

# Erasmus Policy Statement

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## Participation in Erasmus+

Ferdinand Porsche FERNFH is Austria's first and only distance-learning university of applied sciences offering accredited, state-funded degree programmes. It was founded in 2006 and started its study programme in 2007. We now offer six university of applied sciences degree programmes (3 Bachelor's, 3 Master's), as well as 35 micro-credentials and one continuing education degree programme (MBA). The programmes are accredited by the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria). Our activities are subject to the legal requirements of the Austrian University of Applied Sciences Act (FHG) and the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG).

On the basis of its values and the principle of equal treatment and appreciation laid down in its statutes, FERNFH is committed to a pluralistic, tolerant, and anti-discriminatory attitude in its actions and decisions.

We see the intercultural and international orientation of our programmes not only as an "extra offer" for our students, but also as part of our social responsibility. Internationalisation is not an end in itself but is always linked to its impact on the quality of the output of our teaching and research activities.

FERNFH can be seen as a 'niche provider' within the Austrian higher education landscape. This is also reflected in its Erasmus+ and mobility efforts as well as in its international activities.

The degree programmes offered by FERNFH are designed for people who, for various reasons, do not have access to traditional university programmes. Some are not mobile enough to be able to simply move their centre of life to the nearest university town but would still like to successfully complete a university degree programme or academic short course. Others, for personal or professional reasons, may not be able to accommodate the time constraints of a traditional degree programme. For more than 17 years we have used teaching and learning methods and arrangements that have enabled students of different ages, social and professional backgrounds, health conditions and physical disabilities, geographical and other barriers to successfully complete their studies.

We believe that the number of students affected by these non-traditional study conditions is increasing across Europe and that there is a growing need for international universities to work together in this area. This is one of our main reasons for participating in Erasmus+ and being able, to be part of this international community within Europe and even beyond. We are convinced that this will have an impact not only on our students and staff, but also on FERNFH as an institution.

Distance learning is an inclusive form of learning that helps individuals overcome the educational barriers of traditional higher education systems. We are doing well in some of these areas, but there is room for improvement in others. Research activities at FERNFH strengthen the involvement of students in the professional field of their studies by involving them in research projects and by the systematic transfer of research results into teaching. Our aim is to extend our research activities to several

selected professional subfields in order to create our own research profile, also by establishing cooperation with foreign institutions. Our participation in the Erasmus+ programme will help us to better achieve these goals.

We are interested in participating in Erasmus+ actions under all three Key Action plans:

- KA1: Promote learning mobility and (virtual) exchanges of individuals;

We aim to provide international (virtual/blended) experiences for our students through BIPs, short-term (and if desired long-term) mobility and SMTs. We will focus on these aspects and integrate them in our study programmes and in the dissemination of Erasmus+ opportunities.

In order to offer an international horizon to our students, who are not able to go abroad, we want to establish a form of "Internationalisation @ home". We want our staff (both teaching and administrative) to participate in STA and STT. The fact that our lecturers 'bring home' new teaching and learning experiences in an international environment will significantly enhance the quality of teaching at FERNFH. There is no doubt that incoming lecturers are an enrichment to broaden the horizons of our students. Networking and developing the skills of administrative staff is another key component of the internationalisation strategy, using formats such as job shadowing and staff weeks will be used here.

- KA2: Collaborate with other organisations and institutions in the development of digital teaching methods, hybrid formats, and inclusive educational approaches;

Particularly in the form of collaborative partnerships, FERNFH aims to become more networked, innovative, inclusive and digital. These collaborative partnerships will contribute to the implementation of the institutional strategy.

- KA3: Support for policy development and cooperation in the development of distance learning education and new and innovative (forms of) programmes in the European and international context.

FERNFH prepares its medium-term objectives and the university development plan (Higher Education Development Plan - HEP) every three years. All objectives and measures related to internationalisation and Erasmus+ (including the awarding of the Erasmus Charter) are anchored in the respective development plan. This ensures that they are binding for all institutes and departments and that they are committed to contributing to the achievement of the objectives.

## **Strategy, objectives, and impact**

By participating in the Erasmus+ programme, we aim to improve the quality of our teaching on several levels. On the input side, by bringing in a wide range of skills and competences that are available at other European institutions, and on the output

side, by increasing the intercultural understanding and global citizenship of our graduates.

The university development plan 2024-2027 has a special focus on internationalisation and Erasmus+, which is one of the six main objectives of the development plan. The other four main objectives (student-centred teaching, increased digitalisation of teaching, individualisation of studies, increasing the range of micro-credentials) and the planned activities that are derived from them are also very much in line with the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme. Internationality and physical, virtual and blended incoming and outgoing mobility should be part of everyday study (and work) life at FERNFH.

In particular, we will:

- develop beneficial partnerships and collaborations with other open universities across Europe and promote innovation in distance learning education and learning practices. We will share our expertise and experience with other universities, contributing to the wider goal of improving the quality of higher education in Europe.
- increase the number of international (regular and incoming) lecturers to give all our students the opportunity to learn from experts from other European universities.
- increase the number of students participating, at least for a short period, in international mobility activities and virtual exchanges (SMS and STT), in particular from groups under-represented in mobility, and in cooperation projects.
- increase the number of staff participating in international mobility activities (STT and STA) and cooperation projects.
- strengthen our inclusive and sustainable higher education model and learning environment, accessible to all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. To this end, we will integrate the values of Erasmus+ (inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environment and combating climate change, participation in democratic life, shared values and civic engagement) into our catalogue of "Principles and quality criteria for good teaching".
- promote green practices, including the reduction of the carbon and environmental footprint of mobility activities.
- establish technical requirements for the participation in the "Erasmus without Paper" network.
- develop micro-credentials in non-German languages as well as joint micro-credentials and participate in a corresponding network of higher education partners with similar lifelong learning objectives.
- contribute to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning by participating in the European Network for the Recognition of Prior Learning.
- establish research and development cooperation with international partners in the professional subfields of our research profile and actively promote and participate in Erasmus+ partnerships and projects.

All these efforts will focus on taking into account the specific profile of FERNFH as a pure distance-learning institution.

It will have a significant positive impact on our university, our students, graduates, and staff, and hopefully also on the European partners involved. It will increase our capacity and opportunities to participate in research and cooperation projects at EU level. It will have an impact on our visibility in the international higher education landscape. It will also increase mutual understanding and exposure to different cultures for students and staff at home.

Finally, it will make a small but significant contribution to the development of a more inclusive and interconnected European higher education landscape, providing more flexible and personalised learning opportunities and generally helping to break down barriers between different countries and cultures.

Our internationalisation strategy focuses on qualitative rather than quantitative objectives. The measures that we consider necessary to achieve the above objectives are developed on an annual basis within the framework of the university development plan (HEP).

## **Indicators**

By the end of 2025, the following should be in place:

- A strategy to attract partner universities from Europe. (Objective 1)
- An analysis of demand for and interest in international mobility and of the main obstacles to mobility (for students, lecturers and staff). (Objectives 3 & 4)
- Implementation of the Erasmus Dashboard. (Objective 7)
- An information page within the Online Campus to increase the visibility of Erasmus+ opportunities among our students, lecturers and staff. (Objectives 3 & 4 & 6)
- Present the internationality of the university to date (e.g. foreign students, students working in international companies, lecturers from international universities already teaching at our university). (Objective 1)
- Integrate the values of Erasmus+ into the FERNFH's catalogue of "Principles and quality criteria for good teaching". (Objective 5)
- Fulfil all the technical requirements for participation in the ESCI. (Objectives 6)

By the end of 2026, the following should be in place:

- At least 3 IIAs with different (open) universities, to develop mobility activities such as BIPs or short-term/blended/virtual mobilities for lecturers, students and staff. (Objective 1)
- Participation of 3 staff mobilities (STA and/or STT). (Objective 4)
- 3 applications for SMT and/or short-/long-term mobilities (SMS). (Objective 3)
- At least one micro-credential in English. (Objective 8)
- Full participation in ESCI. (Objective 7)



- Issue European Digital Credentials for Learning. (Objective 7)
- Establish a joint "thesis marketplace" to enable students to write their Bachelor's or Master's thesis at a partner institution. (Objective 3)

To be achieved by the end of 2027:

- 5 % of our students have the opportunity to participate in a BIP. (Objective 1 & 3)
- At least two courses are taught by or with the participation of international (incoming) lecturers. (Objective 2)
- At least 3 students will participate in (outgoing) mobility activities and at least 3 students will visit FERNFH as incoming students. (Objectives 3)
- One micro-credential will be developed as a joint programme. (Objective 8)
- Participation in at least one new cooperation project aimed at developing innovative digital teaching methods, hybrid formats and inclusive educational approaches especially in the fields of public health, digital transformation, diversity management and/or sustainability. (Objective 10)

By 2028:

For the next Erasmus+ programme period, more comprehensive Erasmus+ cooperation projects will be planned, based on existing successful cooperations and defined strategies.