

KUAS Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027

Being a public multidisciplinary university of applied sciences that provides education in the fields of engineering, technology, social sciences, humanities, health and arts, Kaunas University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter KUAS) has defined its mission to provide high-quality higher education focused on practical activities and the needs of the learners and the society, promote applied research and art activities. Responsibility, professionalism, openness, respect and sense of community are the underlying values considered through all activities of the university.

Internationalisation has been among the key strategic priorities of our current Strategy 2020 and it will remain one of the main priorities in the *KUAS Integrated Strategy 2021-2025* to be launched in autumn 2020.

The *KUAS Five Year Development Guidelines (2018-2023)* approved by the Board acknowledge the shared vision of the European Education Area and supports the EU Modernisation and Internationalisation Agenda for Higher Education covering the provisions for further development in sustainability, automatic recognition of the learning outcomes, digitalisation. Optimizing the university's processes and increasing their efficiency through digitalisation is one of the priority activities envisaged in the Guidelines. It also addresses international partnerships, highlighting the importance of maintaining relationships to create mutual added value and also a well-established collaboration with regional industries. KUAS will contribute to developing the European Education Area and highlighting the role of universities of applied sciences in it, seeking to realise its aspiration to enter the European University Alliance.

Academic exchanges, international projects/applied research activities, involvement of foreign lecturers, development of cross-cultural competences facilitate the implementation of the strategic objectives to improve the international openness of higher education, to seek for the international recognition of applied research, to create and develop a professional community, and implement provisions for sustainable development in university activities. Internationalisation contributes to achieving the strategic KUAS goals: deliver high quality and competitive education, strengthen the interaction of applied research and art, HE and business. Emphasis is given to the measures promoting entrepreneurship, the principles of the circular economy, cross-sectorial collaboration to ensure the compliance of the studies with the needs of the labour market. Through international collaboration we project for excellence in pedagogics by sharing the partners' experience in person-centred approach and innovative teaching methods. The foreseen measures contribute to expanding the offer of courses delivered in English, improving the system to deliver courses online, developing the joint and double degree study programmes and the provisions for the development of the professional master programmes. Participation in the Erasmus programme is considered to be of uppermost importance for the realisation of the internationalisation related measures and it is highly promoted throughout the institution.

Therefore, the **Erasmus Charter for Higher Education** is integral for the realisation of our institutional plans and to provide European dimension in the prioritized areas of the institutional development.

In order to meet the aforementioned **internationalization objectives** we foresee the Learning mobility and Cooperation among organisations and institutions to be the key actions of KUAS participation in *Erasmus+* programme to promote:

- Student and staff's physical, blended and virtual mobility
- Deepening collaboration with the selected key partners
- Establishment of the system of the remote course delivery for the international and local audience to make studies easier to access and more inclusive

- Development of joint degree or double degree programmes
- Development professional and horizontal competences and skills among the staff members
- Participation in joint educational and/or research projects.

The student and staff's participation in the *Erasmus+* mobility programme, as one of the main instruments to improve the international openness of higher education, is highlighted in the activities of all KUAS academic units. The mobility facilitates the sharing of best practices with our partners, updating study curriculums with international dimension, enhancing pedagogical excellence and promoting multilingual skills among students and staff. The exchange of teaching staff under *Erasmus+* is considered to be one of the main instruments to ensure the international knowhow, embed the international dimension in the curricula and promote participation in the applied research and projects with international partners. While the mobility under the *Erasmus+* programme has been stable or slightly decreasing among the students, the augmentation of the student and staff's mobility under *Erasmus+* programme will remain among our uppermost goals. Annually we send and receive over 400 students under this programme. Around 250 incoming and outgoing teachers/researchers/staff members contribute to internationalizing and improving the quality of the study programmes. In the coming period until 2027 we will proceed our participation in both mobility projects for HEI's under the Key Action 1 (with Programme countries and with individuals and partner organisations from other parts of the world through International Credit Mobility activities). Considering the decreasing motivation of students to participate in long-term mobility for studies and the needs of the students with fewer opportunities, we plan to promote student participation through mobility windows and a refreshed approach to the individual mobility by developing structures for virtual, blended and short-term physical mobility. Additionally, we will develop and offer other opportunities to take part in exchanges, first of all by implementing short term projects, such as intensive programmes, summer schools, competitions and other activities. Being the university of applied science and delivering study programmes with practical bias, we will continue strengthening the relationships with foreign companies and organizations to secure places for practical training and internships. Beside the teaching mobility we will encourage teachers to use professional development possibilities in the leading international companies and organizations.

KUAS has over 200 *Erasmus+* Inter-institutional Agreements (IIAs) signed with HEIs in most of the European countries, Asia, Africa and seeks to sign IIAs with some HEIs in America. The on-going collaboration with partners is marked out on institutional, faculty and study programme levels. The key international partners are identified at the faculty level, they are encouraged to set specific collaboration goals and outcomes, focusing on the same level foreign institutions with a high ranking and covering more than one study area for exchanges. When establishing the new partnership the mutual benefits are identified considering the compatibility of the study programmes, the potential for applied research and arts, joint/double degree programmes, knowledge exchange, common values and principles of work. The existing agreements are periodically reviewed. Therefore, we do not plan to noticeably increase the number of our *Erasmus+* IIAs. Taking the opportunity offered by the new Erasmus programme to sign the IIAs online, from 2021 we will make the relevant information available for the mobility candidates on the KUAS website.

We will further encourage the academic departments to develop joint and double degree programmes with selected partners in order to create this option in each study field. At present we collaborate in this field with approximately half a dozen higher education institutions within Europe. In order to facilitate the fluent integration of incoming students in all our study programmes we aim to increase the number of courses delivered in English in every programme.

In cooperation with our international partners we will search for the opportunities to establish the professional master degree studies in our institution.

Participation in the mobility actions is interlinked with collaboration in international projects and KUAS will continue actively participating in them. The willingness to enter the Erasmus European University initiative has been already proved by the involvement in the application process. As a member of the alliance KUAS will combine its institutional practices with those of the partners to intensify the current mobility of students, staff and researchers through mobility windows and refreshed approach to the individual mobility by developing structures for virtual, blended and short-term physical mobility. KUAS expresses its motivation to continue the started activities even if the proposal is not approved.

Erasmus+ projects considering the institutional needs and fostering national and regional priorities for development are implemented at KUAS to reinforce the interaction between education & training systems and the labour market. Each project proposal is evaluated based on how the new initiative would strengthen KUAS profile and focus areas. Priority is given to innovative projects that would add value to our study programmes and strengthen the role and recognition of our institution. The main focus is on the quality and accessibility of studies, pedagogical excellence, and development of the entrepreneurial mind set, internationalisation and sustainability.

Facing the new challenges in internationalisation, taking into account inclusion, climate change and sustainability, and understanding the need to contribute more explicitly to societal and economic realities of our time through participation in *Erasmus+* projects we will develop virtual learning services.

Sustainability in KUAS is perceived not only through concrete actions such as courses and study modules addressing responsible entrepreneurship, in campus management and development but also in a more abstract manner as a mind-set of sustainable and critical citizenship endorsed throughout the studies. Participation in the *Erasmus+* projects and cooperation with other partners will provide more opportunities for our community to learn about sustainable development (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) and develop critical thinking which will increase the institutional capacity to integrate sustainable and entrepreneurial thinking to all our activities. KUAS realizes 25-30 projects per year and will strive to maintain the same scope; however, our goal is to increase the number of projects initiated and coordinated by Kaunas University of Applied Sciences.

We will take advantage of our relevant organisational structure to ensure the effective organisation of the international collaboration and implementation of the international activities and their results. *Erasmus+* actions are implemented by joint efforts of International Relations Services, the Project Management Office, the appointed international coordinators at the faculties and the engagement of the academic programme coordinators. We plan to move further towards decentralisation of the international activities and increasing the responsibility of each community member to rethink internationalisation.

Participation in the *Erasmus+* programme will support the achievement of the strategic goals and will **enhance KUAS internationalization outreach**: (i) it will promote KUAS integration within EHEA by strengthening the importance and role of universities of applied sciences; (ii) it will contribute to achieving greater visibility and recognition in the national and international competition (which increases the attractiveness of the study programmes); (iii) it will contribute to building the KUAS capacity and having a positive impact on the faculty and institution through the mobility and participation in the projects by faculty members (which are stimulating research and teaching collaborations) and administrative staff (exchange of best practice); (iv) it will foster the “Internationalisation at home”.

Participation in joint projects, building up professional networks of colleagues from partner universities, working together in JP and/or DD study programmes and developing structures for physical and virtual mobility will play a significant role in achieving the increase of mobility. By 2023, through participation in the European University Initiative, we plan that at least 50% of our students and teachers will benefit from the new possibilities of the *Erasmus+*

programme mobility, be it physical, virtual or blended, with the ratio of incoming and outgoing students and teachers 1:1. The percentage will increase gradually and relying on the project (during the first project year to a level of 20% and during the second project year mobility level will be 35%).

Erasmus+ cooperation will improve the possibilities for exchange of know-how and will increase the internationality, multidisciplinary and links with business world, new subjects being introduced into the study programmes. Through participation in the European University network we will adapt the international experience and implement the studification of work approach when competence required for a degree is acquired by working and connecting work experience with theoretical background of the subject by making use of digitisation and developing digital mentoring.

By participating in the *Erasmus+* actions our students and staff will gain international experience and enhance their linguistic skills, intercultural and other transversal skills.

A major and long-lasting effect of the mobility for students is their increased competitiveness in the labour market and the employability. The mobility, be it physical, blended or virtual, allows them to improve their learning performance not only by mixing with other nationalities and cultures during their exchange but also by interacting with local students. This greatly contributes to their communication and problem-solving skills, adaptability, and multiculturalism. In placements the students will share specific professional skills and knowledge when working in another cultural environment.

The staff will develop their professional and pedagogical expertise gaining experience of lecturing for international audience, sharing the knowledge and methodologies in curriculum development and study materials, applying the human - centred approach, using innovative instruction methods, enhancing HE quality assurance and organising international events. The exchanges will contribute to reinforcing research collaboration.

KUAS monitors international activities, including co-operation projects and mobility, through the implementation of QA system which covers both internal and external evaluation. The all agreed indicators cover the numbers of students and staff participating in the mobility and their ratio with the total number of students and staff per study area, the number of implemented projects and intensive programmes. The annual self-assessment procedures make it possible to measure the achieved results with those foreseen in the strategic and annual plans of the institution and its academic units. The Project Management Office has elaborated a regulation according to which the implementation of all the KUAS projects will be monitored. The proposals will be overviewed by the committee, which will evaluate their relevance and compliance with KUAS needs, priorities and strategy. The student and staff satisfaction will be observed through various surveys.

In order to measure **the impact of the international engagement** inside and outside our university the following will be measured:

- the graduates' employment nationally and internationally through alumni surveys;
- the employers' feedback on the quality of our studies;
- the number of awarded European degrees;
- the scope of international e-learning activities;
- the number of cooperation agreements signed with associated partners and other stakeholders;
- the number of joint research articles with international partners.

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KUAS *Code of Academic Ethics* defines such values as honesty, respect for human dignity and human rights, tolerance, righteousness and responsibility which we apply in all our activities, not to exclude the international ones. We are obliged to exercise equal approach to each and every member of KUAS community despite of their age, gender, sexual orientation,

disability, appearance, race, ethnicity, social status, language, religious and political beliefs, possessions, origin or on other grounds.

The academic mobility management and project management procedures are introduced in our Quality and social responsibility management system. When participating in the academic mobility the students and staff are selected for mobility following transparent and understandable criteria announced in the website and abiding with **the principles of equal opportunities**. All outgoing and incoming students and staff are treated equally in all academic and service matters. We do not charge any type of fees to incoming mobility students for the tuition, registration or examination of these students or for their access to laboratory, library and other facilities offered to local students.

Furthermore, being conscious of those having fewer opportunities, we have developed and will further **improve the measures used to ensure equal opportunities and access to mobility for them**: (i) by developing online tools for managing the application process and providing distance teaching/learning, (ii) by allocating our own financial funds to co-finance the *Erasmus* grants for all students going on mobility for studies, (iii) by organizing special information sessions for the students and staff from less internationally focused study programmes to promote different opportunities for them to opt, (iv) by supporting them through our effective administration system: International Relations Services as the central body, international coordinators in the faculties, mentoring system, psychological support, (v) by enhancing the recognition and at the same time the motivation system to participate in the international activities, (vi) by improving the language proficiency of potential participants through the services of the KUAS Centre of Languages.

We may receive the specific extra funding for disadvantaged mobile students and those with special needs participating in the *Erasmus+* KA103 and KA107 actions from the Lithuanian National Agency, if there is a need. Information about this opportunity is available on KUAS website and intranet facilities. The international students are involved in the induction weeks upon their arrival, cultural and professional activities throughout the whole period of their stay giving them possibilities for better integration into the KUAS community and interaction between themselves and with local students and staff. The continuous collaboration and involvement of the alumni, social partners and guest lecturers into the education process and the exposure of the students to the professional environment significantly contribute to encouraging their participation in the mobility and international project activities.

When participating in the future *Erasmus+* programme we commit **to join the Erasmus Without Paper network and follow the foreseen milestones**: (i) 2021 - to manage inter-institutional agreements and online learning agreements; (ii) 2022 - to send and receive student nominations and acceptances, (iii) 2023 - to exchange transcripts of records related to student mobility. We sincerely hope that by 2025 our system will be adapted and all our students will be able to benefit from the European Student Card Initiative.

We have already started and shall further increase our involvement in the implementation of the new initiative: (i) from 2020 we have started to use the “*Erasmus+* Dashboard” to manage the incoming mobilities for studies, so students have to use the *Erasmus+* mobile app. Therefore, we expect all Learning Agreements to be online; (ii) when the system for traineeships is incorporated into the “*Erasmus+* Dashboard”, we will immediately start using it fully for incoming traineeships as well. This is expected to happen in the beginning of 2021; (iii) we are willing to start receiving nominations, sending acceptance letters and the transcript of records via “*Erasmus+* Dashboard” as soon as this function is created (2022–2023, according to the EC plan). Now the nominations for incoming students are received and acceptance letters are sent via email; (iv) we plan to start managing the outgoing mobilities by using “*Erasmus+* Dashboard” in the autumn of 2020 and expect to fully switch to online Learning Agreements in the spring of 2021. Now the students are recommended, but not required to download the *Erasmus+* mobile app; (v) we will sign the inter-institutional agreements for the next *Erasmus+* programme using the “*Erasmus+* Dashboard”.

We have started and will continue promoting the use of the programme's *Erasmus+* mobile App among students: (i) by documenting the procedures governing the organization of the outgoing students mobility and acceptance of incoming students at our institution ("*Regulations on Organisation of Kauno Kolegija Students Mobility Under the International Exchange Programmes and Their Financing*" (2020), "*Regulations on Acceptance and Organisation of Studies and Traineeships for Incoming Students Under the International Exchange Programmes at Kauno Kolegija*" (2020)); (ii) informing the administrative and academic departments about the application of the on-line documents; (iii) inviting the students to use *Erasmus+* mobile App and instructing how to use it during the information sessions, in the social media and intranet.

Implementation of sustainable development provisions is foreseen in KUAS Strategy. KUAS is the member of *United Nations Global Compact* and operates under the principles that focus on going "green", environmental protection, preservation of natural resources. In the sphere of environmental protection we commit to ensure that our activities will not endanger people and the environment and be protective of nature and public resources by applying effective models of resource management, by pursuing environmentally friendly activities as concerns transport, catering services, recycling and other programmes aimed at reducing pollution, to implement the practice of "green procurement", to save water and energy resources and thus contribute to mitigating climate change and promoting the protection of biological diversity.

In the context of the *Erasmus+* programme our foreseen actions to promote digitalisation via online management of the application process and administration of the mobility, implementation of blended and virtual mobilities will definitely complement the environmentally friendly practices. KUAS carries out investigations in educational, technological, biomedical and other fields. It seeks for interdisciplinary studies and applied research. For example, the priority areas of research at the Faculty of Technologies are focused on the creation of healthy and safe environment, biotechnological and energy research; at the Faculty of Medicine they are focused on healthy aging. Therefore, when communicating with international partners under *Erasmus +* programme these issues are always raised for possible collaboration.

The environmental issues will be addressed when preparing the *Erasmus+* project proposals not just in terms of content but also in designing the implementation – we will attempt to plan webinars and meetings online, where possible.

The *Erasmus+* mobile participants will be prompted to use environmentally friendly ways of travelling, especially when travelling to the neighbouring countries or inside the country.

KUAS fosters the partnership of community members (students, teachers, employees) and seeks to impact the development of the regions and the country via volunteering activities and initiatives at the national and international level. Taking into account its profile, KUAS has developed traditions in promoting social initiatives to spread the ideas of sustainable development and build awareness of active citizenship, social isolation, and inter-generational solidarity. Some initiatives are focused on socially vulnerable groups (youth, seniors, single parents, persons with special needs, etc.) in order to reduce social exclusion. Social initiatives targeting socially vulnerable groups are expressed in various forms, e.g. via students and staff members participation in the projects, participation in the activities of other organizations, providing consulting services to various social groups, participating in charity campaigns, etc. The dialogue between KUAS and the business world is ensured by organizing events aimed at building entrepreneurship skills, having discussions with alumni and employers; giving open lectures to local residents.

KUAS contributes to the cultural and social life offering cultural and intellectual alternatives for the local population through various initiatives: holding conferences, seminars, exhibitions, competitions, public lectures, discussions, celebrations, campaigns, fairs, summer camps, etc.

The voluntary activities of students are carried out in two ways: integration of knowledge obtained in the process of learning in volunteer activities and participation in traditional forms of volunteering that do not require special skills. Therefore, the outgoing and incoming *Erasmus* students, being part of the KUAS community, have a lot of possibilities to engage in these activities: (i) preparing projects and implementation plans; (ii) participating directly in the activities; (iii) promoting best practice and sharing experience when going abroad on exchanges or coming to KUAS; (iv) applying the knowledge and skills in their further studies or career. Activities of KUAS community members focused on socially excluded groups and student volunteer activities are publicised on national TV channels, KUAS website and social media, therefore, at the same time it is a good opportunity to promote Erasmus+ programme. KUAS is member of ESN Lithuania, it has a mentoring system in place for better integration of incoming students. The KUAS ESN members continuously involve the incoming students and those interested in Erasmus opportunities in different cultural and social activities, e.g. the *Erasmus* in School project.

The credits gained for the learning outcomes achieved during a mobility period abroad are recognised at KK according to the approved transparent *Procedure for the Recognition of Study Achievements in Kauno kolegija (2017)*, which determines the principles and procedures for recording individual study achievements acquired in Lithuanian and foreign institutions of higher education, lower study cycle schools, enterprises, organizations as well as those acquired through informal and non-formal education. It is in accordance with the Bologna process, the legislation of the state and *Erasmus* Student Charter. The learning outcomes of the student, who studied according to a programme of partial studies and (or) performed an internship, are evaluated by scores and recognised without any restrictions. They are recorded in the Diploma Supplement. The ECTS is used for transferring the grades and the credits. The students are informed and understand the crediting procedure. The relevant information is published in the website as well as made publicly available through workshops and meetings with students. KUAS has the approved appeal procedure in case the student is not satisfied with the decision regarding the recognition of the learning outcomes.

In order to ensure **the full automatic recognition of all credits** gained for the learning outcomes achieved during a mobility period abroad / a blended mobility we will follow the Council Recommendation on Automatic recognition and will further elaborate the procedures including: (i) updating the course catalogue with descriptions of degree programmes, single educational units and grade distribution tables; (ii) supplementing the procedures to ensure the recognition of learning outcomes achieved during a blended mobility; (iii) strengthening the responsibility of the academic coordinators in approving the Learning Agreements, confirming the Transcripts of Records and recognising the successfully completed activities, without the need for the student to take any further courses or exams in line with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. We will guarantee the quality of students' mobility and recognition of its outcomes by following the approved regulations at our institution on organization and financing the student mobility under the international exchange programmes with the established selection criteria and highlighting the respect of the individual study needs.

Having the strategic objectives to mobilize scientific, creative, academic and administrative staff and to ensure continuous professional development of the staff and improvement of

generic and subject-related competences, KUAS highlights the importance of *Erasmus+* programme for reaching these objectives.

The mobility is included in KUAS lecturer job descriptions and regulations for competitive recruitment of lecturers. Subsequently, academic mobility and participation in the projects is included in the teacher's qualification requirements per cadence as one of the key factors for the professional development and the assessment of the KUAS staff contribution to the university's modernisation and internationalisation. The importance of the international mobility is highlighted in the employees' professional development plans and is recognised during the annual employee assessment process.

We will guarantee the benefits of the staff mobility and its recognition by following the approved procedures and supplementing them with the procedures to ensure the recognition of the blended staff mobility and virtual training. The appropriate selection of mobility participants guarantees the relevance of the visit to our institution, the represented department and/or the field of study area and the relevance of the visit for the professional activity of the lecturer and/or other employee, as these are the criteria foreseen by the approved regulations at our institution on the organisation of staff mobility under international exchange programmes.

The KUAS *Erasmus* Policy Statement will be published in the website: <https://www.kaunokolegija.lt/en/about-us/internationalisation/>.

Erasmus+ programme **dissemination activities** will provide relevant information to the general public in order to motivate them to use mobility as a tool for learning and personal and professional development. Mobility participants will be asked to give presentations on their mobility outcomes for promotional purposes. Conferences and the best practice workshops will be organized with staff and students returning from mobility or in relation to the project results to share the experience. The students' presentations\sharing will be documented by photographs, short videos, and written testimonies. The above-mentioned outputs will then be disseminated on KUAS website (media gallery, news, events) and on social media pages: Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. The information on exchanges and international collaboration is published regularly in KUAS electronic newsletter 'Diktum Faktum' <http://diktumfaktum.kaunokolegija.lt/category/isvykos/>.

The opportunities to participate in mobility are promoted by making it publicly available on the website with the announcement of the selection procedure. Furthermore, each faculty has an international coordinator who will promote *Erasmus+* mobility in the faculty and will provide individual consultations to outgoing and incoming students.

The Project Management Office will notify the KUAS community about the new calls via the internal emailing system, by sending newsletters and by making presentations on the possibilities under *Erasmus+* programme. The employees of the Project Management Office will give individual consultations regarding the programme and implementation of the projects. Information about the on-going projects will be displayed on KUAS website in English and Lithuanian.

KUAS will disseminate information about international collaboration in national and international associations, during networking activities and/or communication with social partners.

The Charter will be communicated by publishing it in the website, transferring its principles into the documents governing the implementation of mobility and project procedures, by regular reference while implementing and monitoring the activities.