

# Erasmus Policy Statement

The University of Antwerp is an international research university that occupies a specific place in the Flemish university landscape. The Antwerp region has metropolitan characteristics with a large migrant population. Antwerp is also a world harbour with diverse connected economic activities. This metropolitan context offers exceptional opportunities for UAntwerp to position itself internationally but still maintain a strongly linked to the local community.

The strategic policy themes of UAntwerp are 'diversity and participation', 'active pluralism', 'sustainability', 'internationalization and region', 'entrepreneurship' and 'metropolitanism'. These themes match perfectly with the focus of the new Erasmus programme and the European Education Area and characterize UAntwerp as an international research university engaging in a global world. Participation in the Erasmus Programme will contribute to achieve both the policy objectives and those of the programme.

Sustainability has been set as an overall standard university-wide with a strong focus on social welfare, ecological interaction with the world and an economy that serves the community.

The University of Antwerp sees internationalization as an essential part of the pursuit of high quality and relevance of education, research and service to society. Internationalization is also part of UAntwerp's "external relations": how does mission and vision enable to enter into a dynamic dialogue with other universities, region, Europe and the world?

To re-emphasize the importance of internationalisation a new strategic plan for internationalisation was published in 2019. The aim is to sharpen the vision on internationalisation for education and research university wide. It focusses on mobility, internationalisation@home activities, societal engagement, language learning and educational offer in English. UAntwerp continuously strives to achieve strong international collaboration and to identify and implement innovative trends. UAntwerp continues the efforts for project-based collaboration in the field of international educational programmes with partners in Europe and beyond. The development of high-quality partnerships plays an important role in the internationalisation strategy: the well-considered initiation and continuation of collaboration with partner institutions that share our values. We are further investing in developing joint modules, joint programmes, double degrees and joint degrees with strong partners. Collaborative online learning is often integrated as a part of the set-up.

Mobility is an excellent way to provide students the possibility to acquire international and intercultural competencies thereby improving their ability to function in a globalised society. UAntwerp aims to offer every student the opportunity to spend a longer or shorter period abroad. Faculties are encouraged to create maximum flexibility to facilitate mobility, while expanding and reinforcing the range of international exposure offered through internationalisation@home activities, blended mobility, internships, summer schools, group excursions.... By offering financial support and a variety of mobility forms, UAntwerp strives to be inclusive by making mobility available to as many students as possible, regardless of their background.

Through a targeted language policy, UAntwerp supports students and staff in both general and academic language acquisition, which is necessary to function optimally in a multilingual environment. A combination of tools is available, such as the online language platform Altissia and on-campus language learning organised by Linguapolis, the language institute of UAntwerp.

Regarding staff mobility, the university aims for growth and encourages all staff to spend a period abroad in order to continually internationalise themselves and to innovate the educational offer.

As a founding partner of the European Universities alliance YUFE, the University of Antwerp will provide both academic staff and support staff the opportunity to European-wide career and development opportunities by offering mobility opportunities at one YUFE institutions in order to expand their horizons and learn new skills. Deepening the collaboration among partners will allow to have an even stronger impact on European students, on the research and innovation landscape, and on society. The university will maximise its efforts with regard to employability of all staff members.

The YUFE project also offers new opportunities for students. YUFE means the possibility of increased integrated mobility between courses at home and abroad, internships in partner institutions, participation in joint programs at bachelor, master and doctoral level and participation in joint modules.

UAntwerp strives for a more just and sustainable world. Historically, there was a strong focus on capacity building in the context of university development cooperation with academics and/or development actors in lower income countries of the Global South. Researchers and employees are encouraged and actively supported to develop intensive collaborations, to set up North-South projects and exchanges with academics from the South.

**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.**

For years, the University of Antwerp has found it beneficial and significant to participate in cooperation projects that create and support sustainable international collaboration. Since internationalization is one of the top priorities within the institutional strategy, strategic use of the Erasmus funded programmes that stimulate the exchange of (international) good practices is highly supported with both students and staff being highly encouraged to participate in these programmes. In addition to participating in mobility programmes, all personnel from faculties and departments are encouraged to actively engage in Erasmus cooperation programs with international partners. The University of Antwerp explains in its institutional strategy how it encourages researchers to seek out international collaboration and to play active, prominent roles in the worldwide research community by means of scientific publications and research projects. This can be achieved by participating in Erasmus funded programs. Staff members can receive support from the central offices (international relations office, financial department, legal department) in their search for information and advice concerning these cooperation projects, both as partner and as coordinator.

In addition to participating in cooperation programs that promote the exchange of good and innovative practices between partners, the University of Antwerp wishes to promote development cooperation and encourages its staff members to participate in programs that benefit the capacity development in partner countries. Having been actively involved with Erasmus funded programmes (both as coordinator and partner) has allowed the University of Antwerp to gain significant experience in international collaboration in different fields of expertise. One of the aims in the institutional strategy is to share and transfer knowledge in order to contribute to societal progress on a global scale. This can be achieved by applying for and participating in Erasmus funded programs that stimulate development cooperation.

We want to give our students broad international and intercultural competences so that they function better in a globalizing society. This means continuing to stimulate and facilitate mobility both inside and outside Europe. The funding and infrastructure provided by the Erasmus programme play an essential role in promoting this mobility and to be able to offer this opportunity to as many students as possible.

In order to increase the employability of our staff and to innovate the education offer, great importance is attached to mobility of staff, where we encourage all staff to spend a period abroad.

We have a proven track record in the participation and implementation of several Erasmus Mundus joint masters. In order to improve the quality and innovation of our degree programmes the central services will keep supporting training activities in setting up joint degrees via the Erasmus program.

UAntwerp is a member of The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance. This is a major strategic partnership established between ten young research-intensive universities from as many European countries. The alliance establishes itself as the leading model of a young, student-centred, non-elitist, open and inclusive European University. The partners are united in their commitment to build an education system that is open, accessible and inclusive, founded on the principles of open science, social responsibility, and, above all else, to putting students at the forefront of everything they do. Aspects that match the strategy policy of our university putting an emphasis on.

To provide continuation for the alliance, the consortium plans to apply for the next European Universities call.

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

Participation in the Erasmus programme gives the university a framework to reach the goals set out by us regarding student and staff mobility and competences and regarding the constant improvement of the quality of research and education. It also stimulates the international cooperation with partners worldwide.

The Erasmus programme offers us the unique opportunity to provide structured funding for student mobility. Mobility is still seen as an important accelerator for students to acquire the necessary skills to function in the current globalised world. The competences they can gain play an important part in the employability of our students: Openness, adaptability, language learning, social and intercultural skills are important competences we want our students to acquire to make themselves valuable on the labour market but also on a personal level. Besides soft skills students also have the opportunity to enrich their academic programme by getting acquainted with different education methods and academic insights an exchange can offer. The exchange options will be further expanded by our membership in the YUFE European university, this membership will give students a further option for short term mobility, blended mobility, online learning and internationalisation@home activities. As a university we adhere to the goals set out by the Erasmus programme to offer as many students the possibility to enjoy a mobility experience and follow the 20% target. We not only want to focus on increasing the quantity but also to deepen the quality of the exchanges, by expanding the support services to our students. We already have an elaborate preparation programme available for students, where they get training on intercultural and social competencies, info on practical preparation.

The University of Antwerp considers staff mobility as an important tool for professional development and to intensify the cooperation with partner universities:

A training period abroad enhances foreign language competence, creates opportunities to share good practices and to acquire international competences and experience. It brings people in contact with another work culture and traditions. Mobility is strongly encouraged by our university to enhance the employability of our staff, to improve internal mobility within the organisation and to enhance the quality of education and research. We want to offer the majority of our staff the possibility to spend a period abroad for training purposes.

A teaching assignment abroad is a way to acquire international teaching experience, to enhance foreign language competences and to experience another academic culture. Contacts between academics worldwide offer opportunities for structural bonds leading to closer cooperation in the field of education and research. International teaching activities are strongly encouraged and are taken into account in the promotion file of all teaching staff.

We want to strengthen the incoming mobility of top researchers. Incoming mobility of top researchers is rather unusual, especially as far as the Anglo-Saxon world is concerned. Short-term visits of a few days to a week are common, but long-term stays at UAntwerp, are rather rare. UAntwerp must position itself more strongly as a pole of attraction for scientific talent associated with very highly regarded universities. We also aim to embed researchers in international networks - institutional ambassadors. The embedding of UAntwerp employees in international networks is of paramount importance for the internationalization of research and innovation.

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