



## Erasmus Policy statement (EPS)

### Institutional strategy

The University of Groningen (UG) continuously strives to improve the quality of its education and research, by keeping up to date with national and international developments and by reacting on the needs of society and of its academic community. The basis for this is a five-year institutional strategy, which enables UG to revise or update strategic choices or targets if demanded by a continuously developing world. At present, the outbreak of the corona virus, and the expectation that this will have considerable impact on (the internationalisation of) higher education worldwide made UG decide to postpone the launch of the new institutional strategy by one year, from autumn 2020 to autumn 2021. Also with the postponement of various decisions at the European level (e.g. on the European budget for 2021-2027) and the EU policy papers due in autumn 2020 (for instance on the European Education Area), UG acknowledges that the Erasmus Policy Statement as presented here, may need an update by the end of 2021. The corona virus outbreak will have a mid- to long-term impact on internationalisation in general and on mobility in particular.

Today's societal challenges can only be tackled by an interdisciplinary approach. UG chooses to focus on those challenges that require cooperation between our strongest research fields, are relevant for the region, and are of global interest at the same time. To this end, UG cooperates with external partners at regional, national, and international level. The interdisciplinary themes will be organised in Schools for: (1) Energy transition and climate change, (2) Healthy Ageing for a healthy society, (3) Digital society and technology, (4) Governance and politics for sustainable society.

The UG strategy will evolve around five strategic themes 1) education, (2) research, (3) societal impact, (4) students and staff, and (5) partnerships. The Erasmus+ programme will contribute to and have an impact on each of these themes. This applies in particular to the individual mobility projects and the European Universities Network, since they are the largest projects and reach out to the entire academic community, staff and students alike, as well as to the city and the region (collaboration with universities of professional education (HBO) in the University of the North).

The starting point for UG's strategy is that we prepare our students to become innovative, engaged, and interdisciplinary academics and world citizens. In order to do so, we embrace our educational strategy at three main aspects:

- Group learning: students learn how to learn, live and work together in our (international) academic community.
- Diversity as a motor for quality: we use the different backgrounds and viewpoints from our students and staff to enhance the learning (outcomes) of our students. We do so: (1) for cultural aspects in the International Classroom, (2) content-wise in interdisciplinary

projects, and (3) increasingly at various level in cooperation with universities of professional education (HBO) and with vocational training centres (MBO).

- Open academic community: we learn students to be open to new ideas, to individuals from different backgrounds, beliefs, ideas etc. Inclusion is at the core of our strategy. Besides that, UG actively encourages students to gain new (international) experience and be open to others and other communities by studying abroad.

The internationalisation strategy of UG is implemented (among other things) by formulating operational strategy plans at faculty level. The ambitions for inbound and outbound mobility are formulated in these documents. Development of new formats for internationalising the curriculum are addressed, as well as the project initiatives, for instance for the creation of double or multiple degrees. Faculties are encouraged to closely monitor the quality of mobility partners and their course offer, in order to safeguard credit transfer.

### **UG participation in the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027**

The University of Groningen intends to participate in all Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme, as it did in the previous programme from 2014 up until 2020. The reason for UG to actively participate in the Erasmus Programme is that it fits its institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy. Participation in European and in international projects is a crucial aspect of UG's internationalisation strategy. The opportunities for cooperation that are offered by the programme are a means for UG to achieve its goals for mobility, for cooperation in (strategic) partnerships, for innovation and modernisation of its teaching and education, and to exchange good practices with universities and organisations in order to achieve common objectives and mutual benefits, both within and outside the country. As for the international dimension, this applies especially to the KA107 projects, Capacity Building projects, and the EM Joint Master Degrees.

UG's involvement on a broad scale has supported and will continue to support UG's development as a major player in the area of (international) mobility, (multilateral) cooperation, and contributor to the enhancement of the European Education Area, European citizenship, and policy development (e.g. in the Tuning Academy, Virtual Exchange projects, and Jean Monnet projects).

The offer of concise minor programmes has increased considerably in the past years. This development gives students the opportunity to widen or deepen their scope, for instance by including an international mobility in their study programme. In view of the new strategy more (interdisciplinary) minor programmes will be developed. The discussion on alternative modes for international experiences has started, and the consequences of the corona crises are expected to speed up this process. The experience that UG gained in the past four years with more than 50 summer schools per year (organised both in Groningen and elsewhere in the world) will be instrumental in the development of blended learning. UG welcomes the possibilities offered by the combination of virtual exchange and shorter periods of physical mobility as announced in the preparation phase of the new Erasmus programme.

The implementation of the programme is a shared responsibility of the University of Groningen Central Office's (policy) departments and UG's 11 faculties (incl. the Graduate Schools). All projects are assessed on their importance and relevance for UG's strategy by the Boards of relevant faculties, the department of International Strategy and Relations, and consequently by the Board of the University.

## **Implementation at the central level**

At the central level, several departments are involved in the implementation of the programme.

The main responsibility lies with the department of International Strategy and Relations (ISR). Its tasks and responsibilities are: (1) the ECHE and EPS application, (2) the University's annual mobility project applications (KA103 and KA107), management, and implementation (together with the Mobility and Scholarship Desk (MSD) and UG's faculties, see below), (3) central contact for all of UG's project applications, dissemination of information on UG's participation in projects, and securing the Board's approval for participation in projects, (4) safeguarding the embedment of all projects in the institution, (5) ensuring that all projects follow the rules and regulation of the Dutch law (e.g. on higher education, immigration, etc.), and do so together with the legal department, (6) monitoring of the ECHE principles throughout the university, (7) reporting and preparing of audits on KA103 and KA107 projects to the National Agency, and of KA2 and KA3 cooperation projects in case coordinated at the level of the central office (8) support KA2 and KA3 project participants at the faculty level in the preparation of reports and audits, (9) advise on the alignment of the admission, enrolment and graduation procedures of Erasmus Mundus Master's projects.

MSD is UG's mobility projects' implementing office. MSD staff manages the Mobility Tool and the OLS, the payment of scholarships for students and staff (in all mobility projects) and student grants in Erasmus Mundus Master Degrees which are coordinated by UG. Also, MSD maintains the dedicated website for mobility. MSD cooperates with Financial Shared Services, which executes the actual payment of scholarships.

ABJZ (Legal department) is responsible for safeguarding adherence to the Dutch Law on Higher Education of all aspects of project proposals and project management. The legal department checks all applications on the support of Faculty Boards (or Office Management when projects at the central level are concerned) and of the relevant Management Controller for budgetary implications.

The Board of the University will sign all project applications, Mandate Letters and Declarations on Honour, once they have been approved by the Legal department. All three members of the Board have the power of attorney to sign the required documents.

## **Implementation at the faculty level**

Faculty Boards: (1) approve all faculty mobility agreements (IIA's) and (2) approve all E+ project applications, the participation of staff members, and the budget involved (if supported by the management controller).

International offices implement mobility projects at the faculty level. They are responsible for (1) a transparent application and selection procedure, (2) outgoing nominations and incoming applications, (3) providing guidance to both incoming and outgoing students before, during and after the mobility, (4) full and correct use of the Erasmus+ tools for recognition, i.e. the Learning Agreement (before, during and after) and the Transcript of Records (incl. the ECTS grading table), (5) recognition of credits obtained abroad (in cooperation with the examination boards), (6) submission of complete mobility files to the MSD.

Each faculty's has its own course catalogue manager who is responsible for keeping up to date the ECTS course catalogue. Teaching staff provides information on the study programme in a strict format (in line with the ECTS Users' Guide guidelines), in Dutch and/or in English. Course catalogue managers will check the contents and completeness of the information provided (content of the course, entry requirements, literature, number of credits, learning outcomes, etc.). The UG language centre can double-check the correctness and consistency in the use of (English) terminology. In case the information can be delivered in one language only (by international staff) the information is translated.

### **Participation of students and staff**

Student and staff participation in the Erasmus+ programme is most clear in the (KA103 and KA107) mobility projects as well as in the EM Joint Master's Degrees.

Students are encouraged to participate in KA103 and KA107 projects by both teaching and support staff. One of the aims of the UG is to provide all students who wish to have (and gain from) an international experience, the opportunity to do so. Some degree programmes have incorporated a compulsory semester abroad when the international experience is believed to contribute to the student's development and competences which are required to meet the end term of the programme. In other cases, the international experience can be incorporated in the programme during the minor programme (usually one semester in the first cycle). A growing number of programmes include a traineeship in the curriculum. This traineeship can take place in the Netherlands or abroad.

In all cases, students are informed about the possibilities which their programme offers, about the choices they have as to destinations, and about the procedures they need to follow, in a timely and transparent way by programme managers, teaching staff, study advisors, and international officers. The UG website provides ample information for both incoming students and for its outgoing students (for the latter on the Student Portal) on procedures and options, for each individual faculty.

Participation of students in Erasmus+ mobility projects not only takes shape in the actual mobility of students, but is also encouraged in the informal curriculum, e.g. by cooperating with and being active in ESN, by contributing to the UG welcoming events, acting as student buddies and as international student mentors. This aspect of internationalisation at Home is considered of vital importance as a central aspect in UG's internationalisation strategy. It is a central item in each of UG's faculty internationalisation plans. The participation of students in the Erasmus+ projects is key to incoming students for a smooth immersion into the academic life, and for home students to have an international experience by learning from and working with (groups of) international students. Moreover, returning students are an asset in the welcoming of new international students; they can practice the skills they gained while abroad themselves and share their experience with others. Working with incoming international students after having been abroad can help students overcome the reversed culture shock which many of them experience.

Welcoming and support services are key to the study success and the satisfaction of international students. ESN-Groningen is instrumental to this and has a position of a permanent student body in our university. The bi-annual "Groningen Together" event brings together all UG student and study organisations (> 100) and 8 non-EEA student bodies. Aim of the event is to make UG students aware and encourage organisations to

include international students in their communities. Participation of international students in boards of student bodies is strongly encouraged and steadily growing.

Members of staff are involved in the mobility projects through teaching staff mobility (STA) or staff training (STT), both as host and as outgoing participants. Participation in the mobility projects is encouraged by international offices and by the HR department, which has developed a strategy for employability and talent development (providing information on the intranet: Work and Career). Realisation of support staff mobility is part of the annual “performance assessment”. Besides the mobility projects, UG academic and support staff participates in various other KA1 (joint master degrees), KA2 and KA3 projects. As mentioned above, staff involvement is supported at departmental, faculty and Board levels.