

Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”

Erasmus Policy Statement 2014-2020

VFU international (EU and non-EU) strategy

The internationalization of the educational and research activities of VFU is subject of the Strategy for Internationalization of the University for the Period 2011-2016. The strategy is successfully integrated within the Strategic Plan for Development of the University for the Period 2012-2017.

The major expected result from the internationalization for VFU’s students is to make best use of the links of the University with the partnering foreign universities, the representatives of the business and NGO, in view of acquiring skills and competences for successful professional and personal accomplishment in a global environment. An important aspect in the Internationalization Strategy is further improvement of the academic infrastructure for the organization and conducting of EU and non-EU academic mobility.

The leading principle in the organization of the academic mobility is total transparency, awareness and equal access to the provided opportunities for all the students and lecturers. The efforts are focused on the following main activities:

- Expanding the network of academic contacts, which enables the exchange of students and lecturers. The selection of partners is done on the basis of „Selection Criteria and Mechanisms for the Choice of International Partnerships”, elaborated and applied in the University. The document specifies the criteria for choosing a partnering institution, the possible levels of collaboration, the means for achieving sustainable partnership and the types of statutory legal documents, regulating international partnership. The operating partnerships will continue to be a subject of annual monitoring and analysis on university, faculty and departmental level. The activities implemented within the

academic mobility are evaluated also under the international standard ISO 9001:2008. The main target regions identified in the Strategy are the EU countries, the USA, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Turkey, China, where the ratio between the EU and non-EU countries should reach 60:40.

- Full academic recognition of student credit mobility at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels, not only with the EU partners, but also with those from non-EU countries. VFU applies the ECTS, and respectively a methodology, which is based on the learning outcomes as the most important mechanism for achieving academic recognition. Since 2009, the University is also a holder of DS label, and since 2010 of ECTS label.
- „Internationalization at home”: internationalization of the academic and administrative capacity of the University; establishing an equal quality level of teaching and service to Bulgarian and foreign students and lecturers; provision of an opportunity for including a wider range of academic staff members in initiatives for establishing and expanding international partnership; increasing the number of courses and programmes taught in a foreign language (English and Russian).
- Enhancing the activity of the branch boards of trustees with the different departments, thereby increasing the opportunities for credit mobility in business structures and operating enterprises. Particular efforts will be focused on involving representatives of the practical field to participate in the educational process.

The most important objectives and target groups of VFU’s mobility activities are:

- Full-time bachelor’s degree students:

The Internationalization Strategy includes the objective that 10% of the full-time bachelor’s degree students should go through a period of study abroad. The efforts will be focused on increasing the number of students, whose mobility is aimed at practical training. Creating a framework of initiatives for students, who have no opportunity to carry out mobility abroad.

- Part-time bachelor’s and master’s degree students:

The part-time bachelor’s and master’s degree students represent in total around 60% of the total number of students. The University offers them every year Short Term Programmes in Germany, Belgium, the Russian Federation, which form part of the students’ curricula and earn a certain number of credits.

- Staff and lecturer mobility:

Increasing the number and quality of the mobilities for the academic and administrative staff is a major element in the Strategy for Internationalization of VFU, as well as in the Career Development Programme. The set objectives are that 10% of the academic staff should carry out mobility aimed at teaching or training.

- Double and joint degrees:

The elaboration of double and joint degrees with EU and non-EU partner institutions is a forthcoming important task for the University, for the implementation of which VFU has its own accumulated academic and management capacity.

VFU strategy for the organisation and implementation of international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training

During the last 10 years, VFU has acquired extensive project management experience and has been involved in more than 90 regional and international projects. Under LLP 2013 Call VFU applied for 26 projects as Lead and Partner organization. Cooperation in respect of international projects is one of the main aims of the VFU's development plan. Participation in current and future projects will aim at: strategic partnerships with HEIs to foster intense cooperation to contribute to the EU modernization agenda; strategic alliance for a more competitive position at the global HEI market; intensified contacts with non-EU countries; internationalization at every level of the educational process and in the external contacts. Further participation in large international projects will complement the whole cycle of its services, add value to its mission and main activities, will creatively mobilize its resources and further the existing partnerships of VFU, stimulating the creation of new links. Staff members responsible for realizing international projects shall make every effort to involve in projects as many students and teachers as possible. Last year 100 members of the academic staff were included in LLP application. Participating in international projects should lead to sustainable benefits for each party and should also increase involvement in this type of activity for every member of the University. Information on each successfully implemented project is published on the institutional site. The project development, progress and implementation is monitored by process maps at the end of each academic year. It is set to achieve applicability of research in the Strategic Development Plan of VFU 2012-2017. As a result of LLP Project participation we have achieved expertise

by a developed Master's degree programme and separate modules in the field of tourism. Partners from practice who have participated in research projects under the LLP are being involved in the study process.

Impact of VFU's participation in the Programme

Over the last 10 years VFU has been actively participating in building the European education and research area. The University has successfully applied the ECTS in its educational activity. In 2009 VFU was awarded the DS Label, in 2010 - the ECTS Label, and in 2012 it was awarded the HR Logo „Research in Excellence”. The University has functioning partnerships with 83 partnering foreign academic and research institutions and business organizations, which enables the development of the link education – science – practice. VFU has an operating Internationalization Strategy and working programme thereof, which clearly define the key priorities, the expected results and indicators for measuring the achievements.

This accumulated basis and experience provide us with grounds to consider that VFU has sufficient academic and research potential to have its contribution to the implementation of the European Union's modernization and internationalization agenda.

In regards to the priorities of the Modernization Agenda, VFU has the following focus:

- VFU will continue to improve the quality of all mobility activities, expand the cross-border cooperation, offer Double and Joint Degrees Programmes with well-established partners, and develop new strategic partnerships for achieving a global approach to scientific research and transfer of knowledge and innovations. The timely inclusion of the achievements of research work in the educational process will substantially contribute to enhancing the quality of the offered educational services.
- The process of accreditation and recertification under the international certificate ISO 9001:2008, the permanent internal monitoring, and the programme for career development of the academic staff ensure that the quality and relevance of the degree programmes are constantly being improved and that the curricula meet the needs of the labour market, graduates and different stakeholders.

- VFU will continue to improve the link between higher education, research and business on an international level through the branch boards of trustees functioning at the University with every department, which involve the participation of representatives of the business and the practical field; through performing consulting and expert's services to the benefit of the society; through deliberate policy for involving students into research work.
- The Strategy for Internationalization of VFU is integrated into the Strategic Plan for Development of the University. There is a Committee for the Internationalization of VFU functioning with VFU's President, which includes experts in the educational and research work, career development of the academic staff and project management. The centralized Office Project Management is in charge of applying effective governance and funding mechanisms for all activities.