Erasmus Charter for Higher Education awarded by the European Commission, selection year 2014
The University of Tartu’s Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS) for 2014-2020

The University of Tartu’s (UT’s) strategy for internationalisation encompasses relations both within and outside of the EU. The strategic plan currently being written for the next period (2014-2020) will contain a separate chapter devoted to internationalisation, in line with both national and EU funding programmes and UT’s objectives. Several goals defined by the Strategic Plan directly support the principles of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (2014-2020). These include aims to:

IN INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

1. Improve the quality of UT’s core activities and the competitiveness of the University’s members by developing internationalisation of the environment in which UT’s core activities take place and supporting international staff mobility;
2. Develop UT and the City of Tartu into attractive, internationally competitive places for working and living, including the engagement of top international specialists in efforts to achieve the goals of the Estonian R&D and Innovation Policy for 2014-2020;
3. Strengthen the effects of international partnerships on UT’s reputation and development of research cooperation by defining key strategic partners and priorities for regional cooperation;

IN TEACHING DEVELOPMENT:

4. Raise the attractiveness of UT as an international study destination, setting quality and sustainability as prerequisites for development of English-language teaching and curricula;
5. Strengthen UT’s reputation, strategically developing regional and disciplinary cooperation networks;
6. Prepare students for work and communication in multicultural settings by supporting the development of their awareness, attitudes and values as well as student mobility;
7. Guarantee the international visibility and quality of UT’s graduate studies by participating in international graduate study networks and recruiting talented international students.

Specific goals which have been defined for the current development period include international student mobility (to be increased by 30%, incoming and outgoing) and staff mobility. A goal has been set of increasing the percentage of international staff to 5%; this has already been surpassed in the current period. Alongside national priorities, UT has prioritised the mobility of upper-cycle students in order to ensure that all students are given the opportunity for international study, and that the mobility results in improved quality of studies and research.

Partners are chosen based on academic quality and mutual strategic goals, at various levels. Academic structural units choose their own partners, but the general principles of strategic partnerships on every level are the same: cooperation may be formalised with partners with whom there is mutual interest in substantive cooperation, e.g. student and staff exchange, joint
initiatives; mutual knowledge about compatibility and quality of studies; and, preferably, interest among more than one cooperation partner at UT.

Currently the focus in institutional bilateral partnerships is on partners outside the EU, particularly with partners in former republics of the Soviet Union, including Russia, in addition to partners of equal or higher academic standing in Asia and North America. Within the EU, we encourage partnerships based on Erasmus agreements as well as intensified cooperation with strategic partners in northern Europe and the Baltic Sea Region, and the development of consortia with older partners in order to facilitate cooperation with more distant and less familiar partners, especially in Southeast and East Asia.

UT is an active member in several international networks, including membership in the Coimbra Group of Universities, the Utrecht Network, the European University Association and the Baltic Sea Region University Network, in which we are a founding member. We are also members of ISEP. These networks are of strategic significance for facilitating student mobility within and beyond the EU and the exchange of experience and good practice in the internationalisation of higher education. The Utrecht Network enables student mobility with Australian and Midwestern American universities, and enhances the professional development of our employees. Our participation in Erasmus Mundus Action 2 projects has also been boosted through cooperation within these networks.

UT participates in several international and national joint study programmes. Most of our joint programmes are taught in English, and international ones are supported by the Erasmus Mundus programme. Joint programmes have grown out of productive, long-term cooperation with our European partners. UT provides central administrative support for establishing joint programmes and the internal rules for opening a new programme also include guiding principles specific to joint programmes. UT implements Cotutelle agreements to foster cooperation with research universities through the joint supervision of PhD candidates.

**UT’s strategy for the organisation and implementation of international cooperation projects in teaching and training in relation to projects implemented under the Programme**

UT’s strategic approach to developing cooperation projects involves first guaranteeing the necessary conditions for supporting participation in teaching, research and development projects, including offering support for project coordination, management and information exchange. The offices responsible for disseminating information on the calls for various projects are the Academic Affairs, R&D and Personnel Offices.

Academic units which are more active and engaged in international cooperation are approached individually to inquire about, encourage and support their interest and readiness to initiate a cooperative project of high quality. If a unit is willing to take up the coordinating position in a project, UT’s central project team assists in writing the proposal, working with partners and keeping track of the project details, including the budget. In case UT is invited to cooperate as a partner, academic units can also rely on project management assistance from central offices. Projects related to student mobility promoting Europe, Estonia and UT as an academically motivating study destination either for degree or credits are administered
To improve the competitiveness and quality of cooperation, UT encourages its staff to undertake additional training.

In expanding existing projects or launching new ones, such as those within Erasmus Mundus and Tempus, UT makes an effort to involve partners from regions with which we have long-term partnership and familiarity, such as Russia and other former Soviet republics.

For the coming period, UT sees a need to make short-term mobility projects more available to students of partner institutions outside Europe where semester mobility may not be feasible due to finance or study programme restrictions.

The expected impact of the participation in the Programme on the modernisation of UT in terms of the policy objectives you intend to achieve

UT’s policy objectives are well aligned with those of the Modernisation Agenda of Europe’s Higher Education. The points described here will enhance the quality of European education and research and more specifically that of UT’s education and research.

Participation in the Programme is expected to increase the attractiveness of UT’s study programmes and the motivation of our students to complete them. By facilitating mobility as a well-integrated option offered in our curricula, we allow more students to benefit from international experience as well as making study abroad more realistic for a greater number of students at all levels. Offering diverse and academically compatible study abroad programmes in all of our faculties and running a well-functioning system of credit transfer encourages students to plan a period of mobility in their studies and motivates students to make use of the mobility options without fear of impeding their academic progress. This aim is also supported by new, more flexible, national regulations which allow mobile students additional time to complete their programmes.

It is of utmost importance to the development of teaching quality that teaching staff have and make use of opportunities for self-development. These include various supplementary training courses and time spent abroad. UT has prioritised the training of teaching staff in offering language courses and courses dedicated to various teaching competencies such as teaching in a multicultural classroom, students with special needs and others. Development of interactive teaching, e-courses and online teaching materials is supported both at UT and by national programmes. UT also encourages the use of sabbaticals abroad by covering replacement costs and providing extra funding for the international mobility. Research periods abroad are taken into account at recruitment and in evaluation of teaching staff.

UT sees the incorporation of greater cross-border cooperation into study programmes and graduate schools as an important means of improving our education performance. This includes not only mobility but also jointly developed short-term study programmes, joint supervision, and international training opportunities.

UT has set a goal of becoming an “entrepreneurial university” as one of its development priorities of the next period, alongside quality in research and teaching. This means (1) facilitating university-enterprise relations and the development of university spin-offs; (2) incorporating innovation and entrepreneurial attitudes and skills into curricula; (3) enforcing
the requirement that every curricula include a practical traineeship for building students’ experience, skills and future employability. The “knowledge triangle” between education, research and business, supported by the Programme is crucial in achieving this goal. UT plans to encourage the development of international traineeships in particular, especially with partners in neighbouring countries.

Signed by Martin Hallik,
Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs

May 2013, Tartu, Estonia