ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI (SF HELSINK01)

As in the application for Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 05/2013

Please describe your institution’s international (EU and non-EU) strategy. In your description please explain a) how you choose your partners, b) in which geographical area(s) and c) the most important objectives and target groups of your mobility activities (with regard to staff and students in first, second and third cycles, including study and training, and short cycles). If applicable, also explain how your institution participates in the development of double/multiple/joint degrees. (max. 5000 characters)

The University of Helsinki selects its European and non-EU partners first and foremost based on quality. As a research-led university, UH seeks partnerships with leading institutions globally, but also pays attention to the linguistic and cultural diversity of its partnerships. Under the Programme the faculties, departments and other academic units of UH have a freedom of choosing their partners among eligible institutions, but there are institutional quality guidelines helping them to determine the most suitable partners. These guidelines are reviewed in training sessions and are available in the UH intranet. Outside the Programme the central authority exercises strict quality control for extra-European partnerships.

As a leading research-led university, the University of Helsinki has chosen not to select any specific geographic areas for international partnerships. The prevailing idea is to engage with the best possible partners regardless of their home country in order to add as much value to international co-operation as possible. Naturally, the University has some historical, cultural and linguistic considerations when choosing partners, and it recognises, for example, the growing importance of the so-called BRIC countries. These considerations, however, are secondary to finding the best partners both institutionally and from the point of view of the relevant academic unit(s). The most fruitful partnerships are most often built on prior academic co-operation and collaboration, and this is also taken into account when selecting new partners. Exchange agreements are concluded only with universities that have an operating culture and profile that supports UH’s strategic objectives.

The University of Helsinki is a member in two key institutional organisations: the European Association of Universities (EUA) and the International Association of Universities (IAU). The University is also a founding member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU). Other institutional networks the University belongs to are Universities in the Capitals of Europe
In addition to institutional organisations and networks, the University of Helsinki has an extensive list of co-operation agreements and projects. In terms of volume the most important internal target groups for mobility activities continue to be first and second cycle students. The University of Helsinki already meets the European target of reaching 20% student participation, and is very close to reaching the numeric student mobility goals set by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The challenge for the new Programme period is therefore not to increase the overall numbers, but rather to enhance the qualitative aspects of mobility, including credit transfer. Moreover, UH attempts to reach a better balance between academic disciplines when it comes to mobility, as not all individual faculties reach the 20% target.

When it comes to international mobility, third-cycle students’ and faculty members’ interests are not best served through actions provided by the Programme. Whereas the University continues to provide opportunities for these groups as well, it is clear that other European programmes (H2020, Marie Curie) will be more attractive to them and be more widely used by them. In order to offer as wide opportunities as possible for mobility participation the University will continue the existing practice of topping-up mobility grants from its own funds.

The University of Helsinki has participated in double/multiple/joint degrees in a fairly cautious manner recognising many unresolved legal and administrative hurdles that still exist both nationally and also at the European level. It has recently become apparent that the overly strict interpretation of tuition fees in Finland, for example, rules out many potential joint initiatives. UH has nonetheless adopted common guidelines for participating in joint degree programmes, and these have been made available through the intranet as well as in various training sessions.

**If applicable, please describe your institution's strategy for the organisation and implementation of international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training in relation to projects implemented under the Programme. (max. 2000 characters)**

As already stated above, the University of Helsinki has adopted a centralised approach to participating in international cooperation projects outside mobility actions. This pertains to projects under the Programme as well as other international projects. The heads of departments and the deans of faculties have formally been given the right to sign applications, agreements and reports and it is thus their responsibility to make sure that the projects are well-founded and within the priorities of their units. The central offices disseminate information related to projects and offer some support services, e.g. financial administration, but for the most part, the departments and faculties are the key players.

The new non-EU possibilities will be of specific interest to the University of Helsinki but at the time of writing this, it is too early to tell if they will become significant.

**Please explain the expected impact of your participation in the Programme on the modernisation of your institution (for each of the 5 priorities of the Modernisation Agenda*) in terms of the policy objectives you intend to achieve. (max. 3000 characters)**

All Finnish universities underwent a thorough university reform in 2010 and this reform was partly founded on the ideals also present in the Modernisation Agenda (MA). The University of Helsinki has subsequently taken several steps further and considers itself to be in a very good position when it comes to the five priorities of the MA. Increasing attainment levels, improving the quality and
relevance of higher education, strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation, making the knowledge triangle work, and improving the governance and funding have all been addressed in the current strategy of the University of Helsinki.

Regarding the Key Policy Issues for higher education institutions stated in the MA, the University of Helsinki believes the Programme to be especially significant in introducing incentives for professional development, given that UH has an extensive open university and continuing education units. The University of Helsinki will also consider possibilities of building learning mobility more systematically into curricula and thereby increasing participation in some of the currently underrepresented fields of study. Moreover, special emphasis will be given to improving the processes and procedures for credit transfer in order for exchange participants to be able to expect full recognition even before their mobility period.

With the increased participation of non-EU/EEA countries in the Programme the issues of visas and residence permits have become even more important than they have been in the past. UH will continue an open dialogue with relevant government agencies in order to abolish current obstacles to extra-European mobility.

Finally, UH considers traineeships as a vital part of the Programme in linking it closer to students’ labour market / professional orientation, as well as to labour market, business and industry.