ensure the depth and scope of our involvement with the programme and its activities, while the programme itself become integral and extensively embedded into the processes and everyday life of the university. Since the very beginning of the participation in the Erasmus programme, student and staff mobility supported by KA1 action is one of our institutional priorities. By taking full advantage of the KA1 action and organizing incoming and outgoing student mobility (be it physical, blended or virtual) for studies and traineeship, staff mobility for training and teaching, hosting staff, coming from foreign public and private organizations, for teaching, participating in one of the kind Erasmus+ consortia in Lithuania "Partners 4 Value", VMU moves deliberately towards reaching its internationalization goals: making mobility as a norm and creating Global Campus with environmentally friendly infrastructure for inclusiveness, diversity and openness.



First of all, to make the mobility possible, VMU is working towards the implementation of the strategy “Mobility as a Norm”, and also creating the possibility for further growth of “Mobility Windows”. For the past several years, VMU’s lecturers were encouraged to partly shift to distant/remote and blended activities (to transfer their lecture content to Moodle), lecturers are also encouraged for a mutual exchange (it is one of the priorities in the selection procedure). These initiatives add up to ensure the possibility for lecturers to be absent for a week or so to carry on Erasmus teaching assignments.

It is very important to mention that all the processes of the mobility (promotion, counselling, selection, appeal, recognition, reporting, etc.) are organized in accordance with internal procedures approved by VMU Rector and are in line with Erasmus principles. To ensure the quality of the mobility, partner institutions are being selected very thoroughly by collecting extensive data on the institution and / or by organizing preparatory staff visit to the HEIs and workplace institutions.

The selection procedure as well as all other Erasmus-exchange-related information is published on the institutional website in Lithuanian and English. The selection is done by the selection committees assembled by the Rector or deans of the faculties (centralised selection procedure for staff training visits and recent graduate traineeships, decentralised for teaching visits and study exchange). If a student or a staff member has doubts concerning the fairness of the selection process, there is a clear complaint submission procedure in place to address it. It is important to mention that VMU puts a lot of efforts to encourage people with fewer opportunities to participate in Erasmus programme. The efforts were recognized by the National Agency in 2009, when VMU received a quality award for this deed.

After participants are selected, they have a “pre-departure” training (face-to-face and online). They are invited to different events where they can meet their foreign counterparts and to engage in a cultural exploration and exchange before the actual exchange takes place. There is also an elaborate scheme for students to get ready for the mobility, as English language is made an obligatory (and free of charge) language to study for University’s students. All students must reach at least B2 (with no history of previous studying of the language) / C1 (with previous history of studying the language) of English language proficiency. Moreover, students and staff have a possibility to study other 30 foreign languages at VMU in order to become more familiar with the local languages and cultures or even reach the sufficient level to study/teach in target language. Students are also offered to study languages via the OLS platform.

VMU International Cooperation Department (ICD) makes sure that all teaching, training, learning and traineeship agreements (hereinafter the “Agreements”) are correctly prepared and confirmed before the departure of participants. Mobility participants receive guidance on how to prepare a quality Agreement and requested to do that before the mobility. Only after the Agreement is signed by all parties (this serves as a confirmation that all ECTS credits will be recognized, in study mobility case) and submitted to the ICD, the ICD prepares the Grant Agreement. After the Grant Agreement is signed and before the departure, mobility participant receives the pre-financing / advance.

Before the Autumn and Spring semesters, VMU ICD, in cooperation with VMU ESN and VMU Mentors, organize the Welcome Week for the international students. During this week, incoming students are familiarized with the organization of studies, university, city and country in general. The incoming staff (for teaching or training purposes) are being matched with their counterpart at VMU or the coordinator of the faculty / ICD takes responsibility to mentor / help them throughout their mobility period at VMU.

VMU offers all of its incoming students a possibility to stay in its dormitories. Those who do not want to stay in a dormitory are advised on how to find another type of accommodation. ICD staff is trained and ready to solve and advice on any visa / migration issue. There is a psychologist employed at the ICD, taking care of students’ psychological health and wellbeing. Contacts of the person in charge are published on the website as well as indicated the interinstitutional agreement. All incoming / outgoing mobile participants are advised (and in some cases obliged) to purchase the insurance. In March of each year, the course catalogue for the upcoming academic year is published on the VMU website and updated when needed. All students and staff, be them international or local, are treated equally and provided with the same high-quality services.

There are no separate classes for exchange students, all classes taught in English are open for locals, degree-seeking international and exchange students. This ensures better integration of incoming students and contributes towards the achievement of internationalization at home as one of the key goals of VMU internationalization guidelines. The quality of studies is being measured by the Study Quality Unit. VMU ESN and mentors do their best to make VMU international students to feel at home. During the Welcome Week, incoming students are offered the intensive Lithuanian Language Course and if they wish, they may continue it throughout the entire semester. Incoming students can also study foreign languages (including English).

After mobility period is completed, all incoming students and staff, in due time, receive the period statement and the transcript of records. As VMU and most of its partner universities use ECTS, the transfer of credits goes very smoothly. In case partner institution does not use ECTS, it is requested to issue a clarification on how their grading system used can be converted to ECTS. All credits collected by VMU students at the host institution are counted and recognized towards their degree automatically. In case of student mobility for traineeship – mobility periods as well as the results achieved are reflected in student's Diploma Supplement. Staff mobility is encouraged and recognized as part of employee development plan. Mobility participants are invited in various events and encouraged to promote the benefits of mobility.

Participation in **KA2** and **KA3** projects is crucial for us to reach our all three strategic goals. We are sure that coordination of the projects as well as the involvement as a partner institution will have a direct impact on elaboration of our strategic partnerships and networks as well as making our university a global, inclusive and modern institution. VMU has extensive experience in running and taking part in KA2 and KA3 projects. It is currently involved in 80 projects in the fields of biotechnology, biophysics, bioeconomy, agriculture, creative industries, law, education, sociology, psychology, computational linguistics, bilingualism, etc. Therefore, the scientists have accumulated solid experience in international scientific research and project management, holding memberships of national and international professional associations of diverse scientific areas and fields. Participation in Erasmus+ actions KA2 and KA3 contributes to VMU's actions to improve the quality and effectiveness of education, a combination of research and educational process at all levels of studying, internationalization of higher education, international cooperation, modernization of educational programs and staff development, which are the main priorities of the University, ensuring its credibility and recognition at present, and raising its competitiveness in the future. VMU is an active participant of **KA2** projects promoting cooperation and partnerships that have an impact on the modernization and internationalization of higher education institutions and systems in Partner Countries, with a special focus on Partner Countries neighbouring the EU. The outputs are tangible – new BA and MA programmes developed in Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and other countries; new competences of the researchers, participating and organizing various scientific international conferences are improved, and this allows developing new know-how and good practices of exchange, fostering innovation, creativity, knowledge exchange and/or multidisciplinary teaching and learning.

KA2 Partnerships for excellence – European University program needs to be mentioned separately, as our participation in this call is directly related to our main strategic goals of internationalisation and aims to develop meaningful and sustainable partnerships. We believe that the second time will be successful for our alliance **Transform4Europe (T4E)**.

The project is noteworthy because of its wholesome and sustainable systematic approach to the interrelated actors like individuals -> universities -> regions -> Europe. Moreover, T4E is a partnership composed of like-minded universities. Despite their differences in size, scope and profile, they share a common vision for higher education in Europe as a major player in shaping the future of Europe through a knowledge-entrepreneurial approach embedded in their regions, and featuring Saarland University (Germany), The University of Alicante (Spain), The Estonian Academy of Arts (Estonia), The University of Silesia in Katowice (Poland), Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (Bulgaria), The University of Trieste (Italy) and VMU.

It is worth mentioning that alliance members already carry out activities that react to the most pressing issue on their own initiative without waiting for the project evaluation results: we are already discussing how to deal with the issues posed for education and mobility due to COVID-19, sharing the best practices of online education and the effect of coronavirus for everyone affected on the personal level that universities can help in their capacity as operators in both the local ecosystem and interconnectedness to other stakeholders around the world.

KA2 Partnerships for excellence – Erasmus Mundus programme is also our strategic aim, guided by our ambition to be successful in our international visibility and impact. Unfortunately, due to high competition, we could not get support for this activity last year, even though we have been successfully running two interdisciplinary and international joint master degree programs for several years: “Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism” (SoMu) with the partners: Johannes-Gutenberg University, Germany, Stockholm University, Sweden and the University of Tartu, Estonia and “Master of Interdisciplinary studies and research in Eastern Europe” (MIREES) with the partners: University of Bologna (Italy), St. Petersburg State University (Russia) and Corvinus University of Budapest (Hungary).

Support to policy dialogue (KA3) takes place through the network of Higher Education Reform Experts in Partner Countries neighboring the EU, policy dialogue with Partner Countries and international attractiveness and promotion events; participating in Jean Monnet activities Modules and Chairs allow stimulating teaching, research and reflection in the field of European Union studies worldwide.

Project activities are considered as an effective way to implement innovations in scientific fields and study process which result in fostering the development of the city, region, and country. National and international cooperation networks are created and sustained, therefore, the scientific community of VMU is efficiently involved in the diverse EU programmes for promotion of science and research innovations – H2020, COST, Jean Monnet, Norway Grants, Erasmus+ (Strategic Partnerships, Capacity Building for Higher Education, Knowledge Alliances, Erasmus Mobility), as well as European Structural Funds and different national programmes.

Implementation of project activities takes place through the systematic process at VMU coordinated and monitored by the Research and Innovation Department's Project Management Unit, Department of Finances, Department of Human Resources, Department of Public Procurement and International Cooperation Department. Therefore, administrative workload implementing national and international projects is based on the accumulated long-term experience that guarantees efficiency and which is considered as a success factor for the efficient implementation of the project being implemented. VMU has also established the procedure for the management of the rights arising from intellectual performance developed.

In summation of our activities in Erasmus Key actions, we emphasize the need to follow the common humanistic and European values in our community's life and international cooperation and declare our strong commitment to quality studies, research, and innovation, to equality of participation (inclusiveness of all) and the freedom of academy and tolerance of expression and action.

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

Erasmus is the main program implemented by the University, providing all opportunities to expand cooperation with foreign partners, carry out large-scale exchanges of students and staff, initiate and carry out joint international projects in the field of studies and research, develop joint programs, etc.



The programme will serve to the improvement of quality and relevance of University's education process. The key activities of the Programme will give clear and effective measures to increase involvement of students and staff to study exchanges and placements, teaching and training visits, strategic partnership projects and thematic networks. This will give excellent possibilities to participants – both students and teachers – to transfer competences of studies and teaching. Students will have a possibility to experience new and innovative learning approaches and delivery methods. Academic staff will gain more skills on improving those teaching experiences, flexible adoption of teaching methods and speeding up the curricula changes, necessary to follow the needs of labour market. Non-academic staff will increase their competencies in organising and implementing their everyday duties it will also add up to a higher job satisfaction.

The programme will directly serve to strengthen the quality of learning at the University through mobility and cross border cooperation. Erasmus programme gives a wide scope of geographical and professional possibilities for VMU teachers and students to choose places for performing of mobility under their personal and departmental needs. The needs of wide recognition of academic qualification gained after the mobility will foster university permanently improve its academic recognition system regardless the recognition by the approved internal procedures is automatic.

Different actions of the programme such as partnership projects or mobility activities will contribute to the development the knowledge triangle – links between university education, research, and business/ industry. By participating in placement activities, VMU students will develop practical skills with the business sector and gain practical professional knowledge. Teachers going for training to companies or other institutions will gain a better understanding of the needs and expectations from employers regarding graduates. This will facilitate more effective and flexible curriculum changes to fulfil business needs and expectations.

Program funding during the new period will significantly contribute to the increase in the number of mobilities, mobility management infrastructure, staff competences in management of internationalization processes as well as in organising and providing blended and virtual mobility.

The program will support VMU in its vision to consistently implement the Global Campus, mobility as a norm and university teaching concepts so as to develop into a leading university in the medium or long term. That means professional field-oriented and science-based education and training according to international standards.

Our targets and indicators are:

- Increase outgoing student mobility by 5% each year and ensure that by the end of the new programme (2027), at least 35% of graduating students have had the international exchange experience;
- Increase number of recent graduate students going for traineeship by 5% each year;
- Increase the number of incoming exchange students by 5% each year;
- Increase staff mobility by 10% each year;
- Ensure that by the year 2024, 10% of student mobility is implemented in blended or virtual mobility mode and double the number by the end of the new programme;
- Ensure that by the year 2024, 10% of staff mobility for teaching is implemented in blended or virtual mobility mode and double the number by the end of the new programme;
- Introduce mobility window to at least 10% of study programmes by the year 2024 and double the number by the end of the new programme;
- Ensure mobility grants to 100% of students, studying in double diploma / joint programs;
- Follow the milestones of ESC and digitalize mobility organization procedure:

1. 2021 – to manage inter-institutional agreements and online learning agreements;
2. 2022 – to send and receive student nominations and acceptances;
3. 2023 – to exchange transcripts of records related to student mobility;
4. 2025 – all VMU students, participating in Erasmus mobility, takes full advantage of the European Student Card Initiative.





Erasmus+



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- By the year 2024, to issue Vytautas Magnus University's "certificate" of international experience together with the Diploma Supplement;
- By the year 2022, to launch Erasmus Ambassadors programme;
- By 2021, optimize Erasmus+ Inter-institutional Agreements: indication of clear priorities for partner institution selection (compatibility of academic profiles, ranking of the institution, geographical balance, etc.), monitoring, renewal, centralization of management;
- Increase the number of projects (KA2) that VMU is coordinator off by at least 10% percent by the year 2024 and double the number by the end of the programme;
- Become a coordinator of at least one KA3 project by the year 2024 and for at least 2 by the end of the programme.
- Increase the number of people with fewer opportunities to participate in Erasmus programme;

Ensure participation in one European Universities project. If this year's call proves to be unsuccessful, we will participate in the next one.