

Centria University of Applied Sciences

Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-2027

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency.

What would you like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does your participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into your institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

(Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area¹ and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

Centria University of Applied Sciences is an international higher education institution, with a large international student population, an active international network of partners, with whom we implement exchanges of students and staff, carry out research and development projects and develop the learning. Internationalization forms an integral part of our main functions, as internationalization is integrated in both teaching and in research and development, as well as in the general administration of Centria. By participating in the Erasmus programme we aim in the first place at internationalizing the learning, but also the research and development and the administration. In this context it means providing our students with exchange and work placement opportunities abroad, through which they can develop global competences. For our staff members it means opportunities to participate in international education and to establish professional international networks and partnerships that enrich the learning, the research and development and the administration at Centria, and opportunities for professional development. As we continuously aim at developing and internationalizing the learning, inbound student and staff mobility are seen as extremely valuable actions for furthering these purposes.

The importance of internationalisation is reflected in our latest strategy, the Centria 2021-2024 (2030) Strategy, which defines internationalization as one of our key projects. The learning at Centria shall highlight internationalisation and enhance the development of global competences among students and staff. Students, teachers, researchers and administrators are supported and encouraged to participate in international mobility and cooperation projects and to link with, and invite colleagues from partner institutions to teach in our programs, to participate in our projects and to cooperate in order to disseminate best practices, that support the internationalization of all functions. In this respect, the Centria Strategy builds upon the *Policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish Higher Education and Research 2017-2025* adopted by the Finnish Ministry of Education, which states that "International interaction and mobility to and from Finland will foster diversity in education and research". All higher education institutions are also expected to ensure that this really takes place, by having a clear set of aims and supporting measures for internationalization. Furthermore, "Finland's higher education institutions will expand their international mobility arrangements and ensure that such periods at home and abroad (incl. exchange programs) are planned and realistic and can therefore be incorporated in students' studies and in the work of staff."

In order to implement the strategy and enhance the learning of global competences, Centria has set goals for increasing both outbound and inbound mobility and all degree programs have international plans of actions, where they define program specific mobility options and internationalisation@home possibilities. Participation in the Erasmus program is crucial for furthering these goals and implementing the strategy. The Erasmus program also plays an important role in the modernization of Centria, as we also seek to collaborate

and exchange good practices with our international partners for implementing modernization actions. Modernization is an ongoing process, and affects all main functions. The development of the digital learning environments is highlighted in the strategy, and Centria also seeks to modernize the administration of exchanges by adopting new digital tools. Centria is committed to gradually start implementing digital projects such as Erasmus Without paper, and the European Student Card Initiative. Centria is also intensifying the efforts to develop the opportunities for blended mobility for both incoming and outgoing students together with partner institutions.

Participation in the Erasmus program will contribute significantly towards reaching the objectives set for internationalisation and modernisation in the Centria 2021-2024 (2030) Strategy. The Erasmus programme continues to provide our students with the opportunities to develop global competences and gain international experience in their own field. Inbound exchange students and international degree-seeking students provide our domestic students with the opportunity to study in an international environment where the perspectives on different subjects become more diverse, and to develop intercultural communication skills by interacting with the exchange students both in class and outside class.

Ensuring that the staff has opportunities to participate in international education, in other words to take part in an international exchange, to collaborate with colleagues abroad and to establish new networks, is essential for developing international learning environments. Similarly, incoming staff exchanges bring in international expertise and new perspectives, which raise the quality of our programmes. The Erasmus programme has for decades been our most important mobility program, and the vast majority of all our inter-institutional partnerships function within the Erasmus framework. Participation in the Erasmus programme is crucial for implementing the above-mentioned objectives.

Seeking to increase the number of students participating in mobility and making learning and training abroad the norm is for Centria the most crucial way of contributing towards building a European Education Area. Centria intends to raise both the number of outgoing and incoming students. For this end all programs have developed international plans highlighting different mobility options and defined mobility windows. All the Finnish-taught programmes are required to increase the number of courses taught in English, in order to be able to welcome exchanges, and new full degree programmes English-taught degree programmes are developed.

Centria's participation in the programme contributes towards building the European Education Area, also by focusing especially on providing students with excellent opportunities to learn foreign languages. We will during the coming years focus even more on encouraging students to study and learn foreign languages, as communication and language skills are seen as essential parts of global competences at Centria. The key competences for lifelong learning enlisted are also one of the priorities that Centria seeks to enhance, especially through the currently ongoing work on adopting a new curriculum where generic competences are re-defined.

Participation in the Erasmus programme is very important for Centria, as it provides us with means that are essential for implementing the strategic objectives.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

Centria University of Applied Sciences is applying for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education 2021-2027. During the entire duration of the programme Centria UAS intends to implement the following Erasmus actions:

Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) Learning Mobility:

The mobility of higher education students and staff

Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2)- Cooperation among organisations and institutions:

Partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices

The mobility of students and staff, under Erasmus Key Action 1, is essential for our internationalization as it provides our students with opportunities to develop global competences, gain international experience and new perspectives in their own field through student exchange and work placement periods abroad. Inbound exchange students provide our domestic students with the opportunity to study in an international environment where the perspectives on different subjects become more diverse, and where developing intercultural communication skills becomes effective and genuine.

The mobility of staff is also crucial for the internationalisation, as it provides our staff with opportunities to participate in international education, in other words, to take part in an international exchange, to collaborate with colleagues abroad and to establish new networks. This in turn is essential for developing international learning environments, where all programs include international elements and perspectives. Similarly, incoming staff exchanges bring in international expertise and new perspectives, which raise the quality of our programmes and/or research and development and innovation projects or the general administration.

Centria respects, follows and is committed to the Erasmus Charter principles in the implementation of all program actions. At Centria it is the International Partnerships and Exchange Office that administers the Erasmus program. The International Partnerships and Exchange Office consists of an International Relations Manager who is in charge of the overall administration of Erasmus and other exchange programs and two coordinators, one for incoming student exchanges and the other for outgoing student exchanges. The mobility coordinator for outgoing mobility is in charge of promoting mobility opportunities, organizing internal application rounds, advising students on issues like grants, insurances, visas and accommodation. Moreover, grants payments, keeping Mobility Tool updated and collecting all documents are also part of the tasks performed by the mobility coordinator for outgoing mobility. The mobility coordinator for incoming student mobility is on the other hand in charge of promoting study abroad opportunities at Centria to the partner institutions, making sure that the course catalogue is up to date, reserving accommodation, collecting all the documents and issuing transcripts of records and confirmation of stays, organization of Orientation Days, arranging and supervising application, issuing Acceptance Letters, supervising exchange tutors, arranging practical placements, helping in practical arrangements, organization of cultural events. There is also the element of interchangeable assistance and support within the team in the work whenever required. The International Relations Manager, is also the institutional Erasmus coordinator and administers the grant agreement with the National Agency, the interim and final reports, the budget and the inter-institutional agreements. The International Relations Manager also makes sure that the ECHE principles are respected and followed in the implementation of all Erasmus program actions. All degree programs have also appointed academic coordinators, who are responsible for study abroad advising concerning all academic matters for both incoming and outgoing students, approving the learning and training agreements and recognition of studies and work placements undertaken abroad, and the transfer of these credits into the student's records.

Centria organizes one main internal application round and two additional application rounds for outgoing student mobility. It is of utmost importance for us that the information about exchange studies and work placement opportunities reach all students, and that all students have equal access to exchange opportunities. The promotion of exchange activities and study abroad advising is done both by the international mobility coordinator and by the academic coordinators in the programs. The selection of students is fair and transparent and based on documented criteria. The selection is done by the degree programmes.

All exchanges are carried out only with partners with whom Centria has a signed inter-institutional agreement, and all exchanges are based upon learning/training agreements signed before the exchange begins. Students are well-informed about the division of tasks regarding the study abroad advising between the academic coordinators and the International Partnerships and Exchanges Office. All outgoing students are also well-prepared before the exchange starts, as they can also participate in a 2 ECTS Training Course for studies or work placements abroad. The course focuses on providing both practical information for studies and work placements abroad, as well as on discussing issues connected to developing global competences and intercultural communication.

During the exchange, the International Partnerships and Exchanges Office remains at the disposal of the outbound students in all matters concerning the practical side of the exchange such as insurances e.g., whereas the academic coordinators advise on all academic matters, such as changes to the learning/training agreements for example.

After the mobility students get full automatic recognition for credits achieved during the exchange or the work placement abroad, as agreed in the learning/training agreement and confirmed in the transcript of records. It is the academic coordinators that insert the credits into students records. The credits are naturally counted towards the degree.

Centria has two application rounds for incoming exchange students. We keep the potential exchange students informed by promotional videos and letters and naturally by keeping the information on the website up-to-date. In this respect we are renewing and improving the course catalogue, which should make it easier for students to find all the necessary information about the courses. The coordinator for incoming exchanges and the academic coordinators remain at the disposal of the potential students, which makes it easier for them to make well-informed choices regarding courses, and to find information regarding insurances and visas e.g. All learning agreements are signed prior to the mobility period. Centria reserves accommodation for all incoming students, and organise a pick-up service, orientation days and a student-buddy system for all incoming students.

During the exchange, the International Partnerships and Exchanges Office remains at the disposal of the incoming students in all matter concerning the practical side of the exchange such as accommodation, insurances e.g., whereas the academic coordinators advise on all academic matters, such as changes to the learning/training agreements for example. It is of utmost importance, and we do all we can to ensure that all incoming students will benefit from equal student services.

After the mobility students get will receive a transcript of records as well as a certificate of stay, which are also sent to their home institutions.

The International Partnerships and Exchange Office administers the outgoing staff exchanges. This entails promoting the possibilities offered by Erasmus and other exchange programs, providing information and advising participants on the rules and requirements and the preparation of the mobility agreement. The International Partnerships and Exchange Office also manages grant payments and inserts the data into Mobility Tool. Staff members are encouraged to take part in international education and to do mobility periods abroad. All participants are selected in a fair, transparent and coherent manner. All staff exchanges shall be relevant for strengthening and developing the relationship with the partner institution, have an academic rationale or impact on RDI or the administration and contribute to the professional development of the participant. It is the degree programmes represented by the head of the degree programme, or the head of the RDI-teams or the supervisor of an administrative unit that selects the participants. All mobility agreements are made in cooperation with the receiving institution or organisation well in advance before the mobility period. All mobilities are recognized by the institution and regarded as essential parts of the professional development plans of the staff members.

Incoming staff exchanges are as mentioned above very important for Centria. We welcome staff exchanges initiated by our partners and we also actively invite staff exchanges from the partners. With regard to incoming staff exchanges we strive for them to be relevant for strengthening and developing the relationship with the partner institution, to have an academic rationale or impact on RDI or the administration and contribute to the professional development of the participant as well as the hosting programme, team or department. The International Partnerships and Exchanges Office advises and assists the hosting programme, team or administrative unit with completing the mobility agreement, and approves it formally before the mobility takes place. After the mobility the incoming staff member receives the duly completed and signed transcripts.

In addition to mobility, Centria also intends to participate in "Partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices". Such cooperation activities contribute towards the fulfilment of the Centria strategy. The Centria 2021-2024 (2030) Strategy, which defines internationalization as one of our key projects. The learning at Centria shall highlight internationalization and enhance the development of global competences among students and staff. Students, teachers, researchers and administrators are thus supported and encouraged not only to participate in international mobility, but also to participate in cooperation projects and to link with colleagues from partner institutions for the purpose of teaching in our programs, or for joint participation or development of projects.

Centria seeks to initiate and participate in projects that further our strategical goals, and which foreseen results are sustainable and balanced and lead to future development of our international involvement. Centria encourages both staff and students to participate in international projects, and provides relevant support during both the application and implementation phases of the projects.

When choosing projects and partners Centria bases its decisions on participation upon strategical geographical and subject area priorities and our capacity to achieve intended goals.

What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.) You are encouraged to offer an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

The overall impact of participation in the Erasmus+ programme is that students develop global competences and benefit from an international dimension in their studies, and that staff members participate in international education and contribute to our programmes and learning environments becoming more international and more qualitative. In all these actions will modernize Centria and contribute towards improving the quality of the education.

Our targets for the new program period are both quantitative and qualitative. We intend to increase the numbers of both outgoing and incoming students, as well as incoming and outgoing staff exchanges, and we intend to improve also the quality of our exchanges. By increasing the quality of the implementation we refer mainly to three things: making the exchanges more systematic, ensuring that a larger number of students study together with the incoming students and strengthening the co-operation with key-exchange partners.

As for the quantitative objectives we intend to increase the number of students and staff members participating in mobility year by year. By the end of the programme we hope to have achieved a situation where we implement 80 student exchanges every year. One third of these are foreseen to be work placement exchanges. Currently, we are at 50 student exchanges per year out of which a bit less than one third are work placements. The mid-term objective 2024 is 65 outgoing student exchanges/work placements. In order to achieve the expected growth, we will establish mobility windows in all programmes, develop the opportunities for blended mobility, hold yearly performance reviews with the programmes, where we set the programme specific targets for the following year and follow-up on the current year. We intend to increase the interest for studies abroad by implementing teaching staff exchanges for all new groups already during the first semester and by developing new kinds of promotional events. We monitor the progress regarding the quantitative goals by following the program specific application numbers very closely.

As for incoming mobility we intend to increase the number of incoming students by developing new English-taught degree programmes, by inserting English-taught courses also in the Finnish-taught programmes, which will also have a positive effective on internationalisation@home as non-mobile students will get international experiences. Providing incoming students with opportunities for blended mobility is also important, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, made us speed up with the development work. Moreover, we will also focus on improving the course catalogue, and intensifying and renewing the promotional activities. Moreover, we will also encourage teaching staff exchanges to our key partners. We are currently hosting about 60 incoming student exchanges/year and 10 work placements/year. We aim at reaching 100 exchanges (80 student exchanges and 20 work placements) before the end of the program period. The expected growth is 5%/year.

As for improving the quality of both outgoing and incoming exchanges we follow very closely the feedback from the EU Surveys and try to constantly improve in the areas, which could be strengthened. We have received excellent feedback from both outgoing and incoming students on the quality of the services, but the feedback has also shown the need to improve the course catalogue.

When it comes to outgoing and incoming staff exchanges our goal is to increase the numbers and to implement especially teaching staff exchanges in a more systematic manner. As for outgoing teaching staff exchanges, our goal is to increase from the current 10-12/year to 20 before the end of the program period. This will be done by setting targets for all degree programs, by asking all programs to make specific teaching staff exchange plans and by working together with the key partners in order to set up more systematic exchanges in both

directions. We also wish to increase the number of incoming teaching staff exchanges from the current 20 to 40 before the end of the program period. Also in this respect, the degree program specific planning will be essential for not just increasing the numbers, but also for improving the quality of the implementation.

As for staff exchanges we wish to grow from the current 15 exchanges/year to 25 before the end of the program period. This can be achieved by working closely with key partners, in order to implement systematic exchanges between different departments units or teams. The objective with this kind of systematic exchanges is to jointly work on improving a service or a process.

We also strive to increase the number of projects that also provide both students and staff with possibilities to participate in international educational cooperation. We will focus on projects that fit our strategic goals, benefit the learning and all participants and which results are sustainable and balanced and which are compatible with our size and resources. Our goal is to increase the number of projects every year, so that students from all study programmes can participate in at least one KA2 project by the end of the programme period. International projects have an impact on the individual level as participants develop global competences, on the institutional level, as it internationalizes the learning and the RDI at the involved institutions, and on the regional level as the results of projects, such e.g. new innovations or practices spread to the local communities.