# Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

# Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027

## VFU international (EU and non-EU) strategy

The internationalization of the educational and research activities of VFU is subject of the University Development Strategy 2018 - 2022. Part 5.1.2. Internationalization and mobility, The Internationalization Strategy and Strategic Framework for Career Development of the Academic Staff of VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar". The strategy is successfully implemented by the Roadmap "Strategy Implementation", including activities under the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2019-2022.

VFU has a strong record of internationalization. We will continue our efforts to achieve new objectives of the institutional internationalization and modernization in the new programme period.
 The leading principles in organizing the academic mobility are non-discrimination, total transparency and inclusion of students and staff, equal and equitable access to participants from all backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities. VFU will implement and promote environmentally-friendly  practices and active citizenship in the context of the Erasmus+ Programme.
VFU focuses its efforts on creating policies and initiatives in key priorities that will boost VFU institutional internationalization and modernization:

✓ Constant development of internationalization and mobility as main characteristics of training at VFU, which enhance the quality of education and training and offer opportunities for staff and students to broaden their horizons, acquire knowledge and transferable skills through participation in Erasmus+ Programme.

✓ Expanding international cooperation between EU and non-EU higher education institutions by active participation in Erasmus+projects and strengthening strategic and structured cooperation by developing new forms of cross-border partnership.

✓ Priority participation in key activities to achieve the goals of the European Educational Space, in particular in the new European Universities Initiative and the use of the European Student Card.

✓ Innovation and usage of digital technologies in education.

✓ Continuation of our successful application of the Bologna process to increase mobility for participants from all backgrounds and to develop a successful multilingual and multicultural European Educational and Research Area and facilitate the mutual recognition of academic qualifications gained abroad by the implementation of the European transparency tools for validation of ECTS and learning outcomes.

✓ Implementing tools related to Modernization of Higher Education which lead to successful Education - Enterprises partnerships.

✓ Providing Quality Assurance by national and international assessment and recertification involving students' opinion survey in order to improve the quality of education and training services at VFU, to promote sustainable employment, foster personal development and encourage active citizenship.

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

The above-stated key priorities will be implemented in practice at VFU by means of various activities:

**Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility**

✓ Promoting inclusive approaches to activities related to mobility and cooperation through the development and implementation of flexible forms of mobility (virtual, blended).

✓ Increasing the number of VFU student and staff mobility within Programme and partner countries.

✓ Increasing the number of incoming mobile students and staff, participating in international credit mobility.

- ✓ Attracting foreign lecturers and leading business experts to participate in the educational process at VFU.
- ✓ Support the implementation of the European Student Card initiative in order to allow students to manage online the whole range of administrative steps of their mobility abroad, as well as facilitate access to a wider range of student services.
- ✓ Applying the ECTS, and respectively a methodology, which is based on the learning outcomes as the most important mechanism to achieve academic recognition.
- ✓ Applying European transparency tools for validation of ECTS and learning outcomes.
- ✓ Full academic recognition of student credits at bachelor, master and factorial levels, not only with the EU partners, but also with those from non-EU countries to remove barriers to mobility.

**Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) - Cooperation among organizations and institutions**

- ✓ VFU will continue to promote all mobility activities, offer Joint Programmes with well-established partners, develop new strategic partnerships for achieving a global approach to scientific research and transfer of knowledge and innovations.
- ✓ Building a network of partner universities with a similar to our university academic profile to facilitate the development of international curricula and joint degrees, foster international research and innovation projects and support the exchange of students, staff and knowledge.
- ✓ Maintaining and activating traditional partnerships, creating new ones with prestigious universities. The main target regions identified in the Strategy are the EU countries, the USA, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Turkey, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Israel and the Western Balkans.
- ✓ The selection of partners is done on the basis of „Selection Criteria and Mechanisms for the Choice of International Partnerships", elaborated and applied at the University.
- ✓ VFU is involved in the European Universities Initiative under ERASMUS+ Programme, which aims at fostering excellence, innovation and inclusion in higher education across Europe, in order to reinforce EU citizenship and contribute to the building of a renewed Europe.

**Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3)**
- ✓ Support policy development and cooperation with partner organisations.

**Modernisation of Higher Education**
- ✓ Perception of a new educational model at VFU focused on knowledge, skills and competencies, ensuring the full implementation of students in professional and personal terms. The University Development Strategy seeks to implement a new educational model and ensure the sustainable development of the professional areas by consolidating the university potential, optimising the academic profile, differentiating the competitive advantages and positioning in areas that correspond to the capacity and availability of a critical mass of university own staff.
- ✓ Active introduction and use of new digital technologies in the educational process at VFU in order to improve the quality of education and provide opportunities to deliver courses to students in all forms of mobility.
- ✓ Strengthening links between education, research and innovation through developing results-oriented curricula that better meet the learning needs of students and relate to the labour market and society as a whole.
- ✓ Introducing interdisciplinary approaches and innovative teaching methods, such as student-centred learning that helps in the acquisition of advanced transferable skills.
- ✓ Reforming the training programmes, including training enriched with information and communication technologies (ICTs), and joint practices, including cooperation between universities and business organisations.
- ✓ Ensuring successful Education - Enterprises partnerships through enhancing the activity of the Branch Boards of Trustees with the different departments, thereby increasing the opportunities for mobility in business structures and enterprises. Particular efforts will be focused on involving representatives of the practical field to participate in the educational process.
- ✓ Promoting civil and social responsibility of students and staff through participation in various initiatives and campaigns on the University and regional level.

**Quality Assurance**

VFU national and international assessment and certification (ISO 9001:2015, "HR Excellence in Research" Logo, the permanent internal monitoring, and the Strategic Framework for Career Development of the Academic Staff of VFU "Chernorizets Hrabar") involves students' opinion survey in order to improve the quality of education and training services at VFU and 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.

The Selection Criteria and Mechanisms for the Choice of International Partnerships specifies the criteria for choosing a partnering institution, the possible levels of cooperation, the means for achieving sustainable partnership and the types of legal documents, regulating international partnership. Partnerships will continue to be a subject of annual motoring and analysis on university, faculty and department level.

VFU ensures an equal academic attitude and quality service to Bulgarian and foreign students and staff; 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).

## Impact of VFU's participation in the Programme

Over the last 20 years, VFU has been actively participating in building the European Education and Research Area. The University has successfully applied the ECTS in its educational activities. VFU was awarded the DS Label for two periods: 2009-2013 and 2013-2016. VFU was awarded the ECTS Label twice – in 2009 and in 2013. VFU was awarded the „HR Excellence in Research" Logo in 2012 and in 2020.

VFU has functioning partnerships with more than 250 national and foreign academic and research institutions and business organizations, which enables the development of the link education – science – practice. 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 modernisation and internationalisation agenda.

We have been involved in more than 120 regional and international projects.

Under Erasmus+ Programme VFU applied for 32 projects as Leading or Partner organisation. The university Internationalisation Strategy clearly defines the key priorities, the expected results and indicators for measuring the achievements.

In regards to the priorities of our participation in Erasmus+ Programme, VFU has qualitative and quantitative indicators. Some of them are:

- ✓ Bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree students in all modes of study (full-time, part-time and distance) - 12% students should go through a period of mobility abroad. The efforts will be focused on increasing the number of students, whose mobility aims at practical training.
- ✓ Staff mobility - increasing the number of mobility for the academic and administrative staff to 12%.
- ✓ Increase the number of expected incoming mobility of students and staff.
- ✓ Increase in the percentage of courses taught in a foreign language at university as well as in a virtual environment - 10%.
- ✓ Increase the number of courses up-dated after the mobility as a result of it - 50%.
- ✓ Attract foreign lecturers and leading business experts - at least 10 per year.
- ✓ VFU intends to participate in international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training within the Erasmus+ Programme framework. Preferences are given to projects leading to sustainable and balanced outcomes, introducing innovative educational solutions and using modern information technologies, as they prepare the young people to enter the demanding job market and expand our teaching and training programmes.
- ✓ Maintaining an up-to-date database of information about Erasmus+ Programme project calls for which VFU is an acceptable candidate.
- ✓ Active application with competitive projects and maximising the possibility of financing the research and development activities at VFU through Erasmus+ programme - 5%.
- ✓ Creating conditions for inclusion of university staff in the Erasmus+ Programme projects to help their scientific and expert growth.