



ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS) 2021-2027

Erasmus activities included in the Erasmus Policy Statement

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:

The Erasmus Policy statement (EPS): Strategy of Burgas Free University

The policy objectives we have set are stated and how we expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising Burgas Free University, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area (EEA).

The international strategy of Burgas Free University (BFU) is integral to achieving its strategic directions and mission: “The New Idea in Education”. The institutional strategy of Burgas Free University (BFU) for internationalisation focuses on the sustainable development of institutional relationships and strategic activities that will reinforce the international profile of BFU and its position on the global educational market. It acknowledges the provision of high quality degree programmes, active participation in international cooperation projects and the key contribution of student and staff mobilities. The concept of an internationalised university involves the provision of multicultural educational experience for students and staff and the development of strong international partnerships to support our capacity in education and research.

The internationalisation strategy of BFU is based on and complies with the goals and objectives set out in the Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period after 2020 and all the relevant documents approved at European level. Burgas Free University supports the initiatives and priorities to help establish a European Education Area and will undertake all measure to achieve that goal-full recognition of school

and higher education qualifications across the EU, establishing international mobility for study and learning (student and staff mobilities) as a norm, every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue, equal and easy access for everyone to high-quality education, irrespective of their socio-economic background, fostering a European sense of belonging among citizens, strengthening the sense of European identity through education and culture.

International cooperation has been part of our long-term strategy to secure and improve quality within and outside the university. Cooperation between universities and organisations in different EU and non-EU countries helps to strengthen the international community. Burgas Free University chooses its partners for mobility activities among the partner universities with which we have signed framework agreements for cooperation. BFU promotes professional collaboration and maintains good contacts with more than one hundred and sixty universities and organisations all over Europe and the world, thus providing both staff and students with a stimulating and demanding academic environment. Among these, during the 29 years of its establishment BFU has signed 62 framework agreements, memoranda and protocols of cooperation with universities and institutions in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, aiming at developing academic relations and long-term cooperation in the field of higher education, exchange of academic staff, student exchange and support of research. In further developing its international profile and reputation, Burgas Free University places particular emphasis on promoting deeper engagement with EU and non-EU countries and regions; improving partnerships with the neighbouring Balkan and West Balkan countries; developing joint Master's and double degrees; further developing measures for quality control and internal monitoring and evaluation of the University's and faculties' participation in international mobilities and cooperation programmes.

Modernisation through sustainable internationalisation is the major goal of the strategy for internationalisation of Burgas Free University. The University places particular emphasis upon the following strategic objectives: promotion of international mobility; internationalisation of the education – internationalisation of the academic community at BFU and the degree programmes we offer, providing more degree programmes in English; participation in international projects, innovation initiatives and consortia for capacity building that will contribute to the goals of the European Education Area formation. Internationalisation is promoted, supported and monitored at all structural levels at the university – the senior management, the Vice-Rector of Research and International Cooperation, the International Relations Office and at faculty level. All the staff - academic and administrative at BFU are involved in its effective implementation.

By participating in all the three Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme and implementing our strategy for internationalisation and modernisation we will strive towards achieving our mission and strategic directions – to connect research, studies and inclusive education on a global scale. Our aim is to promote the improvement of the intercultural and international dimension of the learning and teaching processes by including international lectures, seminars and classes in the curricula; provide international educational experience to students, teachers and staff; support for the social, cultural and economic development of the city and the region through international expertise.

The participation in the Erasmus programme activities, the provision of multicultural educational experience for students and staff, expanding the network of active academic partnerships and the establishment and development of new strong, sustainable international partnerships will increase the competitiveness of Burgas Free University and further enable us to achieve our goal - modernise our institution, modernise and keep the degree programmes up to date, support our capacity in education and research.

The participation in the Erasmus programme initiatives will help us to increase the competitiveness of the university in the national and international educational markets, as well as enable students to enter the European/world labour market. It will contribute to the policy of modernisation and internationalisation of higher education in the European Union by improving the educational level of graduates and researchers in view of the needs of the labour market in Bulgaria and the EU; improving the quality and applicability of higher education; strengthening cross-border cooperation; linking higher education, research and business to excellence and regional development.

Erasmus actions we would like to take part in, how they will be implemented in practice at Burgas Free University and how our participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of BFU's institutional strategy.

Burgas Free University intends to participate in all three Key Actions of the Erasmus+ Programme in the new programme period:

- In the first place, participation in Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility: student and staff mobility.

Burgas Free University will promote and implement quality mobility of higher education students and staff, including participants from under-represented groups and with fewer opportunities, which will provide multicultural educational experiences for all. BFU will undertake the necessary steps to implement digital mobility management in line with the technical standards of the Student Card Initiative and the use of the EWP Network. Burgas Free University respects in full the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion set out in the Erasmus+ programme and ensures full and equitable access to all participants in mobilities.

The target groups in the mobility activities are:

- the main target group is student mobility, both outgoing and incoming - our plan is to increase significantly the number of outgoing and incoming students from the first cycle, second and third cycle. We strongly believe that international mobility is essential for the academic and professional development of students - it educates students to become prepared, informed and responsible citizens and supports them as alumni to make significant, leading contributions internationally. Regarding student mobilities for training we plan to expand and diversify the network of employers and business partners in order to provide more opportunities for Erasmus traineeships. We will encourage students to do traineeships for digital skills;

- the second target group is staff mobility- BFU will intensify staff mobility (both outgoing and incoming staff mobility for teaching and training) as a powerful means for the professional development of lecturers, researchers and staff, to improve the intercultural and international dimension of teaching and learning, for creating new professional networks and increasing the quality of the services and teaching that we offer.

Burgas Free University will strive to expand the framework of existing active Inter-institutional agreements and offer more opportunities for student and staff mobilities by increasing the number of countries, partner universities and training programs to provide both students and staff with a stimulating and demanding academic environment. We seek partner institutions that have compatible degree programmes and courses. A geographical balance has

always been sought. It has been the strategy of BFU to sign Inter-Institutional agreements with partners in various regions in Europe and only 2-3 partners in a country with the aim of keeping the geographical balance and having more diverse partnerships. We will further seek to expand the existing framework of Inter-Institutional agreements with non-EU countries as well.

- Secondly, participation in 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.

Participation in European and international cooperation projects is an integral part of the internationalisation and modernisation strategy of BFU. We have significant experience with successfully completed and current projects in: Capacity building in the field of higher education, Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices, Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training, Strategic Partnerships for youth, Erasmus+ Higher Education-Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, Knowledge Alliances for higher education. The university has always been very active in both initiating project proposals and becoming a partner in joint actions. However, participating in projects is based on a specific needs analysis, taking into account the institutional capacity and the potential impact. The university is open to and welcomes project ideas and initiatives for participation in sustainable projects proposed by the lecturers and staff - to achieve our aim for modernisation that will lead to the further development of the European Higher Education Area and will support the social, cultural and economic development of the city and the region.

BFU will encourage the researchers and staff to participate in projects in the field of the sustainable development in education, inclusive education, civic education, developing digital skills, creating virtual learning spaces, information security, social entrepreneurship and innovation to produce research of international impact and significance. BFU will ensure high-quality support to the teachers and staff in preparation of the project proposals and applications for cooperation projects and will comply with the quality standards defined in the ECHE. The university will provide relevant support and follow-up during and after the implementation of the project activities as regards management and administrative back-up. BFU takes measures to support staff and students' participation by providing administrative support, allocating additional resources, allowing adequate time and space, ensuring the dissemination of project results through the university webpage, the social media channels and publications in the university issues.

- Thirdly, participation in Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3) - Support to policy development and cooperation. Burgas Free University will participate in the decentralized and centralized actions under KA 3 – Initiatives for policy innovation, European policy experimentations, Civil Society Cooperation, European policy tools, Cooperation with international organisations that stimulate the innovative policy development, enhance policy dialogue and implementation and the exchange of knowledge in the fields of education, training and youth.

Envisaged impact of our participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on Burgas Free University: targets, qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring the impact (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) and an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

In the next few years Burgas Free University, along with many other universities in Europe, will be facing the main challenges and obstacles regarding the modernisation of higher education. Our participation in the Erasmus+ programme will greatly contribute to the university governance, curricula improvement, interdisciplinarity in training and research, digital transformation, higher quality of education provided, enhancement of mobility activities, stronger partnerships with the business community.

As part of the modernisation of our university, we will increase our efforts to improve the quality, relevance and attractiveness of the programmes offered by providing relevant support, guidance and counselling and courses that are more responsive to the social and business needs. We will be more flexible in designing the study programmes, include interdisciplinary learning modules, provide a greater variety of study modes to meet the needs of a larger and diverse group of students, including students with special needs, students with fewer opportunities and students from under-represented groups. Thus, more young people will receive a better-quality degree and will have improved job prospects. By increasing the attainment levels and offering more quality degrees, better-educated and qualified workforce will be provided to the business sector in the city, the region and the country. Strengthening the links between higher education institutions, employers and labour market institutions, improving the match between skills and jobs, taking into account the needs of the labour market and society will increase the graduate employment. The contribution we will make to the economic growth and prosperity in Europe will help to increase our international attractiveness.

The international mobility of students, staff and researchers has a positive impact on the quality of education and will play a crucial role in the modernisation agenda of Burgas Free University. The concept of BFU for an international university includes providing an opportunity for students, teachers and staff to gain multicultural educational experience and to develop sustainable international partnerships to support the educational and research capacity of the university. The student and staff mobility exchange and the participation in sustainable international projects under the Erasmus+ programme are in line with the main strategic goals and priorities set by BFU, namely: promoting the improvement of the intercultural and international dimension of the learning and teaching processes by including international lectures, seminars and classes in the curricula; providing international educational experience to students, teachers and staff; support for the social, cultural and economic development of the city and the region through international expertise. Participating in Erasmus+ programme activities has a positive impact on the participants- students, teachers and staff and on the university as a whole. The students acquire better language skills, knowledge, skills in the specific subject area, social awareness, gain more confidence, cultural and civic competence, abilities to communicate in a multicultural environment, they are more interested in European topics and feel more European. As regards to their professional development and career opportunities, the results from the Erasmus Impact Study show that doing mobilities for studies or training abroad helps students develop their professional, social and intercultural skills and increase their employability. Mobile higher education students are more likely to have found a job one year after graduation compared to their non-mobile peers. The participation in teaching/training mobilities and in international cooperation projects has a positive impact on the personal and professional development of the teachers and staff. It increases their competences and professional skills for lecturing in a multicultural environment; improves their language proficiency, the teaching methods and techniques by sharing good practices; enables them to establish and reinforce professional contacts with colleagues from the respective areas of study, participate in international events, joint projects and publications.

We will make efforts to facilitate the increase of learning mobility by strengthening the ECTS and improve the efficient recognition processes by implementing full automatic recognition, developing joint degrees and double Master's degrees, encouraging digital opportunity internships and work placements. Providing more courses in English will increase the number of incoming students and will also make us attractive for academics and researchers from Europe and from partner universities outside the EU and facilitate new forms of cross-border cooperation. Investing in the continuous professional development of our teaching staff, lifelong learning, innovation, cooperation with the business sector will help us in strengthening the links between education, research and innovation.

Being a private university gives us more flexibility and academic freedom as regards diversification of programmes, recruiting staff, raising private revenues. However, improving governance and funding in the EU will give us greater autonomy in overcoming the administrative restrictions and concentrating on our core tasks in education, research and international cooperation.