

INTERNATIONALIZATION
STRATEGY OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF APPLIED SCIENCES
VELIKA GORICA
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ON THE DRAFTING OF THE INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY

Internationalization Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica was drafted by the employees of the International Cooperation and Projects Department as follows:

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Gendered terms apply equally to all genders, regardless of the gender in which they are expressed.

For practical reasons, the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica is often shortened to University in the text, while the Internationalization Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica 2022-2026 is shortened to Strategy.

Abbreviations are explained at their first appearance in the text.

The content of the document is the sole responsibility of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica, which is also the only holder of this document.

The Expert Council of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica adopted this Internationalization Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica 2022-2026 on its 2nd session, held on 10 December 2021.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the very establishment of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica, internationalization has been identified as an important process, necessary for the development, quality, and sustainability of the entire institution. The University is the first and still the only higher education institution in Velika Gorica and is aware of its role in the development of the local community. This is the reason why it actively participates in cooperation with public institutions, civil society organizations at all levels, but also business entities. Encouraged by the positive results at the local level, the University has expanded its activities to cooperate beyond the borders of the Republic of Croatia.

Cooperation with regional partners has been continuously strengthened, and with the entry of the University into the *Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)*, it has also joined the Erasmus+ programme and expanded participation in student, teaching and staff mobility. This process has been systematically and dynamically expanded and accelerated since 2011. After the University was granted a charter that allows participation in the Erasmus+ programme, it emphasised incoming and outgoing student mobility, but it also enabled the teaching and non-teaching staff to participate in staff exchange. It is important to point out that the purpose of internationalization at the University is not only manifested in the strengthening of international mobility and cooperation with foreign institutions of higher education, but also in the cooperation through the exchange of experiences with the business sector. Namely, the students do not participate in the mobility only for educational purposes, but they also have the opportunity to gain practical experiences by participating in student internships at foreign partner institutions. International cooperation with the real sector is likewise manifested in the inviting of guest lecturers who possess practical business experience. In the forthcoming period, it is necessary to continue the current good practice in cooperation achieved with foreign partners, but also improve cooperation in currently underdeveloped areas. In accordance with this notion, the objectives, measures and indicators of this Strategy have been identified, and the main prerequisite for the majority of cooperation has already been achieved by the renewal of the Erasmus Charter for the period between 2021-2027, which the University obtained in 2021.

Since the internationalization process is an extensive and demanding task, during the 2016-2020 period the University was guided by the *Internationalization Strategy* document. Administrative capacity was strengthened by the establishment and expansion of the International Cooperation and Projects Department. Through the successful application and realization of several international projects, the University has not only significantly improved its own human resource and institutional capacities, but the emphasis was placed on the improvement of the study programmes. One of the important objectives in the forthcoming period is the organisation of courses in English within each study programme through the development of an international 30-ECTS module in each study programme.

An important aspect of internationalization are the public policies with an emphasis on education since internationalization can be realized only by aligning study programmes with the latest European and global educational trends. The harmonization with the European Qualifications Framework is a necessary precondition, as well as the strengthening of the international character. In this way, the University will make it easier for its students to obtain recognition and international acceptance of their qualifications in the European Economic Area, promote better transparency of qualifications and create new values. Learning outcomes will be adapted to the needs of the Croatian and European labour markets, and the clarity of qualifications and competences will enable students to easily assess and recognize competences gained, as well as ensure competitiveness in the labour market.

Internationalization Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica 2022-2026 is based on the strategy from the previous period and other current relevant strategic documents, such as the *Development Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica 2022-2026*. In addition to internal documents, this strategy is likewise based on the 2017 European Commission document titled *A renewed EU agenda for higher education*, as well as the Croatian *National Development Strategy 2030* in which internationalization “in accordance with the contemporary European trends through the improvement of availability of high-quality higher education, relevant with respect to the labour market and society” (NDS 2030, p. 58) is defined as one of the priorities for implementation in the field of higher education policy. Therefore, this Strategy has been designed to take over, continue and improve good practices and those activities that have proven successful; rectify and harmonize those less successful, and establish the framework for launching new activities in accordance with the national and European trends in the field of higher education internationalization.

2. MISSION AND VISION OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

MISSION

The University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica is a higher education institution which, through its unique study programmes and lifelong learning programmes, educates and mentors experts and bearers of social development at the national and international level. By encouraging mobility, international cooperation and scientific-research work, as well as through the implementation of modern teaching methods, it enables knowledge transfer from an international context, with the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills relevant to ensure competitiveness on the contemporary complex and volatile labour market.



VISION

The University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica aims to become a distinguished modern institution of higher education, which will compete in the Croatian and international higher education area through its unique study programmes and lifelong learning programmes. By continuously improving study programmes based on modern educational trends, harmonizing learning outcomes with the highest Croatian and European standards, and taking into account the needs of the labour market at the international level, the University strives to educate and train professional and competent personnel, who will be flexible and adaptable to global change.



3. GENERAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The introductory part of the Strategy provides a clear framework for the development of internationalization in the period between 2022 and 2026, which is manifested in four directions: further development of mobility, development of international cooperation with foreign strategic partners, involvement in EU-funded projects and the implementation of mechanisms for quality assurance and information availability. These objectives are interrelated since the realization of one objective facilitates the realization of another. Successful achievement of quality assurance and information availability directly affects the realization of all other objectives, since it means the creation of ideal conditions and preconditions for the improvement of mobility, projects, and international cooperation. On the other hand, neglect of this objective would directly jeopardize the realization of all other objectives. Therefore, in the coming period we will work on the realization of all identified objectives because the internationalization of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica can be achieved only through the realization of all those objectives.

a) FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF MOBILITY

The most important form of internationalization is still the mobility of students, teaching and non-teaching staff. The aim is to significantly increase the outgoing mobility (teachers, non-teaching staff and students), as well as incoming mobility depending on the funds received from the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes and the University's own funds. This aim shall be realized by continuously encouraging mobility, primarily through information on the opportunities for mobility. The University must encourage students to participate in mobility because this allows them to come into contact with an international environment, thus making them adaptable to the European labour area. Various activities will be organized for the students, with the aim of encouraging mobility since international exchange experiences at the same time enable the improvement of work quality and finally employability in the global labour market. In order to encourage the so-called "internationalization at-home", or the addition of an international component in the studying at the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica, it is likewise planned to include foreign lecturers' lectures in the course curricula, as well as the organization of classes in English within each study programme. Mobility will be further encouraged by the introduction of the so-called *blended mobility*, which combines distance studying or professional practice, while only a portion of the exchange must be completed in person. In this way, we will try to enable student exchange as much as possible for the part-time students who are

often unable to spend long periods abroad due to their full-time employment. In addition to students, mobility (in person and *blended*) will be encouraged in teaching and non-teaching staff because it allows the exchange of knowledge and skills, research experience and good practice. Implementation of new insights in the workplace increases the quality and efficiency of the staff, while the University simultaneously improves its human resource and institutional capacities.

b) DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WITH FOREIGN STRATEGIC PARTNERS

In order to enable high-quality mobility, it is necessary to conclude new bilateral agreements with foreign institutions. However, once the agreements have been concluded, it is equally important to implement them. Therefore, in order to achieve quality in the forthcoming period, greater attention shall be paid to the implementation of agreements already concluded than to their quantity. In addition to the cooperation in mobility programmes, cooperation shall be achieved through the conclusion of cooperation agreements and participation in joint scientific-research projects. In the previous period, the University has become a member of international associations in the field of Crisis Management (the CONRIS network) and environmental protection (IFEH). This is the reason why we plan further expansion of cooperation with international associations in the fields of the University's study programmes, as well as the involvement in their work. Bilateral cooperation shall also be achieved through the participation in professional and scientific conferences and congresses, with an emphasis on two international conferences organized by the University: "Crisis Management Days" in the field of Crisis Management and OCCSEE – International Optometric Conference of Central and Southeastern Europe. The exchange of publications will likewise be encouraged, as well as publication of scientific articles in English. An important role in this will be played by the scientific-professional journal *Annals of Disaster Risk Sciences*, established by the University with the aim of creating a central platform for the dissemination and transfer of the latest knowledge in the field of Crisis Management.

c) INVOLVEMENT IN EU-FUNDED PROJECTS

So far, the University has completed its participation in three EU-funded projects, from three different funding sources: Horizon, EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the European Social Fund (ESF). It is currently implementing one ESF-funded project as the applicant, while participating in two as a partner. It is also a partner on a project funded by the Internal Security Fund (ISF). Encouraged by good experiences of participation in various projects, the University will in the

following period continue to apply to public tenders for EU funding, conclude partnerships for successful application to public tenders and simultaneously work on the high-quality implementation of the approved EU projects. Current capacities of the Department allow the application and participation in such projects. The examples of good practice could be included in our curricula through the Jean Monnet actions, as well as through the development of lifelong learning in the field of EU project management.

d) IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INFORMATION AVAILABILITY MECHANISMS

In the forthcoming period, administrative monitoring of mobility will be simplified as much as possible in order to further encourage mobility, primarily of students. The University is already included in the process of digitalisation through the *Erasmus without paper* initiative, and it should be made possible for students to use an application for easier mobility tracking. Until now, the students were discouraged to go abroad by the process of validating and recognizing ECTS credits obtained during mobility. Because of this, one of the main objectives of this period is to simplify the process of validating and recognizing competencies gained through mobility. In order to further encourage incoming mobility, it is necessary to systematically enable students to navigate their study programmes with greater ease. The satisfaction of all students should be monitored through questionnaire surveys, whose results will directly influence the improvement and quality of both the incoming and outgoing mobility. Encouragement of student mobility, as well as teaching and non-teaching staff mobility, shall be achieved through information availability. In other words, a website in English will be developed, promotional materials in English will be regularly made and updated, while promotion and visibility of the University will be achieved through the participation in seminars, conferences, and education fairs abroad. The International Cooperation and Projects Department will be included in the implementation of all aforementioned objectives, in cooperation with other competent University bodies for each individual objective and measure. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly plan and monitor the operations of the Department in order to ensure the efficient implementation of all aforementioned objectives.

4. MAIN PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONALIZATION

In the implementation of the aforementioned strategic objectives, it is important to emphasise the main principles which the University will follow in order to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The main principles in achieving these objectives are inclusiveness, transparency, and flexibility.

● INCLUSIVENESS

Besides the students from the Republic of Croatia, our study programmes are open to students of all other nationalities, thus emphasising non-discrimination and equality of students and staff, as well as promoting equal opportunities, inclusion of persons with disabilities and fundamental values of democratic citizenship, such as tolerance. The University will actively work on the promotion of the Erasmus+ traineeships and professional practice in order for the students to develop their communication skills in an international environment, in addition to their professional and practical skills. Likewise, international cooperation with a wide range of foreign partners shall be encouraged in order to maximize the opening of various opportunities for knowledge transfer.

● TRANSPARENCY

With the purpose of enhancing transparency and the quality of education through mobility, the University will continue to work on the removal of administrative obstacles and ensuring recognition for mobility periods through various tools (recognition of ECTS credits, entry of recognized ECTS credits and mobility periods in the Diploma Supplement, European Qualifications Framework). Students who participated in mobility will be provided with transparency. The process of recognition for courses completed on other higher education institutions shall be made easier, as well as the comparison and transferability of qualifications. At their request, the University will enter work experience acquired abroad during mobility in the students' Europass Mobility document.

● FLEXIBILITY

This principle is also the principle governing the University in the document titled *Development Strategy of the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica 2022-2026*. It is based on meeting the needs of the students, teaching and non-teaching staff. This principle includes the creation of innovative opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and skills, with the introduction of blended mobility in the forthcoming period.

This will make mobility more flexible and thus more available to all those interested in it, with an emphasis on part-time students who are less likely to opt for mobility due to their full-time employment. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has further changed the functioning of modern society, making distance learning one of priorities in educational development.

Following the example of strategic objectives, the aforementioned principles are likewise interrelated and form a unit with regard to the manner in which the internationalization measures determined by this Strategy are to be implemented.



5. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND SUB-OBJECTIVES, MEASURES, INDICATORS, STAKEHOLDERS, AND IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINES

Strategic objective 1: Improve internationalization and international cooperation of the University through EU funds

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 1.1. ENCOURAGE INCOMING AND OUTGOING MOBILITY OF STUDENTS, TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING STAFF WITHIN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME	
Measure	1.1.1. Organize courses in English in each study programme
Implementation stakeholder/s	Vice-Dean for Teaching Activities ECTS coordinator Heads of study programmes
Indicator/s	Developed a 30-ECTS international study module in each study programme
Implementation deadline	2026
Measure	
	1.1.2. Enable innovative mobility modes – blended mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	Dean International Cooperation and Projects Department Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes
Indicator/s	Enabling online and live mobility (so-called blended mobility)
Implementation deadline	2023
Measure	
	1.1.3. Include lectures by foreign teachers in course curricula
Implementation stakeholder/s	Vice-Dean for Teaching Activities Heads of study programmes
Indicator/s	Number of classes held by foreign lecturers
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Measure	1.1.4. Inform the students, teaching and non-teaching staff of the University on the opportunities for outgoing mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes
Indicator/s	Number of outgoing students, teaching and non-teaching staff
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	1.1.5. Organize activities for students with the purpose of encouraging outgoing mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	Centre for Career and Psychological Support Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes
Indicator/s	Number of activities organized for students (workshops for writing CVs, cover letters etc.)
Implementation deadline	Continuously

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 1.2. PARTICIPATE IN EU-FUNDED PROJECTS AS AN APPLICANT OR A PARTNER	
Measure	1.2.1. Apply for public tenders from EU funds
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Number of EU-funded projects applied for
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	1.2.2. Enter into partnerships in the implementation of EU-funded projects
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Number of partners in the implementation of EU-funded projects
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Measure	1.2.3. Implement approved projects in accordance with grant agreements
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Annual report on the work of the International Cooperation and Projects Department
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Strategic objective 2: Develop international cooperation with foreign strategic partners

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 2.1. CONCLUDE AND FULFIL BILATERAL COOPERATION AGREEMENTS AND CONTRACTS	
Measure	2.1.1. Conclude new and implement existing bilateral agreements with foreign institutions within the framework of the mobility programme
Implementation stakeholder/s	Dean Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Number of new bilateral agreements within the mobility programme Number of incoming and outgoing mobilities within existing bilateral agreements
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	2.1.2. Conclude cooperation agreements with foreign institutions from the educational and real sectors
Implementation stakeholder/s	Dean Vice-Dean for Teaching Activities Secretary

Indicator/s	Number of concluded cooperation agreements from the educational sector Number of concluded cooperation agreements from the real sector
Implementation deadline	Continuously

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 2.2. IMPROVE COOPERATION WITH FOREIGN PARTNERS	
Measure	2.2.1. Involve the University in the work of international associations from the fields of the University's study programmes
Implementation stakeholder/s	Heads of study programmes
Indicator/s	Number of memberships in associations
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	
	2.2.2. Exchange teaching and professional publications, e-publications, academic material, sources, and other resources
Implementation stakeholder/s	Vice-Dean for Science and Quality Assurance
Indicator/s	Number of sent and received teaching and professional publications
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	
	2.2.3. Increase the number of the University's own editions of textbooks in English
Implementation stakeholder/s	Teaching Activities and Student Affairs Department
Indicator/s	Number of new publications in the library
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Measure	2.2.4. Achieve bilateral cooperation through the participation in conferences and other professional and scientific congresses
Implementation stakeholder/s	Dean Vice-Dean for Science and Quality Assurance
Indicator/s	Number of partners who participate in conferences organized by the University Number of conferences organized by partners, in which the University participates
Implementation deadline	Continuously

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 2.3. DEVELOP SCIENTIFIC-RESEARCH CAPACITIES IN COOPERATION WITH FOREIGN PARTNERS

Measure	2.3.1. Cooperate in scientific-research projects with international partners
Implementation stakeholder/s	Vice-Dean for Science and Quality Assurance Heads of study programmes International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Number of scientific papers published in co-authorship with foreign authors
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Strategic objective 3: Ensuring quality and availability of information in the fields of internationalization and international cooperation

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 3.1. IMPROVE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MOBILITY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ADMINISTRATIVE MONITORING	
Measure	3.1.1. Develop an application for monitoring mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department IT Support Department
Indicator/s	Mobility monitoring application developed
Implementation deadline	2023
Measure	
	3.1.2. Simplify the process of evaluating and recognizing ECTS credits achieved through mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	Vice-Dean for Teaching Activities ECTS coordinator Teaching Activities and Student Affairs Department
Indicator/s	Normative act on the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica's international mobility drafted and adopted Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes established
Implementation deadline	2023
Measure	
	3.1.3. Conduct continuous questionnaire surveys on student satisfaction with mobility
Implementation stakeholder/s	Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes Vice-Dean for Science and Quality Assurance
Indicator/s	Report on the evaluation of conducted student satisfaction surveys on mobility
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Measure	3.1.4. Enable incoming students to navigate their studies with ease
Implementation stakeholder/s	Committee for the implementation of mobility programmes Student Assembly
Indicator/s	Number of info days organized Introduction of the peer mentorship programme
Implementation deadline	Continuously

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 3.2. ENSURE HIGH-QUALITY SUPPORT STRUCTURE IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Measure	3.2.1. Plan the work and development of the International Cooperation and Projects Department
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Annual work plan of the International Cooperation and Projects Department Annual procurement plan of the International Cooperation and Projects Department
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	3.2.2. Continuously monitor the work of the International Cooperation and Projects Department
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Annual report on the work of the International Cooperation and Projects Department
Implementation deadline	Continuously

Measure	3.2.3. Continuously implement the Internationalization Strategy and revise and update it if necessary
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Internationalization Strategy updated
Implementation deadline	Every two years

SUB-OBJECTIVE: 3.3. ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION ON THE UNIVERSITY

Measure	3.3.1. Develop a website in English
Implementation stakeholder/s	IT Support Department Communications Department
Indicator/s	University website in English developed
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	3.3.2. Provide promotional materials in English
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department Communications Department
Indicator/s	Number of promotional materials made
Implementation deadline	Continuously
Measure	3.3.3. Promote the University at seminars, conferences, and education fairs
Implementation stakeholder/s	International Cooperation and Projects Department
Indicator/s	Number of events where the University was presented
Implementation deadline	Continuously