

Erasmus Policy Statement for the 2014-2020 EU programme for education, training, youth and sport proposed by the European Commission on 23 November 2011

Please describe your institution's international (EU and non-EU) strategy. In your description please explain a) how you choose your partners, b) in which geographical area(s) and c) the most important objectives and target groups of your mobility activities (with regard to staff and students in first, second and third cycles, including study and training, and short cycles). If applicable, also explain how your institution participates in the development of double/multiple/joint degrees. (max. 5000 characters)

Introduction – Internationalization as a Core Value

According to the mission statement of Örebro School of Theology (ÖST) one of the goals is “to strive to develop the quality and internationalization of the education in a constructive dialogue between critical and constructive academic work and an evangelical theological profile.” Internationalization is thus a core value which has characterized ÖST since its foundation.

International Strategy (EU)

In the last decade, ÖST has chosen to develop strategic co-operation with a number of partners of similar size and profile in Europe which offer programmes and courses in Theology. Most of these are affiliated to the European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA), which is a network for theological education, founded in 1979 by ÖST and 22 other European educational institutions. EEAA is a Charter Member of the International Council for Theological Education (ICETE), a Full Member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and an Affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). A representative of ÖST is currently chairman of EEAA.

The partner institutions are located in Scandinavian countries (Norway, Finland), Estonia, Belgium and Great Britain, and they currently have an Erasmus University Charter (EUC). The strategy for 2014-2020 is mainly to develop existing partnerships and to increase mobility activities.

ÖST has recently developed two distinct master programmes in co-operation with two of our international partners in Norway and Finland. These master programmes, however, are not projects under the Erasmus programme and they do not lead to joint degrees (only separate degrees in Norway and Finland, respectively), since ÖST is not accredited on the master level by the Swedish state. Nevertheless, these programmes give students the opportunity to continue their theological education and offer opportunities for teachers and staff at ÖST to get involved in education at a more advanced level, which is particularly important since ÖST does not yet have accreditation from the Swedish state to offer a master program in the Swedish system for higher education. The Erasmus programme 2014-2020 supporting mobility activities will enhance our co-operation in these programmes.

International Strategy (non-EU)

ÖST co-operates with institutions outside the EU, in Nepal, Myanmar, the Central African Republic and the US. We currently have an annual Minor Field Studies programme to Kathmandu in Nepal in co-operation with the Association for Theological Education (ATEN). We have recently developed contact with Karen Baptist Theological Seminary in Myanmar.

Further, we have had a partnership since 1982 with Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB) in the Central African Republic, where a teacher from ÖST has been an annual guest lecturer for decades. The strategy for 2014-2020 is to maintain these existing contacts and the current level of mobility activities.

Since Swedish students in general find it attractive to study in the US, we are currently seeking to renew a co-operation with Bethel University in the US, in order to offer this opportunity of exchange for our first-cycle students.

Target Groups and Objectives of Mobility Activities

The most important target group of the students mobility activities are first-cycle students, since ÖST offers education on this level. The objectives of the mobility is that students may broaden the perspectives in their education in general, improve their linguistic competence, and gain experiences from other cultures, which will contribute to the development of internationally experienced future professionals. In extension, co-operation between institutions will enrich the education environment of host institutions.

The target group of HEI staff mobility activities are staff at host- and partnerinstitutions, albeit with a focus on teachers. The overall objective for this mobility is to increase the international experience of the faculty members through the Erasmus co-operation for staff mobility. This will enhance language skills, give academic input and broaden the professional perspective. Further, the activities will promote exchange of pedagogical expertise and methods, and allow students at host institutions to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of invited teachers.

Through the Erasmus programme, the teachers of ÖST will be granted the possibility to gain teaching experience on first, second and third cycles through the Erasmus programme, which is very valuable, since ÖST only offers first-cycle education.

Development of joint degrees

In the near future, ÖST intends to apply to the Swedish Department of Education for a national master programme. If this application is granted ÖST may partake in the development of joint Masters degrees i the future.

ÖST may decide to partake in European and International projects under the new Erasmus programme for 2014-2020, but, because of our small size we will probably not take the initiative to such co-operation.

Please explain the expected impact of your participation in the Programme on the modernisation of your institution (for each of the 5 priorities of the Modernisation Agenda*) in terms of the policy objectives you intend to achieve. (max. 3000 characters)

Explain the expected impact of the HEI participation in the Programme on the HEI modernisation and internationalisation.

The applicant has to demonstrate its awareness of the possible actions to be funded under the Programme and highlight its priorities. Please note that the planned institutional activities do not have to include/respond to all actions supported under the Programme, but they must be realistic and answer institutional needs.

The EPS has to be published on the HEI's web site within one month after the ECHE is awarded by the European Commission. In case the organisation decides to update the EPS during the course of the Programme, it has to inform the National Agency of its country.

The participation in the Programme will enhance modernisation of ÖST according to the following 5 priorities of the Modernisation Agenda:

1. Increase attainment levels and strengthen the social dimension of HE

ÖST expects that participation in the Programme may reduce drop-out among our students because an opportunity to study abroad may be very attractive and offer an incentive to continue the education. Conversely, in our experience incoming students (in particular from less developed European countries) have expressed that they have become stimulated to continue their academic studies.

In Sweden, the writing of theses, which are necessary to attain degrees, may become major obstacles for students. We expect participating students in the Programme to become more skilled in their thesis writing and in extension improve educational outcomes. To this end, ÖST has offered a thesis course with qualified supervision (in English) for incoming students in the teachers' own area of research and excellence.

2. Improving quality & relevance of HE

ÖST believes that contacts with partner institutions in Europe in general, and staff mobility in particular may give us desired stimuli to enhance our education and revise and modernize curricula to respond to the current and changing needs of the job market in Sweden and Europe in particular, so as to enhance the employability of our students.

3. Strengthening quality through mobility and cross- border cooperation

ÖST will ensure efficient recognition of credits gained abroad by an effective quality assurance and a consistent use of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement. In particular, we expect that our co-operation in two master degree programmes with European partners will eliminate unnecessary barriers for our students between the bachelor and master levels.

4. Knowledge Alliances

ÖST attempts to link higher education to research, and to a lesser degree to business (which is natural for a subject area as that of Theology). Consequently, a special research foundation has recently been founded in order to promote research at ÖST. The research foundation will invite stakeholders to finance strategic research at ÖST. The participation in the Programme will primarily enhance the linking of education to research. In particular when staff get to meet excellent researchers and centers of excellence at host institutions, where they can exchange research ideas and experiences.

5. Improving governance and funding

Being a privately owned institution, ÖST is autonomous from the Swedish state. Nevertheless, ÖST will attempt to take up the challenge of more flexible governance and funding systems. We hope to be able to attract more external funding from various stakeholders in the future. Moreover, ÖST will seek to improve and invest in professional management to provide strategic vision and leadership. Participation in the Programme – in particular staff mobility – may give ÖST important input in these strategic areas from other institutions in Europe.