**Erasmus Policy Statement**

**2021-2027**

    The University of Bialystok (UwB) is the fastest developing educational and scientific center in the north-eastern part of Poland. It is the only university in the Podlasie region that provides education and research in humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences. Moreover, the UwB is the first university in Poland that has launched an international faculty, which is situated in Vilnius, Lithuania. Internationalization is one of the paramount goals for the UwB. The fundament of internationalization is the participation in international projects and programmes. Erasmus is the most powerful and dynamic academic exchange Programme in the world. The UwB has been successfully taking part in the Erasmus+ Programme since 1999. Continuing this participation will provide the UwB with access to good practices created within the framework of the initiative, which would allow further development of the University, its staff and its students, which would thus enrich the region, enable the internationalization of future generations, and also allow the exchange of experiences and educational progress throughout the whole community. The Erasmus+ Programme will help support the implementation of the strategic objectives of the UwB in the context of internationalization. The location of the University is very strategic, not only because of its geographic location on the Eastern border of the European Union, but also the fact that it is a multicultural area with Polish, Russian, Belarussian, German, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Tatar, and Jewish heritage. These aforementioned features justify the internationalization of the UwB.

The Development Strategy of the UwB for 2014-2024, originally adopted in 2014, underlines the importance of networks. The UwB is an active part of the following networks: the Borderland Universities Network (BUN) since 2013, the University of the Baltic Sea Region Network (BSRUN) since 2016, the European University Alliance since 2019, and the EUPRIO association of higher education communicators since 2020. Through the participation in these networks and international alliances, the UwB will be constantly gaining in experience and know-how, while building a strong international position in the higher education and science arenas. The cooperation within the networks enables the UwB to help compatriots living outside the Eastern border, by offering higher education in their mother tongue. These students can be subsequently motivated to bridge the gap between the EU and the East. Moreover, these networks will also be an excellent platform for the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme.

By participating in the Erasmus+ Programme in the years 2021-2027, the UwB will have the possibility to contribute to the creation of the European Education Area. Implementation of the Programme will be beneficial for the students and staff of the University, who will have access to the best education, training, and employment in the European single market. It would also increase the chances of the Podlasie region to advance in all spheres included in the initiative. The University is geared to educate socially conscious graduates, familiar with European cultural heritage and its diversity, who can fluently communicate at least in two foreign languages, and for whom it is possible to go abroad to study or practice. The University will execute the priorities of the Programme by implementing the European Student Card Initiative with promotion of the Erasmus+ App, promoting environmentally friendly practices in activities related to the Programme, encouraging the participation of individuals with fewer opportunities, and promoting civic engagement among students and staff. The UwB will fully respect all principles of the Erasmus Charter, especially in non-discrimination, transparency, and inclusion.

One of the important goals for the UwB is broadening educational opportunities in foreign languages, available at the bachelor and master level. At the moment, the programmes offer bachelor degrees in English (English Philology, Computer Science, Physics in the field of Medical Physics) and Russian (Russian Philology, Russian Philology - Language Communication for Business). A master degree programme is available in English: International Economic Relations, English Philology, International Relations, Computer Science specialization in Internet and Mobile Technologies. As of now, study programmes fully taught in foreign languages are mainly addressed to the students from neighbouring countries. However, the University is working on widening this group and becoming an institution for students from all over the world. In parallel, the UwB aims to take advantage of the educational offers within the Erasmus+ Programme.

The modern university nowadays is associated with internationalization. The importance of internationalization is emphasized in Development Strategy, as well as in the individual strategies of the faculties/institutes. In today's world of global connections, it is impossible to function without international relations and cooperation, as well as international exchange of ideas, knowledge, and culture. Cooperation activities contribute towards the fulfilment of the institutional Development Strategy and have strategic meaning, since they can lead to new projects or innovative research. Access to projects, publications, and other tools at the international level would improve the functioning of the University and would increase the prestige of the University in the country. The alliances formed by the UwB are based on trust and sustainability, and the selection of partners is done through the individual contacts or participation in international conferences, fairs, and networks. Therefore, the UwB will work on increasing the number of international partnerships within the Programme and outside of it. The University has currently 292 agreements signed with 199 partners within the Erasmus+ KA103 Programme, and 30 agreements with 17 countries within the Erasmus+ KA107 Programme. The UwB has also the established cooperation with 109 partners outside the Erasmus+ Programme. In the upcoming years 2021-2027, the UwB aims to increase the number of partner institutions under the Programme by at least 20%, especially from EU countries, which are usually represented weakly or not at all (Sweden, Netherlands, and Ireland). The UwB intends to have partners in all Programme countries. The University plans to continue partnerships with neighbouring countries like Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. The UwB would like to increase the number of partnerships with other institutions from outside the EU as well, since the experience from the last years has shown big potential in this area. This cooperation, which did not exist 4 years ago, has now developed into strong partnerships with countries from the Western Balkans (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Far East Asia (Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, China) and South America (Equador, Chile). Through the development of the KA107 Programme, the University aims to promote the EU and its values of freedom, tolerance, equality, inclusion, transparency, and non-discrimination in non-member countries.

New partnerships are very important due to what they offer Programme participants. One of the strategic goals of participating in the Erasmus+ Programme for the University is the continuation and the expansion of the student and staff mobilities, based on the cooperation agreements with partner institutions. The inclusion of students with fewer opportunities and an increase in their participation in the Programme is a very important objective. Due to the location of the University in the non-industrial and moderately affluent part of Poland, many students could benefit from the support provided by the Programme. For most of them, it would be the only opportunity to study abroad.

The UwB, in the upcoming years 2021-2027 is interested in participating in the Erasmus+ Programme within the following areas: Learning Mobility of students and staff (Key Action 1) and Cooperation among organizations and institutions (Key Action 2).

Participating in Learning Mobility action helps to achieve the following objectives included in the University’s Development Strategy: developing cooperation with foreign partners, improving the qualifications of academic staff, establishing and maintaining international contacts, participating in international projects, student development through participation in international exchange, and increasing the number of foreign students. International exchange of the students and staff is one of the strategic goals emphasized in the individual strategies of the faculties/institutes. The opportunity of studying and participating in the traineeships abroad is available to UwB students of all degrees and fields of study. The University is also focused on the implementation of blended mobility. The mobility of academic staff for teaching and training, as well as training of non-academic staff, will continue under the new Programme. The UwB declares to accept the incoming students and staff as well, as a part of the implementation of the Erasmus+ Programme. The University strives to ensure equal access for all participants, paying particular attention to those with fewer opportunities, and equal treatment, based on the principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and inclusion set out in the Programme. The University will encourage those who have not yet participated in the Programme to take part in any of the available opportunities. Students and staff will be offered professional help, mentoring, and assistance before, during, and after the mobility. Participants with disabilities will be provided with required assistance. The staff teaching hours completed at the partner universities within STA will be a part of a professor’s academic workload, based on the UwB work rules and regulations. The trainings at partner institutions will have an impact on employee assessment and will be included on their personal achievement card. In the upcoming years, the UwB will maintain full recognition based on the learning outcomes. Another important goal is increasing the number of international students, who will be provided transparent information, high quality education and services, up-to-date course catalogue, free Polish language courses, and mentor assistance from the Erasmus Student Network of the UwB (ESN). The UwB will also implement the Erasmus Without Papers campaign by adapting its computer systems and by registering the bilateral agreements on Dashboard platform.\* The UwB has taken many steps over the last couple years to ensure the success of the Erasmus+ KA 103 Programme.

The UwB is undertaking another important area of activity in the form of implementing multilateral projects with both EU and non-EU countries within Key Action 2, which is also an aim of Development Strategy. The premise of the established partnerships is the cooperation in the area of conducting joint scientific research, implementing didactic projects in the field of mutual interests, exchanging experience in the field of education and training programmes, and exchanging academic teachers and researchers. The projects are reflected in the specificity of the University, the multicultural and multinational character of the region and the scientific interests of the academic staff. During the planned implementation of the projects in the new Erasmus+ Programme, the UwB will use the knowledge and experience from the past Capacity Building projects, Strategic Partnerships, and Knowledge Alliances. Currently, the UwB is a leader in the Strategic Partnerships project granted for the years 2019-2022 within KA2: “Social Professions for supporting Youth in a European Solidarity Context", implemented at the Faculty of Education with universities in Lithuania, Latvia, Sweden, and Poland. The University intends to continue and to extend cooperation within the framework of future Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices projects. The UwB is also planning, in the upcoming years, to establish double/multiple joint degrees. Although earlier attempts in this area were not successful, mainly because of the difficulties arising from Polish State law, the University will still continue the efforts towards achieving this goal. Since the UwB recognizes the potential and creativity of its students, staff, and researchers, the University is also willing to participate in the European Universities Initiative. For the fast-developing University like UwB, it is a unique opportunity to drive innovative ways of learning and research. The idea is connected to the European Education Area.

A long-term impact of UwB’s participation in the Erasmus+ Programme is the significant increase of the institution’s attractiveness, its reputation and competitiveness in the higher education market. The constantly increasing number of the international students at the UwB indicates very good educational quality of the University, and is one of the reasons the UwB is creating more programmes in English. As a result, the UwB will become more attractive on a local, regional, and global level for candidates and researchers. Participation in the Programme would create the new areas of improvement for the UwB, the region and the country, and will also help with the operational effectiveness of the University. Through participation in the Programme, the UwB will solidify its multicultural role within local communities. Integrating and discovering other cultures will provide an opportunity to overcome stereotypes, prejudice, and prevent social exclusion. This Programme will help in both forming proper tolerance attitude and shaping intercultural competencies in local communities. Sharing experiences and forming new social relations is crucial in establishing a sense of community. Promoting social inclusion is essential for sustainable development on a local, regional, and international level. The opportunity to participate in the Programme will not only promote the multicultural character of the region, but will also introduce the culture of other countries to the mobility participants and local community.

Internationalization has a direct impact on teaching quality, development of new teaching methods, and the quality of students’ incoming and outgoing mobilities. As a result of UwB’s participation in the Erasmus+ Programme, scientific excellence and capacity-building of higher education together with international cooperation will be promoted. Through the involvement in the Programme, the UwB will maintain good practices, use them to stimulate growth, and increase the potential of its students and staff. The student and staff mobilities will permit the exchange of experiences among the participants, connect them to the leading science and research centers, and allow access to outstanding lecturers. The opportunity to participate in the Programme will strengthen the social and cultural competencies of students and staff, who are now increasingly working in international teams. The academic staff mobility will also play an important role in the internationalization process through the improvement of foreign language efficiency and teaching qualifications, introduction of new teaching methods, and the exchange of teaching experiences. The student mobility will mainly help improve intercultural and linguistic competencies of its participants and will also help students gain international knowledge and experience remarkably valuable in the regional and global labour market. Local businesses will benefit from the experiences gained by the students abroad, since these students will return as skilled employees with wider view of the processes occurring in the world. Increasing the quality of education will be achieved through full recognition of studying abroad, a wider array of courses taught in foreign languages, development of language skills of teachers and students, and organization of lectures of incoming researchers. Through the participation in the Programme, teachers will have motivation to improve their teaching skills and to internationalize their research. It will enable more effective and personalized learning experiences and teaching methods. The administrative staff will also benefit from the Programme through the participation in the trainings abroad. The fully transparent financial procedures under the Erasmus+ Programme can be adopted in other fields of the University’s activities.

During the new Programme, the University aims to increase the numbers of all types of mobilities. Every year, 100-120 students participate in SMS and SMP. The UwB plans to achieve at least 150 mobilities per year, and, if possible, to increase this number in the years ahead in order to contribute to sustainable development. The University also aims to increase the current number of incoming students from 80 to at least 100 per year. Since the beginning of the previous Erasmus+ Programme (2014), the University significantly increased the number of staff teaching and training mobilities (from 56 to 101 per year). The goal is to increase this number to 130 outgoing staff per year and continue this strategy in the years ahead. The aforementioned actions also led to implementation of the KA107 project. This cooperation, which started in 2015 with one country (Serbia) and 5 staff mobilities and 1 student mobility, has now developed to include 17 countries from all over the world, with 39 staff mobilities and 6 student mobilities. For the upcoming years, the University plans to further increase the number of mobilities and the number of partner countries. The UwB will ensure high-quality support for the participants within all types of mobilities and cooperation under the KA1 and KA2 actions.

Through visibility and sustainable development, the University strives to be an attractive place to study for Polish and foreign students, a respected educational and research center, and one of the leaders in driving economic development in the region. Effective links between education, research, and business are necessary for improving the connections between basic and applied research and for the transfer of knowledge to the market and business. The efforts to improve these links will be continued at UwB by the Careers’ Office, which continues helping students contact possible employers. The Office maintains permanent contact with local business. The Rector of the UwB has established the Consultation Council, which is responsible for adjusting educational offers to the market needs. Teaching professionals (courses for local administration, teachers, and business) play an important role in the Development Strategy of the University.

The Erasmus+ Programme has enormously contributed to the development of many activities, through teaching and transferring information, communicating, and giving the young generation of students the opportunity to learn in the reality of open borders. It has also positively affected areas that seem to be unrelated to the academic world – companies involved in transport, real estate, gastronomy, services and the entertainment industry. With this in mind, the UwB sees its participation in the Programme as an opportunity not only for itself (for its students as well as academic and administrative staff), but also for the region and the local community. Taking part in the Programme would greatly impact and improve the modernization of the UwB and will affect the development of students and staff on a professional and personal level. Participation in the Erasmus+ Programme will also have a great impact on strengthening multidisciplinary and inter-institutional cooperation.

\*according to the EWP project principles, the university decided to use the USOS system