



Erasmus+

European Policy Statement

Ghent University

2021-2027

Ghent University has been a very active participant in the Erasmus programme from the very beginning. Since the start of Erasmus, universities in Europe in general and Ghent University in particular have changed significantly. What began as a small initiative to preserve the cultural diversity of European society and give students the opportunity to learn another language in another country has become a huge success story. The various challenges in the programme such as quality assurance, recognition and mutual trust between partners, Information sharing and learning outcomes-based education have profoundly changed the way we work and think within our university. The face of the programme has changed as well as the different actions and for Ghent University (often abbreviated to "UGent") the Erasmus programme has worked as a catalyst for internal quality driven changes and has as such profoundly modernised the university as it will do in the future, especially through our ambition to participate in the European Universities initiative.

As such, Ghent University needs the programme to contribute to the objectives of the European Education Area in different ways but at the same time UGent wants to contribute to the further development of the European Education Area, as it has done for over 2 decades with regard to the European Higher Education Area.

More than ever before, higher education institutions are currently facing huge challenges for the coming years. As a university we play a unique role in preparing future graduates to cope with this challenges, but it also means we will have to adapt ourselves. The demand for highly skilled, socially engaged, flexible people will be increasing and changing, even more, after the current COVID 19 crisis. In parallel, countering the growing polarisation of our societies and



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distrust of democratic institutions calls on everyone —including higher education staff and students— to engage more actively with the communities around these and promote social inclusion and mobility. Universities are no isolated communities and are by definition internationally oriented. This offers us the unique power to join forces globally in coping with such challenges, including turning our societies into more sustainable ecosystems. However without European vision, frameworks, programmes and funding this is not only difficult, it is deemed to be even impossible. Only through intensive cooperation between universities, research centres, teachers and learners the challenges in fields e.g. economy, society, sustainability, diversity can be tackled.

Internationalisation is very often part of the answer to these many challenges and runs as a red thread through the various priorities in actions that are set out by Ghent University for the future.

In the coming years, UGent will focus on 6 specific university broad challenges: social identity, diversity, alumni, activating learning, sustainability and talent management.

These 6 challenges have been identified by the UGent community itself and are therefore close to our hearts. The challenges will be tackled together employees, alumni, policy makers etc. inside and outside the university ... and of course and foremost also with our students. These 6 challenges each have an international dimension and build on the mission statement in which UGent profiles itself as a socially engaged and pluralistic university that is open to all students regardless of their philosophical, political, cultural and social background.

For students, a period of studying at a foreign university, doing an internship in an organization abroad or performing research in the framework of the master dissertation abroad has become much more accessible than before thanks to Erasmus+. However we still miss a group of students who, for various reasons, are unable or do not dare to take the step. New actions and priorities in the future programme focussing on a **more inclusive** Erasmus with e.g. (better accessible) short term and blended mobility will help to tackle this challenge. Ghent University included as one of the university-wide quality indicators in the context of the institutional



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review that by 2020, 100% of the courses will have integrated international/intercultural competences into the programme competences. This is an answer to a number of important contemporary challenges that society rightly expects higher education institutions to contribute to. Achieving international/intercultural competences can be done through "Internationalisation@home" (which often relies on incoming teachers or students to establish "an international classroom" or which can be done through virtual mobility. However, involving more students and staff in outgoing physical mobility still remains a priority for Ghent University since we believe that when this is done in qualitative manner, it offers staff and students the strongest international/intercultural learning experience.

In view of the increasing **diversity** of (ethnic) languages in urban contexts, UGent fully recognizes the need of multilingualism bridging skills among its learners, in addition to intercultural skills and broader awareness of diversity. The increasing diversity among students and staff often leads to new questions, needs and demands. UGent developed an action framework 2019-2024 to answer these questions in a well-founded and structural way. UGent works on diversity in an active and integral way. Ghent University is constantly working on an **inclusive** learning, working and research environment in which all members of the Ghent University community feel at home and can develop their talents, so that they can excel in education, research and service provision. This is the only way for Ghent University to be an innovative and fully-fledged global player. Within today's society, diversity is becoming the norm at Ghent University by attracting diverse talent, creating value through research and meeting the needs of different groups. In this context, intersectionality is applied by means of multiple sociological parameters. The purpose of this is to make the different policy actions inclusive and avoid stigmatization of certain target groups. Also in our internationalisation policy, opening study abroad opportunities to a more varied group is key. To achieve this the awarding of a grant in the framework of student mobility (Erasmus+and others) is based upon a fair system taking into account the socio-economic background of the student.

Learning, teaching and working in an **innovative and entrepreneurial environment** is key for



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UGent. Creativity and innovation are important elements of learning and teaching in universities as they are necessary for the training of innovative and entrepreneurial graduates. Since some years DURF ONDERNEMEN - DO! is the centre of expertise for entrepreneurship at UGent. It is the first point of contact for all people at UGent who think about entrepreneurship and forms a stepping stone for further guidance in related services and programmes. The goal of DO! is to correctly inform all students and researchers about the pros and cons of a career as an entrepreneur, to let them acquire as many entrepreneurial competencies as possible, and to provide the official student-entrepreneurs with optimal guidance and support in the development of their business. With actions as GENTREPRENEUR AWARDS, Expedition DO, H-impact (Health And Innovation Impact programme) entrepreneurship and innovation is at the heart of the UGent community, Erasmus-students (who are particularly targeted) included.

As social engagement is one of the 6 university-wide policy choices, involvement of students in the community is at the centre of our future-oriented educational policy. This is already put in practice and visible in the Community Service Learning priorities of UGent. CSL is an educational form within a course unit, with a view to the acquisition of predetermined competencies by students, who at the same time make a meaningful social or societal contribution to a certain community or target group by responding to real social or societal needs and problems. The students apply theoretical learning content during a practical experience, characterized by the inclusion of social commitment. Typical for CSL is that students reflect on their learning experience and this social engagement, which has a learning effect on an academic level as well as on a personal, community or social level. In the context of a globalised education and employment environment, it is essential that students are able to make the best possible use of all learning opportunities across the world. Therefore Ghent University will work further on recognition of **learning outcomes** and build further on experiences and progress already made in other fora, notably the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention and e.g. the Benelux Decision on automatic recognition of



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higher education **qualifications**, but we also want to expand our experience and expertise in the field of recognition beyond the European borders (cfr. our participation in the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project "Recognition matters" with Latin-America or our involvement in the EU-SHARE project with ASEAN Countries). For our own students, recognition and grade conversion are embedded in our internal legislation Education and Exam Code.

As was stated above, Ghent University is focusing on 6 specific challenges identified by the UGent-community and therefore close to our hearts. These 6 challenges each have an international dimension. The expertise that Ghent University obtains by participating in the Erasmus+ programme with its various actions will of course contribute to this. One of these challenges is making our education more activating. Experiences with new forms of learning and teaching in the context of blended short term mobility will of course have an effect on the way of teaching in general. The challenge of maintaining this focus on activating learning in online and blended learning is now brought very high on the agenda by the current COVID 19 crisis. We will use and share experiences in this but also jointly develop alternatives within the framework of the current university networks we are part of and are specially expecting the European Universities application we are part of ("ENLIGHT") to play a crucial role in this. Within this EUn we will be further investigating how we can share (part of) our (existing) online course offer (in order to reduce workload for our teaching staff) and/or create new opportunities for Virtual Exchange or Cooperative Online International Learning.

Also the role of international alumni will be further defined (regular Erasmus+ students, Erasmus Mundus students) and will contribute to the international image of the university. UGent has a strong expertise in Erasmus+ projects. Ghent University developed its own policy concerning active participation in international and European projects. Several projects in which UGent participated(s) as a coordinator or a partner are the result of a bottom up approach from individual faculty members who want to set up a project in specific subject areas. But equally participation in many projects of colleagues of the central administration in close collaboration with different partners from inside and outside Europe UGent will continue



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to support projects to develop innovative strategies to boost mobility or ways to remove obstacles to mobility in higher education. The experience in coordinating and partnering in several key projects with central participation (e.g. EWP, Realise, eQuATIC – see further) will remain important for the UGent community, both in terms of the direct outcomes in modernizing the own institution, as well as in acting as a model for the European higher education sector. As the jury report of the EAIE Institutional Award for innovation in internationalisation stated, when they were recognizing Ghent University as *"a European higher education institution with exceptional efforts to promote internationalisation"*, UGent has been *"[...] at the forefront of the implementation of all European higher education funding programmes since the start of the Erasmus programme, and continued to contribute as coordinators of critical projects"*.

In the next years UGent wants to be or stay involved in projects which contribute to the strategic Ghent University agenda with a focus on the strategic topics already mentioned e.g. enhancing the quality of teaching in UGent, sustainability, diversity, entrepreneurship, social engagement and defining and developing an international dimension within a given academic discipline. UGent will focus on projects enhancing innovation and exchanging methodologies and good practices. In that option Ghent University will continue to focus on the development of excellent joint masters that are unique compared to (existing) national programs and provide added value on top of the common exchanges (Erasmus+ and others).

The implementation of the different actions of the Erasmus+ programme is of course a joint effort of different departments and faculties within UGent. The day to day management of KA1 is done at the central International Relations Office within the Department of Educational Policy. A large team is dealing with the different aspects of mobility, constantly looking for improvement of procedures, setting the lines in accordance with the programme guidelines for students and staff and supporting the participants as good as possible. Another team is working on the management of KA2 and KA3 projects and some colleagues are involved as



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experts. The fact that the IRO has its own dedicated financial staff is very important in the overall management of the programme. In the coming years this will even be enforced.

The target set out by the Bologna ministers of 20% student mobility by 2020 encouraged the university to set its own specific target: by 2020 we wanted 25% of our graduates (i.e. after completion of the master) to have a significant study abroad experience (of at least a total of 15 ECTS-credits). Of course, this encompasses all types of (and not only Erasmus+) mobility, but our large experience with Erasmus offered us the possibility to set out the directions to take for other exchange programmes and actions based on the ECTS-principles. It also encouraged us to set up a better registration system for all inbound and outbound mobilities for traineeships, study and master thesis research. In the coming years UGent wants to maintain this level of mobility and focus even more on the quality assurance of exchange procedures and support for students. We also want to focus more on short term mobility and virtual/blended mobility. Unfortunately the current crisis has forced all universities to move quicker to a broader online offer. It will offer new opportunities for new types of mobility, but at the same time challenges us to move faster in setting up systems that allow for thorough quality assurance of these alternatives. It will also force us to think through to what extent these virtual/blended mobility alternatives offer our students and staff comparable international/intercultural learning experiences and impact on their learning outcomes. We trust our engagement in the EUn-proposal 'ENUGHT' will also offer us possibilities to further investigate this. After all, for Ghent University qualitative exchanges prevail on quantitative numbers and targets. A new policy on the renewal of the Erasmus+ IIA has been approved by the Education Council beginning of 2019 shifting from a more individual approach of establishing agreements towards a study programme based approach. The added value for the UGent programme must always be the starting point when considering entering into, continuing or discontinuing an agreement with a certain institution as by means of an agreement for exchange, part of the UGent training offer is offered at a foreign partner institution. The compatibility of the learning outcomes (final competences) of the programme



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at UGent with those of the foreign programme is of primary importance. In line with the guidelines on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) officially included in the Bologna process, the screening of the offer of the potential foreign institution is therefore not based on the equivalence of individual course units, but on the totality of the exchange programme.

In order to support high quality exchange agreements, Ghent University developed a Quality Assessment Tool for International Cooperation (eQuATIC). The assessment is based on a set of indicators about quality, information exchange and impact of international cooperation. The main principle of eQuATIC is the use of quantified indicators based on available data from different data sources. By converting quantitative and descriptive data into figures, cooperation with partners can be carried out at various levels. Ghent University has coordinated a KA2 project on upscaling the use of eQuATIC at HEIs and continues to support institutions that want to use eQuATIC for qualitative screenings of their partnerships. In the course of the new Erasmus programme Ghent University will keep using eQuATIC for a continuous quality screening of its partnerships, allowing to identify and address specific issues in the bilateral cooperation that need special attention.

Expanding the possibilities for staff mobility for training (in and out) is one of the main priorities for the central HR department in internationalisation. The multiplier effect is enormous. During the current programme hundreds of administrative staff members either visited the UGent or went on a training abroad and this had a very positive effect on the professional development of staff. This path has to be explored more in the future. The monitoring of the gained competencies is one of the ambitions for the future programme. The outputs of the REALISE (see further) project can be of great interest for this. An ongoing challenge is to make staff aware of the Teaching Staff mobility action. The UGent professors often already have an international network as part of their research. More involvement and an increase of teaching staff mobile participants is needed. In that respect we aim to focus more on junior teacher staff, for which involvement in this scheme can help not only to build



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their network, but also to enhance their teaching competences. Quality is also a key element in the full support of Erasmus+ participants, staff and students, incoming and outgoing.

The central International Relations Office has a long-standing tradition in supporting Erasmus+ students and staff and is responsible for communicating with participants on the administrative aspects of an exchange. The different administrative peculiarities of the Erasmus programme are explained in clear communication tools: application procedure, learning agreement, grant agreement, student report... The processes are managed by an in-house developed software tool OASIS (see further). Information on insurance, registration, visas, cultural and linguistic preparation, etc. is also provided. The central IRO is also in close contact with the outgoing students regarding the administrative follow-up. The IRO organizes several activities in order to inform participants and to integrate international students in Ghent, including events e.g. 'Welcome abroad' (for students interested in a study abroad period), 'Welcome Days' (for new incoming students) and 'INTERchange' (where future and past outgoing students interact with international, incoming students). In the following years the Central IRO wants to focus more on intercultural preparation and social wellbeing of the participant students and staff with a more targeted communication flow, specific intercultural physical training events and online materials.

The Faculty Commissions for Internationalisation are responsible for the academic support and the selection of the student participants and the teachers. Academic guidance is provided in the faculties by a team of staff members who are specifically mandated for this purpose. Study results and study progress are monitored in the faculties by, among others, the study counsellors. Where necessary, remedial action can be taken. For incoming students, in certain cases the home institution is informed of serious deficiencies. The faculties also regulate other monitoring moments organized in smaller groups. Outgoing students are also supported by the faculties. This focuses mainly on study progress. Through this mix of central IRO competences, central support departments and faculty competences, there is a continuous interaction and coverage of the various aspects of outbound and inbound mobility.



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In terms of participation in KA2 and KAB Actions, UGent commits to a layered approach. Firstly, as ever before, the central IRO facilitates the participation in projects for which the initiative resides with the university's grassroots levels, i.e. within the academic departments. This is the level where the core activities of the university take place, and any initiative to exchange good practice and or develop innovation in education in a multilateral context at that level deserves full support. This support takes the shape of advice at application stage, funding for prospections, support in development of the project budget, administrative support, as well as monitoring during the implementation phase. Secondly, there is an increased strategic approach towards participation in innovation projects, whereby central support offices (e.g. Quality Assurance, Diversity & Gender unit, etc.) are incentivised to enter into project proposals that fit into the overall objectives of learning and innovation of the university. The international networks which UGent is a member of, play an important role in this, in providing partners and further developing project ideas within these areas. Thirdly, the UGent IRO itself is and remains a key player in project participation itself. Not only does it provide support, it is also an active contributor to key projects that fit with the domain of internationalisation and its development (also see elsewhere). From the central IRO, when the opportunities are offered, targeted involvement in specific KA3- projects (e.g. focused on inclusive mobility or the enhancement of the use of microcredentials) will also continue to be high on the agenda. This participation is considered important both for the intended outcomes, as well as the international visibility it provides for the institution. Last but not least, it is our ambition to tie all these activities into an over-arching strategic framework, which takes shape through the University's participation in the European University initiative. This is the level where project outcomes developed within the alliance's own context, but also elsewhere in other Erasmus projects - if they match with the Alliance's objectives -, will receive their testing, implementation, as well as visibility and leverage for further usage outside of the Alliance's context. This way, we hope to generate impact with all of the Erasmus+ projects throughout



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the entire organisation, allowing for grass-roots initiative while also focusing on our strategic goals.