



VIDZEME UNIVERSITY

OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We believe in value through knowledge. We therefore follow the principles that allow us to build an education, research and innovation ecosystem that cultivates interaction between different academic disciplines and institutions, society and academia, business and culture, and the national and global worlds of education and science. We highly appreciate the European values embodying academic freedom and democracy, an integral part of which is a high quality of life and security. Therefore, we also think about value creation, which means both increasing the productivity of the national economy and raising the welfare of society, as well as strengthening the national identity and culture.

We purposefully build a knowledge society that is able to both use and understand the benefits created by digital technologies and respond adequately to various national or global challenges.

The Erasmus programme and its implementation is a part of the strategy and internationalization aims of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA). The Erasmus projects support a significant part of ViA internationalization and invest in improving and modernizing higher education in the EU and Latvia. The university is well known for its international profile, qualified staff and a balanced link between theory and practice, a number of international activities are integrated in all levels of university operation.

Various stakeholders have been involved in the development of the Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027 of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences. During the process, not only the planning of the next period (2021-2027) was performed, but also the evaluation of the previous period (2014-2020) was carried out. During the planning and evaluation period, ViA completed the evaluation both for the rector/vice-rectors and Erasmus+ coordinators using the ECHE Self-assessment tool provided by the European Commission in order to gain information about possible improvements necessary for the next period.

ViA International Office gathered all the relevant information – the Erasmus Policy Statement 2014-2020, the list of ViA partnerships within all study fields and directions, the developed partnership evaluation form, the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 Guidelines and ViA internationalization guidelines. All the relevant information and documents were sent to the heads of the study fields, deans of the faculties, heads of the departments and the central management (vice-rectors, rector) requesting to evaluate the previous period, evaluate the partnerships as well as provide a general vision of the goals and activities of internationalization, set priorities, plans and aims for the next programming period within their study fields and departments. During the development of the new EPS and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027 project proposal, consultations with representatives

of different study fields and departments took place continually. In order to ensure the perspective of students, the same was asked from the organisations representing students at ViA – the Student Union and the Erasmus Student Network Valmiera.

After collecting all the information, meetings with the ViA management took place to structure it, evaluate the overall situation and set the next period priorities and plans. The final Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027 was presented and agreed on at the Meeting on Development, Academic and Scientific Issues in May 2020.

1. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM ERASMUS PERIOD 2014-2020 AND IMPACT ON VIA DEVELOPMENT

ViA has a wide international cooperation network (more than 100 partner universities in around 45 different countries), a number of various local and international projects have been implemented since the establishment of the institution involving teaching staff, students, administrative staff members, various social and professional partners and bodies: research and curriculum development, joint programme, students and staff mobility projects, lifelong learning projects, library development and society integration projects, career development and other initiatives.

1.1. Cooperation within the EU

The Erasmus partnerships have been developed since 1999. The partnerships cover almost all the Erasmus participating countries in order to ensure the diversity. However, the situation is not the same in various study fields at the university. The average number of active partners per study field is 14. The total number of partners will not be increased during the next phase of the Erasmus programme, but there might be changes in the countries and partner institutions while keeping diversity of the Erasmus participating countries and encouraging active partnership.

The number of active cooperation partners is in the range from 7 to 29 depending on the study programme and the needs of the study field (level, number of students, research activities, etc.). Some partnerships are longstanding and reflect all types of cooperation activities: e.g. student, staff mobility, intensive programmes and common projects. However, the university is open also to new partners, especially in less represented fields. The academic personnel is encouraged to seek for new partners within the EU to provide more academic-linked partnerships, thus developing deeper links between HEIs.

1.2. Cooperation outside the EU

ViA increasingly intends to develop cooperation in various fields not only in the EU Member States, but also with countries outside the EU. The focus in new geographical regions outside the EU is on the Eastern countries and the main target regions include Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South-Eastern-Asia and the USA. The target is set according to the historical links with these regions. The focus is only on state-accredited institutions. Most of the partners are state-financed HEIs, but there are also some strong and significant partnerships with private universities. When establishing new partnerships, it is important that a partner outside the EU has already implemented the Bologna process or is currently implementing it.

The average number of active partners per study field is 8, and the vast majority is active cooperation partners. The total number of partners is expected to slightly increase during the next phase of the Erasmus programme according to the academic, research and joint project

interests, possibilities to develop joint or double degree programmes. ViA has very successful partnerships with universities in India in the field of tourism, Ukraine in the field of strategic communication and Israel in the field of knowledge transfer.

1.3. Cooperation within networks, with industry, partnerships and agreements

The cooperation with different partners is also based on several networks. It is foreseen that each study field is actively involved in at least one international professional network and takes part in general university networks such as EkoTekNord network. ViA is actively and continuously participating in the EAIE (European Association of International Education) network and its organized activities.

Considering that Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences represents professional education, foreign organisations (companies, NGOs, governmental institutions, etc.) constitute a significant part of the cooperation network. During the next period, new agreements, especially with a focus on the region outside the EU, will be negotiated. The formal framework would ensure the possibilities for student and teaching staff internships and common projects. Many international projects have been developed and submitted as an extension of the Erasmus programme.

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences Knowledge and Technology Centre (ZTC) aims to transfer university intellectual potential, technologies and innovation to economics and to promote access to lifelong learning in the Vidzeme region. ZTC mission is to strengthen the trilateral cooperation between universities, industry and local government institutions with a common aim to promote innovation, competitiveness and regional and general economic development. It offers support for young entrepreneurs, cooperation in regional, national and EU-wide level with educational and scientific institutions and with partners from private, public and non-governmental sectors as well as consultation and individual solutions for individuals and legal entities and significant life-long learning activities. ZTC is a crucial link to the industry - it is proved by not only cooperation agreements, but also by joint international projects.

Between the partner institutions (holders of the ECHE), the inter-institutional agreements are signed. The decision on signing a new agreement is made at the faculty, department or institute level if it covers only one faculty field, or at the university management meeting if the agreement foresees cooperation with different faculties and in various study fields. The factors considered are the similarities with the offered study programmes and research fields. The proposal for the new cooperation agreement can be submitted by anyone: staff members, management, students and representatives from abroad. The International Office collects all the proposals and forwards to the faculty or the university management for approval. Academic personnel are encouraged to establish new partnerships within their field of expertise to ensure possibilities for international and joint research.

Within the next period, ViA is going to have a stronger focus on cooperation with industry abroad - continuing cooperation in new project development in the research and training field. This activity is particularly important, because ViA emphasizes the professional experience during studies.

1.4. Mobility, joint programmes

Mobility - students

In the previous period, there was a tendency for the number of students involved in mobility to decrease. The main reasons for this include the decrease in the total number of students,

insufficient funding especially when going to the Nordic countries, low motivation, lack of confidence of students in the level of English language skills and their abilities, insecurity in intercultural communication, unwillingness to lose a job. Mobility opportunities have increased, new agreements have been actively signed and the number of partners outside the EU have increased in different fields. Students have shown more interest in countries outside the EU. Specifically, ViA is looking also for partners for master's level studies taking into account that four new master's level programmes were recently launched.

ViA students prefer to go on internships rather than studies. Students want to gain new – more practical - work experience and are interested in entrepreneurship. Also, the internship period is shorter than the study semester, which allows students to be more mobile. All study courses and internship credits gained abroad are recognized if all the necessary requirements are met. Study or internship content is agreed on before the mobility. A lot of universities change their study course offer during the mobility which causes some difficulties in the recognition process.

The current rate of graduates with international experience (studies and/or internships) during their study time is approximately 23-25%. It is planned to keep the same level of mobility and have it in the range of 25-35%. The short-term mobility will be increased in order to offer international experience to more students, also to those who might not be able to go for the long-term mobility. Each study field should be responsible for one short-term mobility project at least once every two years led by the responsible teaching staff member. The short-term mobility includes intensive programmes, field trips, company visits, and summer schools.

Mobility – staff

ViA staff mobility varies from one year to another (10 to 45 mobilities), but the tendency is to have experience exchange visits rather than teaching mobility. Mostly the staff has chosen to go to the EU countries and partners, but during the past few years mobilities to the countries and partner institutions outside the EU have increased significantly, aimed at initiating cooperation in order to attract students, form networks for project development and share experience.

Not all the staff members engage in the Erasmus mobility, they also tend to have a lack of confidence in the English language skills, but ViA is implementing projects where all the lecturers are involved in training to improve their English, which will promote the increase of teacher mobility.

It is not expected that the mobility of staff will somehow increase in the future, considering the number of lecturers, their involvement in various projects, the workload and the requirements of scientific achievements. ViA aims at keeping the mobility number at the current level:

- promoting and increasing incoming and outgoing teaching mobility among lecturers;
- promoting the participation of administrative staff in the staff weeks related to their field - more and more non-academic personnel should be encouraged to take part in the Erasmus activities in order to experience internationalization, improve their intercultural communication skills and learn new professional skills;
- improving the feedback from mobilities and the internal communication on mobility results, including continuing cooperation through new cooperation forms;
- encouraging mobility to promote the creation of new projects;
- encouraging teaching staff mobilities in companies.

During the spring 2020, the worldwide crisis related to Covid-19 has partly stopped the projects, and all the planned staff mobilities were cancelled. It also created a negative impact on student mobilities for students who were implementing their mobilities during this period. It is expected that the mobility of both students and staff will decrease in the coming year due to the crisis, but ViA aims at promoting the given opportunities and encouraging the staff and students to take part in the Erasmus programme.

Joint programmes, double degrees

The joint master's study programme in International Tourism and Event Management was developed and implemented, but due to bureaucratic obstacles and different development strategies of the partners, the program was stopped after three years. The tourism study field is planning to develop a joint master's programme with Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) in Finland. The cooperation has already been established. On bachelor's level, the tourism study field is also aiming at finding a partner outside the EU to pursue a double degree programme.

ViA Faculty of Engineering (IF) is continuing to work on new ideas for a joint study programme in Sociotechnical Systems Modelling. During the next period, the goal is to attract an associate partner from abroad in the new joint doctoral programme in Economics and Business.

In the information and communication science field, a double degree cooperation agreement was concluded in 2017 with the University of Kiel, Germany. This field is now focusing more on the development of double degree programmes at master's level with universities outside the EU (Ukraine, Georgia).

1.5. Cooperation projects

ViA takes part in mobility project calls (KA1 Mobility of Individuals between Programme countries; Programme and Partner Countries) every year, although the unpredictable project funding for Erasmus+ mobility projects outside the EU makes it very difficult to establish a strong long-term cooperation. Mobility projects, which have a significant role within ViA strategy and internationalization aims, have led to ViA participation in various other cooperation projects, including Erasmus Mundus (EFFORT Power of Education: fostering mobility for cooperation of EU and Eastern Europe), Erasmus Multilateral project (International Tourism and Event Management ITEM programme) and several submitted Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree projects. During the previous period, ViA developed KA2 (Cooperation For Innovation And The Exchange Of Good Practices) strategic partnerships' project "Simulation Games in Strategic Communication" which is now in its implementation stage, as well as submitted the project "Developing problem-based blended learning in tourism masters level". ViA is participating in various strategic partnerships and capacity building projects as a partner as well (Student innovation labs – a way to sustainable and socially responsible growth (INNOLABS); MechaUz - Modernization of Mechatronics and Robotics for Bachelor degree in Uzbekistan through Innovative Ideas and Digital Technology). ViA has joined the European Universities initiative by participating in the project "E³UDRES² - Engaged European Entrepreneurial University as Driver for European Smart and Sustainable Regions" (EUDRES) in order to create a network of universities in Austria, Latvia, Portugal, Belgium, Romania and Hungary. The aim of the creation of the network is to strengthen higher education in regions, developing smart cities, knowledge transfer between the universities and cooperation with the industry.

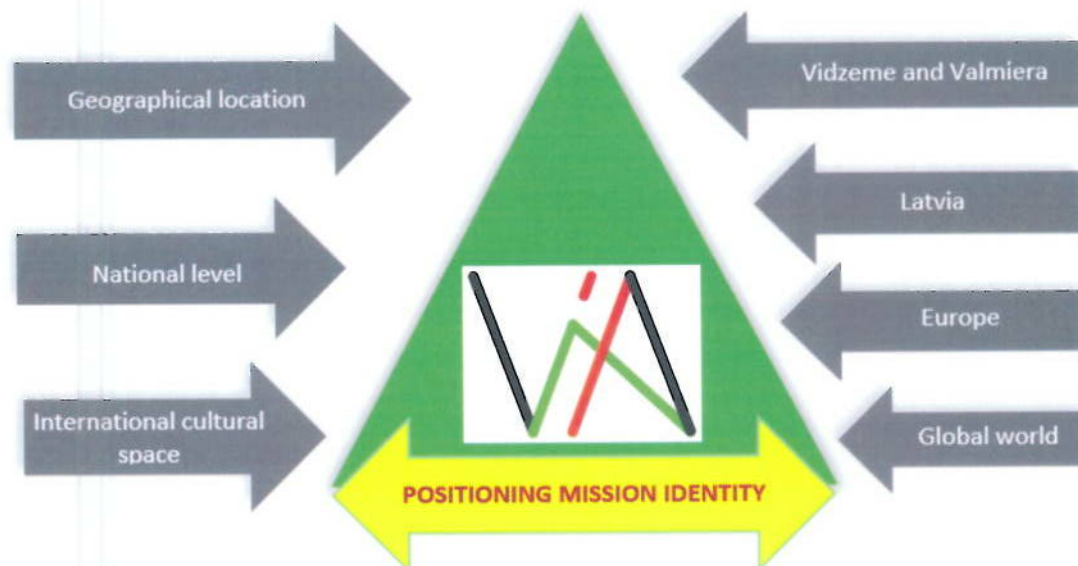
The university develops and participates in other international cooperation projects within various other programmes in order to implement international research, courses, programmes, events, conferences, intensive programmes, etc.: Interreg Central Baltic programme (BOOSTED, NatureBizz), Nordplus, EkoTeknord, Newelra, Nobanet: Nordic-Baltic Network for Internationalisation of SME's, Horizon 2020, MAMBA and others.

During the next period, the university aims at strengthening the cooperation and promoting participation in KA2, KA3 and Jean Monnet activities of the programme.

2. INTERNATIONALISATION FRAMEWORK AND PRIORITIES

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences implements its strategy by operating at the regional (local), national and international levels. Each of these levels are also very important in the context of the identity of the university, as well as its strategic positioning and strategic missions.

Although today the geographical location does not have a decisive or restrictive meaning in the implementation of activities of a higher education and research institution, it is still an important factor in determining the choice of the institution's strategic missions. Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences identifies itself as a part of Europe (meaning cultural space, as well as economic and security aspects), at the same time as an institution operating in the national interests of Latvia, as well as an important factor in promoting the overall growth of Vidzeme region and Valmiera city. Apart from offering higher and further education possibilities, the university has become an essential partner in solving the development issues of the region and the city.



The above-mentioned three levels of identity are the basis of how ViA plans and implements its processes, as well as analyses the achieved results. When planning its strategy, ViA takes into account and respects European, national and regional planning documents, as well as short-term, medium-term and long-term necessities at all three levels.

ViA promotes the growth of Vidzeme region, at the same time promoting the further development of Latvia as a prosperous and secure country and actively participating in the achievement of the common European goals.

Taking into account all the discussions related to the strategy of ViA on the main keywords and actions in the ViA Convention, Meeting on Development, Academic and Scientific Issues, ViA Scientific Council, as well as the internationalization trends and Erasmus guidelines for 2021-2027 programme, the following ViA **internationalization priorities** are set for the next ViA strategy period:

#1 Create and offer internationally relevant, integrated and high-quality content and knowledge flows (joint courses, joint modules, joint study programs (SP), joint degrees);

#2 Develop international partnerships to ensure high quality joint development projects and high-quality mobility of students, academic and non-academic staff;

#3 Attract foreign students;

#4 Attract foreign lecturers & researchers;

#5 Create an international environment and implement ViA processes at the international level.

ViA structural units have also pointed out the following important priorities: the need to promote international scientific cooperation, mobility of lecturers and staff, active and increased student mobility and implementation of intensive programmes and study tours. These are included as activities in specific study fields and structural units.

ViA resolves that the Erasmus programme and projects are part of the modernization and internationalization strategy of ViA, which includes:

- Student mobility
- Staff mobility
- Cooperation projects to improve the quality of studies and student experience.

In order to implement the priorities set by ViA, various activities are planned, which are further summarized by study fields and structural units.

Communication, media and governance study field

1. **To enhance international scientific cooperation.** Further promotion of mobility is planned, which would facilitate the development of new research projects.
2. **To attract foreign students to the new master's programmes.** To develop double degree programmes - currently there are ongoing discussions with universities in Ukraine and Georgia.
3. **To develop internationally relevant, integrated and high-quality content and knowledge flow.** In the previous period, two new master's study programmes – "Media and Information Literacy" and "Strategic Communication and Governance" were established with the support of partners in Great Britain, Estonia and Sweden. The content of the study programmes includes study courses taught independently by foreign lecturers - in the academic year 2020/2021 it will be a lecturer from Estonia.
4. **To attract foreign lecturers and researchers.**

5. **To develop additional international partnerships.** Taking into account that two new study programmes have been developed in the study field, partners for master's level students are sought in particular. Further cooperation is expected with universities in the USA, especially the University of Minnesota Morris, which is already an active cooperation partner both in the organization of intensive programmes, in exchange of lecturers, and implementation of parallel study courses (Mass Communication for bachelor's students).

Tourism study field

1. **To develop the initiated cooperation** with Satakunta University of Applied Sciences in Finland within the framework of the master's programme.
2. **To implement international projects** resulting in both international research and international tourism conferences.
3. **To continue the successfully established cooperation with higher education institutions outside the EU**, especially in India, Ukraine.
4. **To invite graduates** working abroad in tourism industry companies **for guest lectures in the study process.**
5. **To continue the implementation of intensive programmes** within Nordplus and other projects.
6. **To implement joint study tours for Tourism Organization and Management 3rd year students** with Lithuanian and Estonian students to Lithuania and Estonia within Nordplus.

Business administration study field

1. **To develop and offer internationally relevant, integrated and high-quality content.** The provision of double diploma for Business Environment Administration (BVV) and Business Administration (BV) study programmes (with Jade University of Applied Sciences in Germany, Kokshetau State University in Kazakhstan and Mykolaiv National Agrarian University in Ukraine). The development of joint study courses in the modules Bioeconomics and Eco-entrepreneurship in BVV and BV study programmes (within the framework of projects in cooperation with the University of Arcadia in Finland and Mykolaiv National Agrarian University in Ukraine). On the bachelor's level, to increase the proportion of courses that are taught in English for successful acquisition of a foreign language and for provision of a course offer for international students (up to 10% of the total amount).
2. **To ensure high quality of studies and transfer of international business experience by attracting foreign lecturers in teaching study courses.** The cooperation with visiting professors from Kazakhstan, Belarus and Malta in the framework of projects. The development of joint study courses and modules in Bioeconomy/ Eco-entrepreneurship. The cooperation with Nordic partner universities in the framework of projects. An employment contract concluded with at least two foreign lecturers.
3. **To attract foreign students to the master's study programme in Business Environment Administration.** Lecturer mobility to partner universities in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Partnership projects with Ukrainian and Belarusian partners. The offer of expert

services to partner universities in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Transcaucasia countries in the implementation of the Bologna process and projects. The offer and implementation of joint study courses within the modules Bioeconomics/ Eco-entrepreneurship.

4. To develop international partnerships in order to ensure high quality joint development projects and increase the international experience of lecturers and students. To use the opportunities offered to lecturers by the global business education network BUSINET to improve their qualifications and establish international partnerships, to students – to participate in global business student activities (opportunity to obtain BUSINET certificates (Certificate of International Business Practice - CIBP)). To use the research potential of the lecturers in the doctoral study programme Economics and Entrepreneurship and to ensure the involvement of doctoral students in research projects. To motivate lecturers to become more actively involved in mobility.

5. To activate and increase the mobility of Business Administration students. To take advantage of the global business education network BUSINET. To increase foreign language learning opportunities for bachelor's students by offering a second foreign language and increasing the proportion of courses taught in a foreign language. To use the support of professional associations of entrepreneurs and business in providing foreign internships.

Information technology study field

- 1. To develop a new IT study programme in English** with a specialization in Cyber Security and a specialization in Virtual Reality and Smart Technologies.
- 2. To implement international student attraction measures** in accordance with the developed marketing strategy for attracting foreign students.
- 3. To organize regular international thematic conferences, hackathons and other events.**
- 4. To strengthen cooperation with the existing partners and to develop new partnerships in research** in the current research areas of the Faculty of Engineering - virtual and augmented reality, cyber security, digitalization, mechatronics, etc.
- 5. To promote the mobility of the Faculty of Engineering lecturers and administrative staff** for teaching, upskilling and exchange of experience in foreign partner universities.

Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research (HESPI)

- 1. To expand the cooperation agreements with the existing partner universities that provide doctoral studies in economics and business** to include Erasmus exchanges at the doctoral level. In the next period, the goal is to attract an associate partner from abroad for the new joint doctoral programme in Economics and Business.
- 2. To develop Erasmus cooperation agreements with the universities having developed research in media studies.** The University of Warwick in the United Kingdom (Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies) and the University of Aarhus in Denmark (School of Communication and Culture).
- 3. To provide mobility opportunities for doctoral students regardless of their status: a student or an employee.**

4. To further strengthen cooperation in the existing networks. The Nordplus network on circular economy together with partners from Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia (Liepaja University). The Nordplus network on diversification and development of the rural environment together with partners from Lithuania (main partner Kaunas University of Applied sciences), Finland, Estonia, the expansion of the range of partners from Iceland is planned. At the international level, initiatives have been implemented with sectoral organizations, such as the cooperation agreement with the World Cultural Association. However, in the next stage the cooperation especially with companies in the study process in carrying out research work should be strengthened, incl. in doctoral studies.

5. To continue the established cooperation outside the EU with India, Ukraine, Georgia.

6. To admit foreign researchers, postdoctoral students, doctoral students in HESPI.

Knowledge and Technology Centre (ZTC)

1. To develop international partnerships to ensure high quality joint development projects.

2. To implement regular mobility for experience exchange.

3. To create and offer internationally relevant, integrated and high-quality content and knowledge flows:

a. knowledge and experience acquisition, transfer and sharing (e.g. projects for both ViA capacity building and knowledge enhancement and ViA knowledge transfer to cooperation partners in the European countries and regions outside the Europe; or international/ national/ regional partner workshops and discussions on current processes, activities (knowledge-sharing) and implementation of joint initiatives;

b. in the field of lifelong learning, to develop a joint module to be internationally promoted by creating open online courses (for example, MOOC (Massive open online course)) with the possibility to later integrate them in the study programmes.

4. To promote the development of ViA international environment and the implementation of ViA processes at the international level.

The guidelines for international co-operation set out in ViA strategy include: to develop a cooperation network with universities and research institutes, to implement academic staff exchange visits, guest lectures, various cooperation projects, to promote students' participation in various exchange programmes.

3. HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES UNDERLYING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME

During the next Erasmus period, the project activities will be supported by the following horizontal priorities and include the principles:

- development of digitization in all processes (including Erasmus without papers and the European Student Card initiative, etc.)

During the past year, ViA has investigated and tested the opportunities provided by the European Commission and others and actively participated in different info sessions, seminars and other events related to digitalisation. ViA is actively working on informing all participants (students, staff members) about the possibilities. Mobility students are

encouraged to download the Erasmus+ App during info sessions, individual or group meetings and info letters. Starting from the autumn semester 2020, the Online Learning Agreement (OLA) for all outgoing students (studies and/ or internships) is compulsory by registering their mobilities in the Erasmus dashboard platform. All involved staff is informed in advance, and consultations with staff and students will take place, if necessary. ViA is also receiving incoming student nominations and OLAs via the dashboard systems. First OLAs were already created and/ or signed during the academic year 2019/2020.

ViA International Office has tested the IIA manager – possibility to sign inter-institutional agreements digitally via the dashboard system. As soon as it will be launched officially, all the necessary partnership agreements will be updated and signed digitally.

During the new programming period, ViA aims at doing detailed research and actively gets involved in the European Student Card initiative. As the process of possible digitalisation of the existing ViA student card is taking place at the university, ViA is actively researching possibilities to merge the local student card with the European Student Card creating one e-Id for all the students.

ViA will continuously participate in info sessions and possible testings, will join all possible activities related to the process of digitalisation within the Erasmus programme ensuring that all the possibilities are also actively used.

- blended mobility

Provision of high-quality blended learning activities enables more flexible and accessible learning to improve the skills of people working in the industry. It involves innovative blended learning courses connected with the development of digital online resources and intensive study programmes integrated into the study courses. The blended learning mobilities are not only about online and offline learning periods, but also about pedagogical innovation in the delivery methods. Overall it is intended to strengthen the education offer in blended learning contexts by also ensuring that more participants gain international experience.

- equal opportunities

For ViA it is important to maintain a high quality in the organization of student mobility by ensuring equal academic treatment and services to incoming and outgoing students. Each incoming student is registered in ViA for the period of study and will be treated in the same way as local students. Incoming students won't be charged any tuition fees. The transcript of records and other documents are issued for all students. Study/ placement periods under the Erasmus framework within the EU and outside the EU are receiving full academic recognition.

ViA has put forward a principle to increase the mobility of its personnel as well as the mobility of students in all cycles (1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle). ViA is committed to offer male and female students and staff, as well as disabled students and staff, equal opportunities to participate in the Erasmus or other international activities by also non-discriminating based on any other categories. The aim of this principle is to remove or at least decrease the obstacles which may prevent students and staff members from participating in mobility activities. Students are equally encouraged to participate either in studies or internships abroad according to their preferences, their curriculum and their own ambitions.

- support for those with fewer opportunities

ViA implements these principles by ensuring that information about projects and mobilities is public, available for all students and staff, the application for mobility participants is possible for everyone, it ensures selection by criteria (set before for students and staff), the selection is documented (meeting minutes). In case of equal results, preference is given to students with less favourable socio-economic conditions and those who have not used mobility opportunities before. In order to encourage applicants with special needs and difficult circumstances to apply, when announcing the application round, the information about additional financial support is provided. The university premises in Tērbatas street 10 and Ausekļa street 25a are suitable for people with mobility impairments.

- promotion of environmentally friendly initiatives

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences founded an Eco-council in 2012 (in the Institute of Social, Economic and Humanities Research - HESPI). Its main objective is the organisation and management of public activities of Eco-universities and the coordination of ecological activities in ViA and around it. The role of the Eco-council is to coordinate the management activities, events, projects, etc. of ViA so that they are as friendly as possible towards the environment, human health, as well as focusing on the basic principles of ecological activities, promoting the understanding of sustainable development in higher education and the surrounding community. The promotion of environmentally friendly activities is also applied throughout the Erasmus programme and other programmes and projects. The students and staff involved are informed about the activities and apply them within their mobilities, when planning and implementing projects and events.

- promotion of civic engagement

ViA organizes different formal and informal Erasmus info days, where also outgoing and incoming students are invited to participate with a presentation informing about the Erasmus programme, its opportunities and sharing their experiences and mobility results. In this way the students participate in discussions, question-answer sessions and motivate others to participate. During their mobilities, ViA students often choose to write their own public blogs or create vlogs which are available to others. They become student ambassadors of the programme and its results.

Staff is encouraged to share the international experience in their monthly meetings of the respective study field or department. Some teachers organize a public presentation for all the university employees on specific topics or countries, which are less represented in the general mobilities. All the staff members actively apply the gained international experience either by teaching classes, doing research, working in the projects or organizing everyday activities in the university. The knowledge of the international context in the professional field is very valuable as the basis of discussions on the current trends with the university stakeholders, for example, media, companies, and municipalities.

The students who have been on Erasmus mobility tend to be more actively involved in events, especially the international events, as well as in hosting incoming international students to gain more international experience. ViA students apply to be mentors for incoming foreign students voluntarily. After mentoring or participating in events, the students also tend to be more interested in going abroad, international communication, other cultures and are more open. The students are actively involved in different international events organized by ViA - Baltic International Summer School, International Weeks, etc. Incoming students are involved in the local community through the practical

tasks within the course Latvian Language and Culture. ViA encourages its students to be more active while abroad as well.

ViA has two student-managed and student-oriented organizations - the Student Union with a separate international activities section and Erasmus Student Network Valmiera (ESN Valmiera) that students can join (also the incoming international students) and organize different local events and activities inviting also international students to be more active.

All the other principles included in the signed Declaration of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and set by the European Commission and the Erasmus programme will also be respected, communicated and applied.

4. INTERNAL QUALITY CONTROL OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND ERASMUS PROGRAMME: INDICATORS, CRITERIA, PROPOSALS

In order to evaluate the internationalization activities and implementation of the Erasmus programme, ViA has defined a set of various indicators, as well as criteria for assessing the partnerships and proposals for work with international partners.

The indicators to be achieved in an international partnership, evaluation and plans of ViA and particular study fields and departments are the number of partnership I and partnership II, ViA student mobility and mobility of foreign students (studies and internships), mobility of ViA and foreign lecturers (guest lectures and exchange of experience), mobility of ViA and foreign general staff (exchange of experience), 2+2 SP, joint/common projects, joint publications of foreign and ViA researchers, international scientific conferences, percentage of full degree foreign students and percentage of ViA graduates who have acquired international experience.

Detailed information on the indicators and the results are summarized in Annex 1 of this document.

The following criteria are used to assess the quality of the partnerships:

- Number of student mobilities
- Number of lecturer and researcher mobility
- Possible demand of ViA outgoing students and interest in the university of destination; possible demand of incoming students to study at ViA
- Compatibility of partner institutions (fields of study, extent of courses in English, availability of information and website, level of support services, attractiveness of destination or study content, etc.)
- Number of jointly implemented projects, activities, programmes
- Conformity with ViA internationalization guidelines
- Conformity with the strategies of faculties and the development plans, goals and achievement of study results of the study fields
- Benefits of ViA, faculties and study fields
- Risks associated with the partnership
- Available resources for maintaining partnerships and activities
- Diversity of the represented regions

International partnerships are evaluated at the faculty level once a year before the preparation of the self-assessment report of the study field.

Proposals for work with international partners:

- to carry out an annual evaluation of international partners and cooperation;

- when planning Erasmus mobility within the EU and outside the EU, to consider the tasks of the study programme marketing strategy for cooperation with foreign partners and to include relevant activities in planning the lecturer mobility agenda;
- to expand the number of partners and forms of cooperation within Partnership I;
- to create 2 + 2 or 1+1 double degree programmes for attracting foreign students;
- to increase the number of ViA students going on exchange studies and / or internships;
- to provide foreign experience for all students by offering exchange studies, foreign internships, intensive weeks, virtual mobility, etc.

Gatis Krūmiņš

Rector

Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

