

# ERASMUS CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION 2021-2027

## METROPOLIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

### ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

#### 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?*

*(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<sup>1</sup> and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).*

The Erasmus programme is an integral part of internationalisation at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences (Metropolia). The opportunities provided by Erasmus funding are promoted, acknowledged and appreciated on all levels of the institution. Metropolia's International Office (IO) ensures that the programme and its outcomes are visible to all, students and staff alike.

Metropolia has incorporated internationalisation into all of the main themes of the institutional strategy for 2021-2030 through the International Action Plan, which has been specifically drafted to support the implementation of the institutional strategy in a global context and strengthen Metropolia's role as a key influencer in higher education. The whole Metropolia community, including academic and administrative staff as well as students, has been involved in drafting the International Action Plan.

The five key themes of the institutional strategy include phenomenon-based innovation hubs, lifelong learning, sustainable development and growth, people and culture, and digitalization. Our strategic goal for 2030 is to be "A bold reformer of expertise and a builder of a sustainable future" and the international dimension of Metropolia's activities, e.g. our international learning community, global networks as well as our participation in programmes like Erasmus, plays a key role in achieving the strategic goals. The International Action Plan for 2020-2025 sets concrete targets for the internationalization of each of the five strategic themes and provides indicators for estimating to what extent the set targets are achieved. Interim targets have been set for 2022 to reach the goals set for 2025.

Using the strategic theme of lifelong learning as a guideline, the International Action Plan lists actions such as further increasing the number of Metropolia's English-taught courses and degree programmes and strengthening the multicultural skills of our graduates under this theme. The relevant indicators include the number of courses, degree programmes and ECTS credits that are completed in English and/or courses that have built-in components that develop students' multicultural competencies.

From the point of view of lifelong learning, the Erasmus programme plays an essential role in helping us meet the set targets. Our participation in Erasmus activities drives us to develop English-taught modules and international components in our curricula, following the ECTS guidelines in our curriculum development. Active participation in Erasmus mobilities by both students and staff as well as strong involvement in Erasmus collaboration projects with international partners create the backbone for our internationalization.

Digitalisation is another of the five main themes of Metropolia's institutional strategy. Our aim is to have internationalisation built into Metropolia's digital solutions; the digitalisation of education and services takes into account Metropolia's international operation environment and its requirements. The global COVID-19 pandemic of spring 2020, which forced higher education institutions to switch from on-campus teaching to virtual teaching environments, has certainly sped up the digitalization process significantly also at Metropolia. Our International Action Plan states that we will increase the number of virtually offered courses and develop digital materials and platforms preferably in collaboration with international partners, utilizing project funding. This could partly take place through Erasmus funded projects with our strategic European partners. Metropolia has also formally confirmed participation in Erasmus Virtual Exchange, as an addition to our toolkit of digital solutions to internationalize education. Metropolia eagerly anticipates having blended mobilities as part of the new Erasmus programme, and is well equipped to implement these, which further improves the accessibility of international mobility.

Metropolia's International Action Plan also complies with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture's 2017-2025 national guidelines for the promotion of internationalisation of the Finnish higher education and research. According to the guidelines, all Finnish higher education institutions are required, for example, to set targets and supporting actions for their international activity, promote the international competencies and mobility of students and staff, and strengthen the language offer to enhance internationalization at home and international networking. Metropolia's International Action Plan was made to address the requirements set in the national guidelines.

In addition to the promotion of lifelong learning and digitalization, which are important aspects of the European Education Area and key themes in Metropolia's institutional strategy, Metropolia contributes to the creation of the European Education Area in many ways. For example, we encourage all staff and students to spend time abroad, we make our education offer accessible to all irrespective of their background, and recognize higher education qualifications gained in other EU countries. We are also prepared to implement the European Student Card in the new Erasmus period, along with the use of the Erasmus Without Paper network and promotion of the Erasmus+ Mobile App. Together with the strategic European partner network U!REKA, Metropolia has submitted a proposal for the European Universities Initiative in 2019 and a revised proposal in 2020. A successful application in 2020 will enable our consortium to give a strong contribution to the European Education Area by creating a university of the future that promotes European values and identity, and does its share in helping enhance the quality and competitiveness of European higher education.

*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.*

## MOBILITIES:

In the International Action Plan, Metropolia sets out to provide students with a comprehensive education environment in English and strong abilities to function in multicultural networks. Metropolia also aims to be an appealing higher education institution for international students. Erasmus mobilities are central in helping us meet these targets. Our participation in the Erasmus programme drives us to develop an increasing number of English-taught courses and programmes as well as international components in our curricula. Erasmus mobilities are an effective and important tool in developing our students' abilities to function in multicultural environments, both as outgoing mobility participants and through internationalization at home as fellow students of incoming Erasmus mobility students. Therefore, active participation in Erasmus mobilities by both students and staff is very much in the core of Metropolia's international strategy.

Most of Metropolia's international mobility takes place within the framework of the Erasmus programme, under Key Action 1. In 2019, the Erasmus programme accounted for 58 percent of our outgoing student mobility and 80 percent of our incoming student mobility. A significant share of our staff exchanges among both academic and administrative staff is also implemented as Erasmus mobility. At Metropolia, the European dimension of mobility opportunities in general and the Erasmus programme in particular are strongly promoted as a preferred mobility programme. During the coming years, Metropolia aims to increase the number of Erasmus student and staff mobilities not only in Europe, but also as international credit mobility with non-EU partners. Metropolia also welcomes the expansion of Erasmus International Credit Mobility in the 2021-2027 programme period.

Processes related to the establishment and evaluation of inter-institutional agreements with Erasmus partners have been developed over the years. The agreements are established before the beginning of each new programme period, following the Erasmus criteria. International Coordinators (IC) plan and review the partner network with the degree programmes regularly, both informally and through structured partner analyses. A thorough, structured partner analysis is carried out with each programme during 2020 as preparation for the new Erasmus agreement period. Feedback from students and staff is collected regularly to review the quality of partnerships. New agreements are established based on needs rising from the degree programmes. Agreements are made only with partners where potential long-term collaboration can be foreseen, taking into consideration not only mobility potential but also e.g. project, innovation and joint course collaboration. In addition, each degree programme and field of study have their own strategic goals for the partner networks. Metropolia's fruitful collaboration in our strategic European U!REKA alliance as well as our good track record in receiving ICM funding with strategically important partners in Erasmus Partner Countries serve as proof of our commitment to developing high-quality partnerships and processes.

In communication related to student mobility, the ICs play a key role: they process all information, documentation and administration for individual mobilities and partner collaboration. Communication with partner institutions mainly takes place through email. In addition, EAIE conferences have offered an excellent platform to meet many partners in one setting. ICs send information on student exchange applications, including a link to partner information sheets, before the start of each application period. Course lists and an extensive information package on studies, accommodation, life in Finland etc. are available and continuously updated online. Extensive feedback is collected and analysed regularly, and any problems indicated in the feedback is discussed with partners. Similarly, if partners communicate any problems related to the processes in Metropolia, these are discussed with the respective services or degree programmes without delay.

Quality management in Metropolia is the responsibility of all the IO staff, the departmental coordinators and, ultimately, of the management of the institution. Good internal and external communication is the basis for high quality and expectation management. The quality system of international relations is based on the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle used in Metropolia.

The Mobility-Online database is used throughout mobility processes, from application to feedback, and all the Erasmus documents are uploaded into the system. This way both the IC and the student can access their up-to-date

documentation. The system provides participants with a list of next steps and automated messages with instructions at different stages. The processes are transparent and used in all fields of study. Metropolia has worked hard on making Mobility-Online as user-friendly as possible. We have created an interface between our own student registry system and Mobility-Online. Students can easily access the information from our own student platform.

These measures improve accessibility, flexibility, quality and visibility of implementing the mobility activities of the Erasmus programme in Metropolia, as online material (including recordings of orientations) is available to all students at any time in a standardised format. The IO aims to have all relevant information online in a clear and concise form. In addition, participants can always meet with ICs whenever they need face-to-face support.

#### Outgoing students:

All steps of the mobility process, partner lists, funding, practical arrangements, safety issues, credit recognition etc. are explained in detail in the intranet. ICs also organize face-to-face info sessions and orientation events for outgoing students. Orientation events and material are also available online to ensure a flexible way for students to get information. Degree programmes are responsible for academic guidance and credit recognition, including checking the Learning Agreements. Instructions for credit recognition are clear and a digital process of recognition is in use throughout the institution.

The preparations for mobility start with promoting exchange and other internationalisation opportunities in info sessions for all first year students, including master's level. When the application periods start, the ICs prepare a promotional campaign, including the use of social media platforms, to reach all students and to raise interest. ICs prepare students for the exchange application process and our intranet provides the required information. The content is concise to suit the contemporary short-span reading habits. ICs organise application info sessions on all campuses and online. Students can also book an appointment or have a walk-in face-to-face guidance appointment in the IO.

Students selected for exchange receive an acceptance package (acceptance still pending the desired host institution's decision at this stage). Pre-departure orientations are offered on each Metropolia Campus to cover information on applying to the host institution, Erasmus documentation, practical arrangements, risk prevention and safety issues. Orientations are organised in co-operation with the experts in student health and well-being. There is also a separate session on intercultural preparation. An additional online orientation package enables students to study most information online in their own pace, with face-to-face orientations focusing on field-specific questions and providing an opportunity for the students to meet each other.

ICs are in contact with students throughout the mobility, and automated messages from Mobility-Online give specific instructions at each stage. Each degree programme has an appointed academic contact person to instruct students on course choices and to sign the Learning Agreement. Metropolia also provides elective language studies open for all students, some of the courses offered in co-operation with other higher education institutions in the Helsinki area. The students planning to go on exchange are encouraged to take language courses and, when accepted for exchange, to make use of the OLS courses.

#### Incoming students:

The Metropolia website is the main information source, and the acceptance package is available online as well. The website is updated by the IO, other relevant units and degree programmes. A working group monitors that the website follows the ECTS criteria.

ICs send application instructions via email to partner institutions with links to the website material, including field-specific info sheets. The website includes comprehensive information on application, courses, services available, housing, Helsinki area and Finland. During and after the application process students receive detailed information on housing, international tutors, orientation etc. Throughout the process, the students are welcome to contact ICs with any questions.

Exchange students are assigned a peer tutor, trained in collaboration by the student union and the IO. Tutors provide support and information on arrival to Helsinki. The tutor has the incoming students' apartment keys ready, meets them at the airport and escorts them to their apartment. Tutors also help exchange students with everyday questions. The orientation, organized at the beginning of each semester, provides incoming students with information on Finnish culture, living in Finland and in the Helsinki area, practical information about Metropolia and studies, and safety issues. During the orientation, tutors help students enroll to courses and get their public transportation cards.

Exchange students are always welcome to contact their tutors or ICs. Each degree programme has an academic contact person and in most cases, the person meets the students at the beginning of the semester to instruct on key study-related issues. Students also have the option to take a Finnish for Exchange Students course (3-5 ECTS), 3-5 options being offered each semester.

#### Outgoing trainees:

The IC instructs and supports the student throughout the process and handles matters related to Erasmus documents. Each degree programme has an academic contact person responsible for checking the suitability of the learning outcomes, setting goals with the student and signing the LA. In most fields of study, info sessions on work placements are given regularly. All relevant information is available in the intranet. There are also short instructional videos to guide students with the processes.

#### Outgoing staff:

Detailed information is available on the intranet. The ICs help staff members to select a staff training possibility, e.g. a staff week in a partner institution, and help the staff in any questions they might have, for instance on intercultural issues. A centrally coordinated international travel application period is organised annually at institutional level to enhance the visibility of staff exchange opportunities and to ensure the transparency of the mobility process.

#### Incoming staff:

The external website provides instructions for visitors and they are also supported by the ICs and the hosting unit. To improve the impact of staff and teacher exchanges and to disseminate the results more widely in the institution, an international staff week is organised annually in Metropolia. In addition, the different study fields organise international teaching weeks or summer schools.

Responsibilities are divided in a clear and transparent way. Grant processing and Erasmus administration (application, reporting, monitoring) is the Erasmus institutional coordinator's responsibility, while ICs are responsible for guidance and support for individual participants. They also process and check the Erasmus documents (LA, GA, TOR from host, LOC). Coordinators develop the processes constantly with the support of the Erasmus institutional coordinator and other IO staff. Open communication between the ICs of different fields and the students is of key importance. It is of key importance for us to ensure that the processes are equal and of the same quality to all.

## PROJECTS

Metropolia is an active participant in Erasmus Key Action 2 projects. In spring 2020 Metropolia is participating in 8 Key Action 2 projects, coordinating 1 of them. In addition to the ongoing projects, Metropolia is involved in 14 project applications that were submitted in 2020, including a European Universities Initiative application submitted by Metropolia's strategic partner alliance U!REKA. Metropolia has been actively cooperating as partner or coordinator in altogether 21 funded KA2 projects during the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020.

Participation in Erasmus projects is strongly encouraged as the projects provide opportunities for education development in collaboration with international partners and policy makers. They also provide opportunities for student and staff mobility, internationalisation at home, international benchmarking, networking as well as professional development. Metropolia's Research, Development and Innovation services actively seek and distribute information on project possibilities. Project funding opportunities are promoted on the intranet and, in addition, information on calls for projects with a specific content are sent directly to relevant target groups to make sure information of the opportunities reaches potential applicants. All project proposals undergo a feasibility evaluation procedure as per institutional and departmental priorities.

The Research, Development and Innovation Services coordinate possibilities for internal sharing of information on successful applications and experiences. Metropolia supports projects by allocating institutional and departmental resources for application and project planning and by providing administrative assistance. Results are disseminated on the intranet, on the external website and in articles, newsletters and staff events.

Many of Metropolia's Erasmus projects have a strong RDI emphasis. In Metropolia, RDI activities are integrated into teaching, so students get an opportunity to apply their knowledge and develop the skills they need at work. Through the projects, students also create a network that empowers their future career and creates links between companies and graduates. Students are vital for renewing businesses with fresh ideas. RDI projects offer a natural and reliable internationalization path for Metropolia, its students as well as its regional and national collaboration partners. The support of RDI Services in project preparation and application procedures further facilitates involvement in EU-funded cooperation projects.

Metropolia's strategic aim is to be known as a creator of innovative solutions for global challenges and an influential ecosystem actor through our innovation hubs. Our expertise in research, development and innovation activities is displayed through various projects and services in the five innovation hubs, which are: Clean and Sustainable Solutions, Customer-oriented Wellbeing and Health Services, Data-driven Construction; Functional City for People, and Smart Mobility. The innovation hubs provide a new way to learn, produce solutions and collaborate in an interdisciplinary way with international partners on major phenomena or challenges for the benefit of society as a whole. We also seek to increase our attractiveness as a partner in international RDI projects and, as a result, increase the number of EU-funded projects we participate in, including Erasmus projects. We build collaboration platforms for innovation and learning, and offer all students the opportunity to innovate. Active participation in Erasmus projects helps us achieve this strategic goal.

*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.*

Participation in the Erasmus programme is essential in helping Metropolia achieve many of the targets set in the International Action Plan that, in turn, support our institutional strategic goals.

International mobility of both students and staff is already an established part of institutional processes in Metropolia. Out of the 2019 Metropolia graduates, 28% had one or several international mobility periods in their degree (Eurostat). Our target is to maintain and increase current mobility levels while making international learning experiences increasingly inclusive and an even more natural part of working and studying at Metropolia. We continuously promote international mobility among students and staff and work on further developing our marketing, application, selection and support processes to make sure that international mobility will continue to be an attractive option in the years to come, paying extra attention to enable participation of underrepresented groups. International mobility is, after all, a core function that enables us to achieve the goals set in the International Action Plan.

Metropolia has in 2020 submitted a European Universities Initiative application together with the U!REKA Consortium. Our application sets as a target that at least 50% of the students within the alliance should benefit from mobility, be it physical, virtual or blended. U!REKA aims to increase mobility by 10, 20 and 20 percent per year during the three-year EUI project.

In spring 2020, at the time of submitting the ECHE application, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected international mobilities by causing cancellations, interruptions and other changes (such as shifting from on-campus to online teaching) to planned and ongoing mobilities in all higher education institutions, Metropolia included. At this point, it is still impossible to say to what extent the pandemic will continue to affect mobilities during the rest of the year 2020 and in the coming years. Naturally, Metropolia aims to bring its international mobility numbers back to the pre-COVID-19 level as soon as possible when the travel restrictions have been lifted. During the COVID-19 crisis, Metropolia's academic and administrative staff have shown flexibility and ability to respond rapidly to an unprecedented challenge. Teaching shifted from physical environments to virtual ones in a few days and support services to students were swiftly offered through new digital channels. Metropolia IO staff demonstrated sound skills in international mobility crisis management, making sure that both inbound and outbound students received the help, support and advice needed and that international partners stayed informed of developments in Metropolia. Metropolia complies with the authorities' instructions while following up on the situation and collaborating closely with higher education institutions in Finland and abroad, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture as well as the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Based on the International Action Plan, we focus our development actions on enhancing the quality of mobilities particularly by reviewing our international partner network and by enhancing the sustainability and digitalization of international mobility. An extensive analysis of Metropolia's international partners on all levels and in all units will be carried out by 2022 to ensure that high-quality mobility opportunities will be available for Metropolia staff and students in the future as well, and to enable us to build long-term strategic collaboration with key partners, also in the form of collaboration projects.

The International Action Plan states that our target is to significantly increase the number of virtually offered courses, develop digital materials and platforms for education and enhance the online teaching skills of our teaching staff by 2022. During the COVID-19 crisis, Metropolia's online teaching took a giant leap forward, so these targets should be achieved without much difficulty. These developments will improve the quality of Metropolia's virtual and blended mobilities. Virtual modules and courses offered to international students will also help us reduce our carbon footprint and thereby improve the sustainability of exchanges. Metropolia is also looking to providing additional support for low-emission international mobility options by 2022.

Metropolia regularly monitors the EU Survey results as well as the institutional feedback channels, such as the outgoing student exchange reports, the incoming student feedback form and the credits and grades completed and transferred by mobility students, to maintain the quality of both incoming and outgoing exchanges. Indications that suggest there is need for modification and improvement of our processes are picked up by the IO staff and dealt with in a timely manner with the responsible unit.

Incoming international students and staff are considered an important part of the Metropolia community. Together with the international degree-seeking students, they contribute to creating an international learning environment and internationalization at home opportunities for the local students. Metropolia operates in Finnish and in English, and all services are offered in both languages. This ensures that the international students (both exchange and degree-seeking students) as well as international staff have equal opportunities to becoming active members of the community. As part of our internationalisation at home efforts, Metropolia is also aiming to significantly increase the number of courses offered in English so that each degree programme would offer at least 30 ECTS of courses also in English.

One of Metropolia's strategic aims is to enhance our attractiveness as a partner in international projects and, as a result, increase our participation in EU-funded projects, including Erasmus projects. By 2022, we intend to improve the quality and extent of the international project partner network and by 2025, we should already see an annual increase in the number of EU-funded projects. Erasmus projects are naturally included in this strategy. Metropolia has also set the development of a continuous sustainability analysis for projects as a target by 2022. The responsibility and sustainability aspects of projects will be analysed from the ecological, economical and social point of view already during the application phase, and a life cycle and/or sustainability analysis will be included as part of the implementation of the project.