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**Varna University of Management
Bulgaria**

**ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT
2021 - 2027**

1. Relevance of the Erasmus+ programme within VUM's institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy

Internationalisation at Varna University of Management (VUM) is a horizontal policy underpinning all strategic areas of institutional development and modernisation. According to VUM Strategic Development Plan and Internationalisation Strategy, internationalisation is a driver for innovation, a source of inspiration, and a tool to achieve high quality. Since 2014, VUM has been involved in a number of Erasmus+ Key Action 1 (KA1), Key Action 2 (KA2) and Key Action (KA3) projects. By building on the impact, successes and lessons learnt in these projects and with the support of the Erasmus+ programme in the period of 2021-2027, VUM will intensify the already set course of modernisation and will further its internationalisation agenda for the benefits of all academic community members and with the aim to increase VUM competitiveness and global prominence as follows:

Education and Student Experience

Involvement in the Erasmus+ programme will enable VUM to sustain its student mobility policy that requires all students to take part in at least 1 mobility during their studies at VUM thus feeding into European Education Area's (EEA) objective to make participation in a mobility a norm. Through outgoing student mobility, VUM aims to build students' key competences for lifelong learning, incl. interpersonal, entrepreneurial and critical thinking skills as well as cultural awareness, civic engagement and foreign languages proficiency as envisaged in EEA policy. The procedures for automatic recognition at VUM will be improved through digitalisation of the mobility management processes and the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative at VUM as envisaged in EEA. Over the last 7 years, incoming mobility catering for internationalisation at home (IaH) has become a priority at VUM. IaH is anchored in VUM's Strategic Development Plan and Internationalisation Strategy and is considered a key tool for building students' intercultural competence and global skills in domestic environment. VUM focus on Erasmus+ incoming mobility in 2021-2027 will nurture campus diversity thus promoting the common values of tolerance, human dignity, cultural diversity and multiculturalism embedded in the EEA. Another IaH domain to dominate VUM agenda is the introduction of virtual and blended mobility opportunities for VUM students in Erasmus+ cooperation with designated partner higher education institutions (HEIs) and SMEs. By reaching out to high numbers of students through the



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means of ICT and detaching access to sophisticated international knowledge from physical location, VUM will achieve high levels of mobility inclusion and will improve students' digital skills, both of which constitute key EEA policy objectives. The relevance and topicality of VUM virtual exchange plans were reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis that brought to the foreground the need for high quality online education and its key benefits linked to access and inclusion, cost efficiency and environmental sustainability. Another IaH area where VUM aspires to changes with the support of the Erasmus+ programme is the internationalisation of curriculum. Along with strengthening the international and intercultural dimensions in the current formal curriculum, VUM will aim to extend its joint and double degree programmes portfolio. Furthermore, VUM's participation in the Erasmus+ programme will lead to building new university networks where the delivery of pooled courses, modules and programmes is made possible by sharing of human, digital and other types of resources between the HEIs involved. The Erasmus+ cooperation with leading universities will also enable VUM to transfer innovative pedagogies and content and to design new transnational interdisciplinary study programmes. Finally, through participation in the Erasmus+ programme VUM will aim to improve the overall student experience by strengthening and diversifying VUM informal curriculum and fostering students' intercultural competence, cultural identity, social skills, and civic engagement in line with VUM Strategic Development Plan and the EEA objectives.

Research and Innovation

Through participation in the Erasmus+ programme, VUM will aim to improve its capacities for research and innovation as envisaged in VUM's Strategic Development Plan and the Science and Research Strategy. In particular, VUM will strengthen the quality and relevance of research by building transnational transdisciplinary co-creation teams to work on and tackle real-life challenges thus linking education, research, innovation and service to society and contributing to the knowledge square. Through the Erasmus+ programme, VUM will also provide staff mobility opportunities to faculty active in research to improve their skills and innovation capacities. Finally, once accreditation of VUM's doctoral programme in tourism currently in process is awarded, enrolled doctoral students will benefit from doctoral student mobility.

Knowledge Exchange

Sharing means caring is a notion that exemplifies in a nutshell VUM's long-term commitment to transfer knowledge and expertise to HEIs in developing countries. Through opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ programme and in line with its Internationalisation Strategy VUM will continue to work proactively with HEIs in Partner Countries (PCs) around the world for the purposes of capacity building in higher education. Thus, VUM will contribute to partner HEIs' development, welfare and prosperity and will also enhance its global presence and prominence. Within the EU, VUM's knowledge exchange efforts will be focussed on strengthening the collaboration with the industry and business as stipulated in the Strategic Development Plan. Apart from inviting representatives of the business and industry to deliver trainings and teach at VUM in the framework of staff mobility, VUM will engage with international business partners to solve real-life challenges and to transfer innovation from higher education to the business world and vice versa. Finally, in compliance with its Strategic Development Plan, VUM will use the tools provided by the Erasmus+ programme to improve the mechanisms for continuous education and lifelong learning that enable



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sharing of expertise and knowledge with different representatives and players in the society at large and foster VUM academic community members' interpersonal skills and civic engagement in line with the EEA policy.

Talent Management and University Governance

VUM will implement its policies for talent development and engagement by maximizing the Erasmus+ programme's opportunities for staff mobility. Along with upgrading professional skills and knowledge, through staff mobilities VUM will aim to improve academic and administrative staff members' transversal skills incl. their foreign language skills in line with the EEA objectives. In light of the plans for blended mobility and digitalisation of mobility management, special attention will be given to staff mobilities aimed at digital skills' improvement and acquisition of online didactic skills. Through inter-university cooperation opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ programme, VUM will aim to introduce administrative, management and cultural changes across the HEI incl. introduction of a co-creation governance model with students involvement. Another reform envisaged to take place in the near future with the Erasmus+ programme's support is the digitalisation of administrative processes for the purposes of efficient and sustainable use of resources at VUM. Being a private HEI not receiving direct funding from the state, VUM considers participation in the Erasmus+ programme a key source of investment in the HEI's innovation and its students' future.

2. VUM's plans for implementation of the Erasmus+ actions and their contribution to achieving the objectives of VUM's institutional strategy

KA1 Learning Mobility in Higher Education

Relative to its academic policy introduced in 2019 that elevates participation in at least 1 student mobility to a prerequisite for graduation, VUM will continue to proactively implement student mobility projects between Programme Countries (PrCs). VUM students' preference for mobility for placement is rooted in the HEI programmes' strong practical orientation. Through Erasmus+ mobilities conducted at SMEs in PrCs, VUM students will enhance their employability and career options as envisaged in the Strategic Development Plan. In light with its talent management practices, VUM will provide access to mobility to a high number of faculty and administrative staff as well as to young researchers and doctoral students. In accordance with the existing virtual exchange plans, VUM will strive to secure Erasmus+ funding allocated to blended mobility. Since 2015, VUM has participated in 7 Erasmus+ projects for International Credit Mobility (ICM) for the purposes of incoming mobility from 46 HEIs in 23 PCs in the Eastern Partnership and South-Mediterranean areas, Western Balkans, Russia, Iran, Central Asia, Asia, and Latin America. In line with its Internalisation Strategy's focus on IaH, during the next period VUM will build on its achievements in ICM and will aim to secure a large number of high quality mobility opportunities to talented students and staff from various PCs across the globe.

KA2 Partnerships for Cooperation and Exchanges of Practices

Over the last 7 years, VUM has been involved as a coordinator or partner in a number of capacity building projects with HEIs in Asia (Bhutan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia) and in the Eastern Partnership region (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and



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Ukraine). During the next financial period and fully compliant with its Internationalisation Strategy, VUM will stay true to its commitment and efforts to capacitate HEIs from Asia and the Eastern Partnership and will also explore opportunities to engage in Erasmus+ capacity building in higher education projects in Central Asia and the ACP region where VUM is already involved in academic cooperation outside the Erasmus+ programme. In addition, based on its experience with Strategic Partnerships projects and their impact on VUM students' intercultural competence, social skills, and civic engagement, over the next 7 academic years, VUM will involve in new proposals of this scale and scope to diversify its extracurricular portfolio and to expand its non-academic partners' network and collaborations with the civil sector as envisaged in VUM Strategic Development Plan.

KA2 Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities

VUM is highly motivated to join this initiative with the aim to build deep level of inter-university cooperation with partner HEIs in Europe and to stimulate long-term structural and systemic transformation of the institution. Due to its recent focus on the Erasmus+ programme's international dimension, VUM will first need to calibrate and re-evaluate its current academic partnerships in Europe and to revitalize and strengthen cooperation with PrCs HEIs that goes beyond academic exchange and collaborations on departmental and faculty levels. Subsequently, in the framework of a competitive project proposal VUM will commit to design and develop with selected compatible partner HEIs in Europe an ambitious long-term vision for an interconnected future.

KA2 Partnerships for Excellence – EMJM

VUM is already offering double and triple degree programmes in cooperation with HEIs in the UK, Brazil and Philippines. In the future, VUM will extend this know-how and exploit the large networks of partner HEIs across the globe established through its successful ICM and capacity building in higher education projects with the aim to design and implement competitive EMJM projects focusing on innovative interdisciplinary joint master programmes in the fields of management, business, tourism and IT. The new joint master programme(s) will implement flexible personalised curriculum and seamless mobility in line with VUM Strategic Development Plan.

KA2 Partnerships for Innovation

So far, VUM has been involved in a small number of Erasmus+ projects, which aimed to build entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystems and to transfer innovation in the sectors of tourism, hospitality, culinary arts and creative industries. Despite its limited experience with innovation projects, VUM will strive to initiate and build transnational transdisciplinary teams to co-create knowledge and generate innovative solutions to real-life challenges in the industry, business and the society at large. In the long run, the knowledge and soft infrastructure built through potential participation in Knowledge Alliances will lead to improved innovation ecosystem and achievements in applied research as envisaged in VUM's Strategic Development Plan and Science and Research Strategy.



3. Targets, indicators and envisaged impact of VUM's participation in the Erasmus+ programme

In compliance with VUM policy requiring each student to participate in at least 1 mobility during his/her studies at the HEI, over the next 7 academic years 100% of all VUM students will improve their key competences for lifelong learning in the short term and will enhance their employability and career options in the long term. Given VUM current student body size of approx. 620 students, in average 150 outgoing student mobilities per academic year or in total 1050 student mobilities by 2027/2028 will be facilitated at VUM. Provided the current number of full-time students increases significantly, the outgoing student mobility targets will be revised. Short-term impact of the student mobilities will be monitored through student skills assessment prior and after the mobility. Student mobilities' long-term impact will be measured through VUM alumni tracking mechanisms and based on data collected from the National Social Security Institute and the National Statistical Institute for graduates active on the Bulgarian labour market and from foreign embassies concerning VUM international students. In line with VUM Strategic Development Plan and Internationalisation Strategy, at least 50% of the faculty and administrative staff that is approx. 30 staff members (VUM current full-time personnel size is of approx. 60 staff members) will take part in a staff mobility every academic year to improve their key competences and to enrich their professional experience and knowledge. As a result, by end of 2027/2028, in total at least 210 staff mobilities will be completed at VUM. Staff mobilities' short-term impact will be measured in the framework of the annual employee performance evaluation procedures. Staff mobilities' long-term impact will be evaluated based on staff members' personal development plans, career progress curve and promotion. Quality of outgoing mobilities' implementation will be measured through surveys on mobile participants' level of satisfaction incl. their satisfaction with the support provided by VUM before, during and after the mobility (at least 80% of mobility participants per academic year reporting on being satisfied will be considered a success) as well as feedback collected from mobility host institutions. As a result of the envisaged blended mobilities, VUM full-time and incoming students will gain access to quality international knowledge and improve their digital skills. It is expected that by 2023, 100% of VUM incoming students will have access to virtual exchange in addition to the physical mobility to VUM and by 2024, 100% of VUM full-time students will be able to take part in outgoing blended mobility.

Through facilitation of high numbers of incoming student and staff mobilities, VUM academic community members and, in particular, 100% of VUM students will improve their intercultural competence and global skills by living and learning in highly internationalised and culturally diverse domestic environment. By building on the experience acquired in the previous 7 Erasmus+ ICM projects, in the period of 2021-2028 VUM will double the number of incoming student mobilities from PCs compared to the one for the period of 2015-2020 to at least 520 and the number of incoming staff members from PCs to at least 140. In addition, each academic year VUM will host at least 60 incoming student mobilities and 20 staff mobilities from PrCs HEIs. Incoming mobility will also contribute to mobile students' improved transversal skills and employability. VUM will measure this impact through surveys upon incoming mobilities' start and end and based on feedback collected from incoming students on the quality of their mobility, incl. the support and mentoring provided by VUM. In addition to impact on individual level, VUM mobility projects



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will have also long-term institutional impact in terms of a) HEI's enhanced global prominence and presence on the European higher education map to be measured by the number of active partnerships, b) extended academic networks to exploit in KA2 project consortia to be measured based on the number of approved KA2 proposals with VUM participation, c) improved VUM attractiveness reflected in the number of recruited full-time students, d) improved learning and working environment and informal curriculum to be measured based on the levels of VUM students' and staff members' satisfaction.

Proactive involvement in KA2 projects will improve VUM competitiveness and capabilities for internationalisation and innovation. At least 4 proposals for capacity building in higher education in selected PCs will be submitted on an annual basis with VUM involvement and in total at least 6 competitive projects of this type will be implemented by VUM to enhance its global prominence in the course of the next period. At least 2 Strategic Partnerships proposals for cooperation with NGOs and other relevant non-academic partners will be prepared with VUM involvement per call to engage by 2028 in at least 4 successful projects of this type. VUM will engage in at least 3 transnational co-creation teams to generate innovation in education, business and industry sectors and at least 1 Knowledge Alliances project with VUM involvement implemented by 2028 will be considered a success. Similarly, given the highly competitive nature of KA2 Partnerships for Excellence, VUM will put every effort to engage in and successfully implement at least 1 EMJM and 1 European Universities project in the course of the next period. Although EMJM projects are aimed to intervene primarily on departmental and faculty levels, given VUM student body and academic portfolio size, it is expected that a successful EMJM project will have impact on VUM formal curriculum as a whole. A successful European Universities project will have a transformational institution-wide impact that will elevate VUM to a whole new level of development. Quality of KA2 projects' implementation will be monitored based on feedback collected from target users and relevant stakeholders and the evaluation of Progress and Final Reports. Sustainability and long-term impact of KA2 projects will be carefully planned with the aim to facilitate the mainstreaming of relevant project results at all levels and to ensure efficiency and effective operation of newly established procedures and infrastructures through their embedding in VUM's legal acts and organizational chart, if relevant.