

Erasmus Policy Statement for 2021-2027: Strategy of Ansgar University College and Theological Seminary

Introduction and objectives

Ansgar University College and Theological Seminary (AUCTS) traces its roots back to 1913 as a denominational training school for church workers in Norway and abroad. Internationalisation is thus a core value which has characterized AUCTS since its foundation.

During the last decades AUCTS has grown to a well-established privately owned Higher education institution in Norway, recognized by the Ministry of Education and Research, with around 330 enrolled students and 40 members of staff including a faculty of professors, associate and assistant professors, offering education in three subject areas: theology, music, and psychology.

AUCTS has participated in the Erasmus+ programme since 2014. During this period, AUCTS has chosen to develop strategic co-operation in the framework of Erasmus+ with a number of partners of similar size and profile in Europe (Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) that offer programmes and courses in corresponding subject areas. We intend to renew the partnerships with these institutions in the new Erasmus programme 2021–2027 (hereafter Programme) and also to seek new partners (we are currently in contact with Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands to establish co-operation).

Participation in the Programme is a significant step to achieve the key challenges of the internationalisation and modernisation of our institution and, thus, to contribute to the goals of the European Higher Education Area. Therefore, the most important objective in our internationalisation and modernisation strategy for 2020 is to apply for a renewed ECHE to be able to participate in the Programme. We believe that participation will contribute to the modernisation of our institution, in particular the implementation of the priorities in terms of digital mobility management, environmentally friendly practices, educational and professional development of individuals with fewer opportunities. We recognize that these are areas where there is room for development and improvement at our institution.

The new opportunity for short-term mobilities in combination with virtual exchange/blended learning in co-operation with two other European partner institutions will undoubtedly modernise our education, enhancing competencies of our teaching and administrative staff to work in an international setting and to adopt innovative ICT tools. We envisage that this will also widen participation of underrepresented groups, including students who cannot go on traditional long exchanges abroad, so that more students may get an international experience. We think this will facilitate the important goal of the European Education Area, that spending time abroad to study and learn become the norm for students. We further anticipate that virtual exchanges will facilitate the linking of internationalisation-abroad and internationalisation-at-home activities.

Objectives of our participation in the Programme

1. Long-term objectives of the institution

The long-term objectives for mobility and cooperation activities in the Programme are:

- a. to maintain and develop strategic co-operation with other HEIs in Europe;
- b. to promote mobility of staff and students, in particular for individuals with fewer

- opportunities, through the Programme;
- c. to abide by and further develop non-discrimination policies;
 - d. to continue to offer joint courses and modules with European partners;
 - e. to develop new opportunities for short-term mobility in combination with virtual/blended mobility with two other partner HEIs, primarily in a course module in the master programme in theology;
 - f. to develop new mastercourses offered in English;
 - g. to promote environmentally friendly practices in all activities related to the Erasmus programme;
 - h. to implement digital mobility management in line with the technical standards of the European Student Card Initiative;
 - i. to recognise the importance of, and provide visibility to, the results achieved by our staff members engaged in individual mobility;
 - j. to take into account the results of internal monitoring of European and international mobility and cooperation activities to date, thus further improving our international performance; and
 - k. to contribute to the goal of building a European Education Area.

2. Objectives of the student mobility

The key objectives of the mobility activities of students in the Programme are:

- a. to improve participants' key competences for lifelong learning and increase their employability in the European labour market and beyond;
- b. to improve their language skills and digital skills;
- c. to increase their self-empowerment and self-esteem;
- d. to improve their intercultural awareness, giving them the opportunity to build networks of international contacts;
- e. to promote their civic engagement and active citizenship in society before, during and after participation in a mobility; and
- f. to strengthen their identity as a European and increase their knowledge of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity.

3. Objectives of the staff mobility

The key objectives of the mobility activities of staff in the Programme are:

- a. to uphold and develop relationships between colleagues in partner institutions;
- b. to enable two-way transfer of knowledge of good practices in education;
- c. to provide faculty and staff with new experience of teaching and administration in another country and culture;
- d. to enhance and modernize teaching, in particular improve digital skills and the overall quality of teaching;
- e. to support the professional development of faculty and staff; and
- f. to enhance the foreign language competence of participants.

Erasmus actions, their implementation and contribution to achieving the objectives

As a small HEI we intend primarily to take part in **Key Action 1 – Learning mobility of individuals** as we have done successfully in the current Erasmus+ programme. It is possible

that we will also take part in Key Action 2 – Cooperation among organisations and institutions at a later stage, but then we will amend this EPS in consultation with our Erasmus National Agency.

After the award of the ECHE we will publish, within one month, the Charter and this Erasmus Policy Statement on our website with a link to the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform (a place has been assigned) and make sure to communicate the principles of the Charter to staff and students. There will be a special Erasmus+ information day on campus in October/November 2020 about the opportunities of the new Programme for both staff and students (alternatively, if campus is still closed, this will be arranged digitally), and success stories from previous mobilities by students and staff will be shared.

The relevant information and supporting documents about all opportunities of the Programme (as well as the priorities) will be published on the webpage (as will this EPS and the ECHE) where there is currently information about Erasmus+ (<https://ansgarhogskole.no/student/utveksling/eu-og-erasmus>).

The Erasmus co-ordinator will further ensure that the principles of the Charter is incorporated into all the standard documents of the institution. All supporting documents, routines and tools for Key Action 1 will thus be updated and as in the current Erasmus+ programme, we will continue to use the templates provided by the European Commission to make sure that all documents meet the requirements. The Erasmus co-ordinator will lead the implementation of the digital mobility management tools (European Student Card initiative) as soon as they are made available (**objectives 1h, 1k**). The ECHE Guidelines will be made available on the intranet of the institution and accessible for all staff responsible for the implementation of the Programme and internationalisation strategy.

The Erasmus co-ordinator together with the principal and academic dean will work to renew the current inter-institutional agreements under the new Programme (provided that the partner institutions have been awarded an ECHE) online through the Inter-Institutional Agreement Manager (**objective 1a**). In this connection, we will maintain strategic co-operation with the following HEIs of similar size and profile: Örebro School of Theology (Sweden), Evangelische Hochschule Tabor (Germany), Protestantse Theologische Universiteit (the Netherlands), and London School of Theology (United Kingdom, provided that they participate in the Programme). We will also seek new partners, specifically we will attempt to establish an inter-institutional agreement with Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands to establish co-operation in the Programme.

In the coming period we intend to successively increase the mobility of staff and students, in particular short-term mobility in combination with virtual exchange (**objectives 2-3**). We will strive to make the international experience of at least one short-term mobility the norm for each student (**objective 1b**). We will promote environmentally friendly travel options and implement digital mobility management in line with the technical standards of the European Student Card Initiative (**objectives 1g-h, 1k**).

In the first year, the school management will appoint a task force to develop and implement short-term mobility (a minimum study period of 5 days abroad in a course module of at least 3 ECTS) in combination with virtual exchange/blended learning in co-operation with two partner institutions in Sweden and the Netherlands (or the UK), primarily in a course offered in English in the master programme in theology (**objectives 1d-f**).

The Erasmus co-ordinator will have the main responsibility for the implementation of KA 1 – Learning mobility for individuals, which has worked well in the current Erasmus+ programme, and will thus ensure that AUCTS honors the commitment in this application to follow all the Erasmus Charter Principles before, during and after mobility.

Each academic year, as soon as funding is granted, Erasmus+ grants for students will be announced with instructions to apply including criteria for selection and last date of application. The applicants will have an option to disclose that they have fewer opportunities for participation, including eligibility for additional financial support. The Erasmus co-ordinator, the study counselor and the academic dean will make up the committee to evaluate the applications. Criteria for the selection will be academic ability, proficiency in English language (not necessary for exchange in Sweden) and personal character. However, priority will be given to new participants and to individuals with fewer opportunities (**objective 1b**).

Within three weeks after last application date, the committee will present the student(s) who will be awarded grants with motivations stated. Unsuccessful applicants will receive clear feedback on why they were not selected.

The co-ordinator will then work in close contact with the Erasmus+ student, the student counselor and the financial office, as well as with the responsible person(s) at the receiving institution abroad to plan the mobility in detail (the type of learning mobility will be adapted to the profile and expectations of the participants and the learning objectives), and prepare the student and make sure that he or she meets the necessary linguistic proficiency (the student will complete a diagnostic language test online). The necessary agreements will be drawn up online (Grant Agreement, Learning Agreement/Training Agreement) and signed, and the co-ordinator will ensure that the receiving institution provides a Certificate of Attendance and a Transcript of Records, and that the participant student delivers a participant report after the completion of the mobility.

The co-ordinator will further make sure that there is proof of payment of the Erasmus grant and that there is full recognition of all credits gained during the period of study/training abroad, including during blended mobility. During or after the mobility, the student will be invited to share their experiences, e.g., in a special event on campus (connecting with the student abroad on-line), on an Erasmus day or in the school bulletin and other channels. The student will be encouraged to include the achievement in their CV (**objectives 2a-f**).

The co-ordinator will also have main responsibility for incoming students and work closely with study counselor, academic dean and the manager of the student housing and the Student Union representative to ensure that practicalities are arranged well in advanced. Incoming students will be provided with housing and taken well care of during their period of study at AUCTS.

Incoming students will be welcomed and receive an orientation week with various activities organised by the school and Student Union including an oral introduction to studies at AUCTS and a tour on campus. Incoming students will receive assistance by a local student (according to a buddy system) as well as an academic mentor from the faculty. Incoming students (and staff) will be informed that the school chaplain is specially designated to deal with social and psychological questions that they might have. There is information about the school and campus on the webpage (<https://ansgarhogskole.no/om-skolen/information-in-english>) and AUCTS

expects all partners to provide equivalent information. Outgoing and incoming students will be encouraged to download and use the Erasmus+ mobile App for step-by-step guidance (<https://erasmusapp.eu/>).

To ensure that everything works well for outgoing as well as incoming students on mobility, the Erasmus co-ordinator or study counselor will make contact with the students at least every second week (more frequently at the start) to see that everything works in regard to the learning process, and social and practical matters throughout their study period to provide guidance and defuse any problems. If necessary, the Erasmus co-ordinator will contact the co-ordinator at the receiving institution in order to resolve problems.

Each academic year, as soon as funding is granted, the Erasmus+ co-ordinator will announce to the staff and teaching faculty that there are stipends for staff teaching and training assignments at our partner institutions, along with instructions to apply including criteria for selection and last date of application. Applicants will have the option to disclose that they have fewer opportunities for participation, including eligibility for additional financial support. The principal, academic dean and Erasmus co-ordinator will form a committee to evaluate applications according to specific criteria which has been communicated to applicants beforehand (meeting the deadline, making sure that the application form is completed and signed; approval of a host institution; academic and pedagogical abilities, language proficiency; quality of work plan/teaching programme; relevance of work plan/teaching programme to the applicant's professional development and performance). Preferably, stipends will be awarded in each of the three taught subject areas. Priority will be given to teachers and staff who lack international experience and to individuals with fewer opportunities (**objective 1b**). Unsuccessful applicants will receive clear feedback on why they were not selected.

After this selection, the Erasmus co-ordinator will have direct contact with awarded staff and faculty as well as with the responsible person(s) at the host institution abroad, to make sure that agreements for each assignment are drawn up and signed (digitally online), and that the staff receives a Certificate of Attendance from the receiving institution, that the staff delivers a participant report, and that there is proof of payment of the stipend. After the mobility, the staff will be invited to share various aspects of their experience of the mobility, e.g., in faculty meetings, on an Erasmus day or in the school bulletin and other channels. The staff will be encouraged to include the achievement in their CV (**objectives 1i, 3a-f**).

Each mobility activity will be evaluated on the individual level through the participant report, and, annually, on the institutional level with special focus on (a) developing good practices for future cooperation; and (b) evaluating how the mobility in both directions has enriched the participants; (c) how it has affected the academic profile of the involved institutions; (d) how it has contributed to the modernisation and internationalisation of the institution; and (e) how well the new fundamental principles of the Programme have been implemented.

Further, the ECHE self-assessment tool will be used at the end of each year as the internationalization strategy is revised by a committee made up of the principal, the academic dean and the Erasmus co-ordinator (**objective 1j**).

Envisaged impact of participation in the Programme, targets and indicators

We want to maintain our established international cooperation in Europe and will renew inter-institutional agreements online (through the Inter-Institutional Agreement Manager) with four HEIs: Örebro School of Theology (Sweden), Evangelische Hochschule Tabor (Germany),

Protestantse Theologische Universiteit (the Netherlands), and London School of Theology (UK, provided that they participate in the Programme). We are currently working to establish one additional new inter-institutional agreement with Vrije Universiteit (the Netherlands) as soon as possible. This is a particularly strategic partner since we are already involved together in a joint research project in the subject area of Theology.

A minimum of two teachers (preferably from different subject areas for teaching assignments for at least two days each) or other staff (for training one week), and two students (for a study period of one semester each) will be recruited for a mobility activity abroad in the first academic year 2021/22 to any of the above European partners. We will attempt to send at least one teacher (in theology) or staff to Vrije Universiteit and to receive one incoming teacher or other staff from Vrije Universiteit in the first year. We will attempt to alternate sending teachers/other staff to our various partners each year. Further, we will encourage partner institutions to continue to send staff and students to our institution to the same degree.

In 2022/2023 we will aim to recruit three teachers (preferably one from each subject area for teaching assignment for at least two days each), one other staff (training) and two students for long-term mobility (one semester or one year each) to our various partner institutions. In successive years, we will attempt to slightly increase this level of activities for the duration of the Programme (see table below with timeline).

In particular, we will encourage applications (in all mobility activities) from individuals with fewer opportunities, for either economic, social, cultural, geographical, health reasons or for reasons such as disability or educational difficulties.

The specific targets for the new opportunity of short-term mobility (minimum of 5 days) are: (a) to offer one such course module (minimum 3 ECTS) annually (from 2022/23); (b) to recruit 15 outgoing students on an annual basis for this course (from 2022/23 throughout the duration of the Programme); (c) to encourage individuals with fewer opportunities in particular to participate in this course; (d) to offer this course in English and open it up for external second-cycle students from other future partners.

If this mobility activity becomes successful, we will attempt to develop two similar courses with integrated short-term mobility in the bachelor programmes of music (including a study period at London School of Theology in the UK, or an alternative partner in case they do not participate) and psychology (including a study period at Evangelische Hochschule in Germany), respectively, to be offered from 2023/24 and onwards. Our target from 2023/24 is to recruit 30 students, and from 2024/25 to recruit 45 students (15 from each subject area) for short-term mobilities in combination with virtual exchange/blended learning throughout the duration of the Programme.

The table below displays a timeline for quantitative targets of mobilities related to Erasmus+ KA 1.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Staff mobility (teaching assignments)	2 x \geq 2 days	3 x \geq 2 days	3 x \geq 2 days	4 x \geq 2 days	4 x \geq 2 days	5 x \geq 2 days	5 x \geq 2 days

Staff mobility (training)	1 x 5 days						
Student mobility (long-term)	2 x ≈180 days	2 x ≈180 days	3 x ≈180 days	3 x ≈180 days	4 x ≈180 days	4 x ≈180 days	4 x ≈180 days
Student mobility (short-term with virtual exchange)	development	15 x ≥5 days	30 x ≥5 days	45 x ≥5 days			

The Erasmus co-ordinator or study counselor will make contact with each outgoing and incoming student on long-term mobility at least every second week (see above). Incoming students will receive an oral introduction to studies at AUCTS including a tour on campus. Incoming students are expected, as all regular students, to fill in course evaluations after each completed course. This will be important indicators to assess students' learning outcomes (although not on the individual level since these evaluations are anonymous). Conversely, we expect outgoing students to fill in anonymous course evaluations at the partner institution which we will ask institutions to share. At the end of the mobility, we will give feedback to host institutions based on participant reports of outgoing students and, conversely, we will ask partner institutions for feedback concerning incoming students.

Throughout the duration of the Programme, we will encourage environmentally friendly travel options for outgoing staff and students. Our specific target is that at least 50% of the travels in the mobility activities should be by train or other environmentally friendly means.

Another target is to organize one annual Erasmus day on campus to inform about the opportunities and to communicate success stories from participants (students and staff) in the current Erasmus+ programme. The first Erasmus day will be held in October or November 2020 to introduce the new Programme.

During each long-term student mobility in the Programme we will attempt to connect digitally (e.g., on Skype or Zoom) with the student abroad online during "Gerda's café" on campus for an interview about the exchange, in order to promote the Programme and recruit new students. Similarly, we will seek opportunity to interview incoming students during "Gerda's café" on campus about their experience of the study period. We will seek to publish interviews and success stories in the printed and digital school bulletin "Ansgarmagasinet," in social media and other channels. A further target is to ensure that each staff who participated are invited to share their experience in at least one forum (e.g., in faculty meetings, on an Erasmus day or in the school bulletin and other channels).

This Erasmus Policy Statement has been formulated in dialogue between management, staff and student representatives.