

## **VUAS Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS) 2021-2027**

Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS) was established in 1997 and is located in Ventspils, Latvia. Its main fields of action are higher education, scientific activity, commercialisation of knowledge, and lifelong learning. In VUAS, there are three faculties – Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Translation Studies, and Faculty of Information and Technologies. In the university's strategy, "VUAS strategy 2021-2027", the central vision is that by 2027 the university is digitally open, accessible, at the European standard, internationally recognised, and has a significant role in economic and scientific development. The Erasmus Programme serves as one of the critical tools in implementing the university's strategy.

Ventspils University of Applied sciences has set the following aims:

1. For more effective and beneficial mobilities, VUAS is planning to re-evaluate signed Erasmus+ agreements and continue cooperation only with those Universities that have a possibility for mutually beneficial cooperation.
2. VUAS will be expanding links to Erasmus partner countries to create an even more intercultural environment for its students and staff and provide more opportunities to incoming mobility participants and VUAS staff and students.
3. VUAS will help to introduce European quality standards in partner universities and strengthen the cooperation. Students and staff from partner universities will have the opportunity to be a part of the education process development in their universities by sharing knowledge and skills obtained during mobilities.
4. VUAS is going to put a more significant emphasis on traineeship mobilities (incoming and outgoing), which by increasing professional, social, and intercultural skills undeniably provides students with better opportunities in the labour market.
5. VUAS is planning to take part in projects related to the modernisation and digitalisation of study content.
6. VUAS will promote a more environmentally friendly programme administration process (digitalisation) and more environmentally friendly travel options to mobility participants.
7. Erasmus projects carried out by 2027: at least 6 (KA1 and KA2 (at least two related to modernisation and digitalisation of the study process and increasing accessibility of studies and sharing good practice)).

8. VUAS, considering the fast pace of globalization and digitalization, intends at both bachelor and master level to explore the possibilities for online international learning ('virtual mobility'). Blended mobility will be offered to all students who cannot participate in physical mobility or be away from home for a longer period. This would provide more possibilities to those who are working, have families or other responsibilities. Recognition process of a virtual mobility will be carried out the same way as a physical mobility recognition.
9. VUAS will modernise its course catalogue which would be more convenient to use by mobility participants.

Internationalisation has been an integral part of Ventspils University of Applied Sciences (VUAS) strategy. One of the university's strategic goals is to stabilise its international dimension and expand its areas. VUAS has been providing Erasmus opportunities to its students and staff since this programme was introduced in Latvia. VUAS also has been providing full-time study programmes taught entirely in English to international students for eight years. Bachelors programmes include Business Administration, Intercultural Communication and Languages, Translation, Start-Up Management, Computer Sciences, and master programmes include International Business and Export Management and Languages and Cultural Environment. The diversity of these programs shows how VUAS can attract students interested in many different study fields and provide them with a high-quality education in English. Participation in Erasmus provides VUAS full-time and exchange students and staff with the opportunity to get to know different cultures and be prepared for the growing impact of globalisation.

VUAS has been very open to incoming students and has the chance to provide them with affordable dormitories. They are located in the same building complex as the university and are available for all students. Furthermore, students can select any English-taught course from all three faculties during the relevant semester, provided the courses do not overlap. Students can receive individual consultations when necessary since the VUAS is a regional university in Latvia, smaller in student body size. Therefore, one of the biggest strengths is being able to provide each student with an individual approach.

Additionally, to help the international students feel more welcomed, VUAS has started a "Buddy programme" and, in that way, provides each exchange student with support from one local student. It helps to minimise the culture shock and the confusion that can occur when going on mobility.

It is essential to assure equal Erasmus programme opportunities to all VUAS students, assured by a transparent mobility participant selection process. The same requirements apply to all applicants, regardless of their study field, gender, age or nationality. VUAS does not collect information on religious beliefs, political opinions or sexual orientation as it is sensitive information and the university believes it should not be considered while evaluating the applications or mobility results. Erasmus mobility participant selection process is being documented and approved by the VUAS Erasmus commission. Scholarship allocation is confirmed by the Rector.

VUAS is open and inclusive and is ready to provide mobility to all students including students that have fewer opportunities and that come from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2020 VUAS infrastructure is being adjusted so that people with disabilities would be able to access all facilities in the university campus. University dormitory has several rooms that are specifically equipped for students with disabilities. VUAS has already prior experience in hosting and accommodating both local and exchange students with disabilities. Students with disabilities or from low-income families will be offered financial aid from the organizational support or other funds according to University possibilities.

Ventspils has been recognised as one of the greenest in Europe. Also the university is striving to be environmentally friendly. Once admitted VUAS is encouraging incoming students and staff to live in a student dormitory which is located in the same building as the university, which not only allows to save time and money on a daily commute, but also enables students with lower income backgrounds and disabilities to use Erasmus possibilities. Where possible, VUAS will be encouraging mobility participants to use more environmentally friendly transport such as trains and other public transport. When such need arises and if possible, VUAS offers pick-up at local bus stations to incoming students who use public transport.

Also, one of the strategic goals of VUAS is to prepare students for a modern labour market demand. Therefore, the Erasmus programme is one tool that allows students from different backgrounds and fields to gain international study, work and social experience. This experience can help them later in the work environment that is rapidly experiencing globalisation and help them increase their language skills, which are also very important in today's work environment.

In VUAS, the staff is highly valued. It is important that lecturers in VUAS are able to work in different environments, are flexible and have digital knowledge to provide students

with the most modern and efficient study process. Since VUAS provides many programmes taught in English and welcomes international students every study year, the staff must be internationally oriented because teachers are the ones providing the education to all students in VUAS. Therefore, it is essential to provide them with the required skills and expertise. Mobility of teaching and administrative staff is essential for effective partner relationship management, professional training, experience exchange, provides more opportunities to learn from different teaching methods, programme development and support for future cooperation projects. VUAS Erasmus KA2 project aims to modernise the study process and lifelong learning process. VUAS strives to be a part of the movement to develop new teaching and learning methods in language, translation, business and IT fields.

The Erasmus programme plays a crucial role in the internalisation and further growth of the university. The growing number of international students (including mobility students) allows VUAS to ensure an ever-growing international environment and study process and improve VUAS study programme compliance with European standards. Furthermore, it allows European quality education in other countries and introduces, and raises awareness of different cultures.