

## Erasmus Policy Statement

LAB University of Applied Sciences (LAB) is an institution offering education leading to a first and second cycle UAS degrees, Open University studies, continuing education and research, development, and innovations services. Education is offered in the fields of business, health care and social services, tourism and hospitality, design and fine arts, and technology.

The strategic focus areas are based on the higher education institution's strengths and interest groups' needs: health, sustainability, innovations and design. Especially LAB wants to emphasize its potential in growth and internationalization in research, development and innovations (RD&I).

The strategy of LAB promotes sustainable collaboration with partner institutions, companies and other organizations to generate international and professional competence and innovation as well as support the regional strategies in South Karelia and Päijät-Häme. Mobility and international cooperation projects are the main tools for the internationalization of our curricula, learning environment and operations. By participating in these key activities, we aim to strengthen the quality and competitiveness of our programmes and enhance the professional, social and intercultural skills of our students and staff. The efficient integration of mobility into education and RD&I activities are secured at both institutional and faculty level.

LAB has active partnerships in both EU and non-EU countries. The selection of partners is based on the objectives of the strategy and shared quality principles. The criteria include multidisciplinary cooperation opportunities, and the commitment to develop RD&I cooperation. Partnerships are initiated at a faculty level and the selection is based on the compatibility of academic profiles and curricula. Partnerships are approved and monitored at both institutional and faculty level. In the future, our objective is to strengthen the multidisciplinary cooperation in our focus areas combining cooperation both education and RD&I.

The majority of the mobility and international cooperation projects in LAB are based in EU countries. The selection of partners for student mobility takes into account the language policy of LAB and the objectives to support the learning of most commonly spoken languages in Europe. Outside EU our main geographical areas for internationalization are Russia and Asian countries.

Mobility and cooperation are one of the central elements of LAB institutional policy. LAB addresses an interest to increase the mobility of students, teachers and other staff to and from partner universities and amount of joint RD&I projects. Both the first and second cycle students can participate to the exchange programmes. The aim is to further develop these mobilities by better enabling the internationalisation and mobility periods into the curricula of all degree programmes.

The number of exchange students is agreed in bilateral agreements with the partner institution and students are nominated by the sending institution. In all mobility LAB follows the rules of the exchange programme in question. Special attention is paid to under-represented groups in incoming mobility, such as students with disabilities to secure that they can enter and move in the faculties easily. For outgoing disable mobility LAB seeks a partner which is able to receive a disable person.

LAB has organized blended mobility periods with some of its partner institutions. Blended mobility is seen as important option to both encourage students into traditional mobility as well as an option for students with fewer opportunities to go abroad for longer period of time to participate into mobility periods abroad during their studies. Virtual mobility is under development in LAB and the goal is to develop it further with key partners to ensure students with children and other under-presented groups to have an excellent option to take part into mobility actions and gain international study experience. Both blended and virtual mobility also enable LAB to achieve its' strategic goal to have virtual e-campus.

LAB has many double degree agreements with the partner institutions. In a double degree program students can develop a deeper understanding of the required competences than would be possible during a normal exchange period; this is because in a double degree programme the content, extent and total duration (e.g. studies, practical training, thesis) of the studies are agreed on beforehand. To create a double degree LAB and the partner must have a long experience in cooperation. The programmes are carefully evaluated, and curricula must match well for both parties.

Our institutional procedures and processes maintain, develop and enhance the high quality of the mobility. Internationalisation at LAB is seen as a process which is led with a goal-oriented approach. The progress is systematically assessed by considering education and RD&I impact.

The implementation and organisation of mobility at LAB are shared by central international services and faculties. In general, the quality and management related to the mobility activities and partner cooperation is secured by the close cooperation between international services and faculties. In addition, clear roles and responsibilities in the different project phases ensure efficient and successful project management. Together with faculties international services are responsible for the implementation and development of partnerships. The selection of partner institutions is based on the needs of the faculties, the quality of the partners and the compatibility of academic profiles and curriculum. International services establish and monitor all inter-institutional agreements for study and teaching mobility in cooperation with the respective faculties.

International services coordinate the staff and student mobility on administrative level. All the inter-institutional agreements are coordinated by the international services and have also the overall responsibility of the project implementation, management and reporting. All inter-institutional agreements and documents of the mobile participants are stored in the digital mobility management system Mobility-Online software.

The Mobility-Online software supports the management and increases the quality and transparency of all processes and documentation of the mobility projects. Also the software is developed further in light of the European Student Card Initiative. The international services are responsible for the overall management of the information and documentation as well as the grant payments. International services also take care of the promotion of mobility opportunities to LAB students and staff, but big part of the student mobility promotion is done by the responsible and tutor teachers of the degree programs as they have the direct contact to the students and are responsible of the academic guidance. For staff mobility the managers have also important role to encourage and support the staff mobility among their subordinates.

With regards to outgoing mobilities, at LAB it is a key principle that all students have equal opportunities to participate. Information about the opportunities is shared by the international services via the intranet and events. Various information meetings are also organized at the

campuses to encourage students to participate. The online instructions and visibility at the campuses can guarantee an access to the information despite of the time or place of the students. In addition, degree programs' tutor teachers and departmental coordinators have a clear role in marketing the opportunities to students and encouraging them to go abroad. The international services organize and coordinate the application process and are responsible for the administrative guidance throughout the mobility process. Selection and academic guidance are faculties' responsibility. Selections of outgoing students are done according to the rules agreed by all faculties. Academic recognition of the mobility period abroad is taken care by the tutor teachers together with departmental coordinators and recognition is agreed before mobility and checked during mobility in case of changes in the learning agreement occur.

Each curricula of all degree programmes include practical training. LAB encourages students to find placement abroad as intercultural communication is a vitally important part of the modern professional world. Employers respect highly of working experience gained abroad and also combination of student exchange and work placement abroad is highly appreciated by employers in Finland. Thus, international traineeships are promoted in LAB and students are encouraged to network during their study exchange to find also traineeship abroad.

For incoming students, the course catalogues are prepared in the faculties and international services monitor that the course catalogue is published in time and is available on our web pages. The international services organize the application process for incomings and make sure that the application documents are available for the faculties. The selection of the incoming students is made in the faculties through a transparent selection process. All practical arrangements for incoming exchange students, such as finding an accommodation and the orientation program, are guided by the international services. The academic guidance of incoming students is taken care by appointed faculty members, tutor teachers. The academic recognition is also taken care by the appointed faculty who is responsible for the academic guidance in the field. The transcripts are provided via Mobility-Online software for our incoming exchange students and the documents are ready within five weeks after the completion of the exchange studies.

Information about staff mobility possibilities are centralised and easily found from LAB intranet. International services coordinate the staff mobility and make the arrangements for these together with the mobility staff. Faculties and other functions make the final decision on the participants. Emphasis has been put on improving the planning of the content of the mobilities so that the mobilities benefit both individuals and the whole institution as well as possible. The incoming teacher mobility is integrated as a part of the courses at LAB and promoted in all faculties.

International services collect and report of feedback from all mobile participants. The feedback is discussed with management, teachers and students on an annual basis. Student mobility feedback is partly visible also for internal purposes. Via the report portal, outgoing students can have guidance for their destination selection as well as practical arrangements from the previous students.

The objective of LAB is to generate international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training to enhance the international know-how for the development of our curricula, learning environments and operations. These objectives are closely linked with the development of teachers' and other staff members' professional competences as well to the development of regional and European learning communities and innovation eco-systems. Furthermore, the international projects enable the sharing of evidence-based knowledge and good practices in order to develop

educational systems and high-quality research in European and non-European collaboration. Goal is also to tighten cooperation with globalizing companies and companies serving international customers by joint projects involving both students and staff.

The objectives, tasks and roles of participants in each international cooperation project are specified at both institutional and faculty level. Participation in international cooperation projects is regarded an important aspect of the professional development of students and staff. The allocation of the workload for both planning and implementation of the projects guarantees the staff's commitment. Students are encouraged to participate in the projects and by participating they gain credits towards their degree. The dissemination of the project activities and results is considered throughout the projects' lifecycle.

LAB's strategic goal is to grow international impact in its focus areas Design, Health, Innovations and Sustainability. This goal will be achieved by versatile and multidisciplinary international co-operation combining education and RD&I with partners. The Erasmus+ programme has an essential role in building more impact in international cooperation.

Expected impact of our participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on the modernization of our institution. LAB contributes to the new EU agenda for higher education with the following impact:

#### 1. Tackling skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development.

In order to improve the quality and relevance of our education, we systematically cooperate with companies, organisations and other Higher Education Institutions and Vocational schools in the design, delivery and assessment of our programmes. Our competence-based curricula encourage flexible learning paths and we provide part-time, virtual and distance learning. In addition to degree programmes, we provide further education opportunities for adults in the labour market. We invest in continuous professional development of our staff, by allocating working time for professional development and for participating in mobility and national and international RD&I activities. Students are encouraged to participate in the RD&I activities, which are often real-world problems. Strong connections to working life are also seen in curricula, as work placements are integrated to all first cycle curricula.

#### 2. Building inclusive and connected higher education systems.

In order to ensure that LAB is inclusive and connected to the community, we have strong connections with schools, local companies, other organizations and higher education institutions both in Finland and abroad. Our both campuses in Lappeenranta and Lahti are safe and accessible for all students and to disabled persons. We are building also a virtual campus which will make all students equal no matter where they are physically studying and enables more flexibility in studies.

#### 3. Ensuring higher education institutions contribute in innovation.

LAB aims to be an innovative higher education institution and Commercialization of Innovations is one of the key focus areas of LAB. Also, other focus areas, Sustainability, Design and Health generate new product, process, service and social innovations. Our strength is in research, development and innovation and education, and we aim to strongly increase our share in RD&I projects. Our goal is to enhance regional cooperation and the core activity is to develop sustainable partnerships with regional operators. The aim is to build a regional innovation hub to strengthen the knowledge-transfer and to promote international and multilateral RD&I on regional competence focus areas.

LAB has previously been two separate institutions working under two Charters until Lahti and Saimaa University of Applied Sciences merged creating LAB University of Applied Sciences on 1.1.2020. As our campuses have had different working ways and received different kind of feedback in EU surveys, we are in a position of having the possibility of comparing the feedback of the two institutions more closely and to form a suitable way of working for the new institution. The best practices can be easily found and implemented into LAB processes. EU surveys have pointed out already few elements what to boost and further develop during the new programme.

During the new programme period our target is to develop further the process of our course catalogue so that it is up to date and easy to use, improve the process of signing the LA's for incoming exchange students before their exchange period and to have equal and efficient support services for academic and administrative guidance especially for outgoing students in both campuses. Within the new programme we target to increase our student and staff mobility by 25 percent by the year 2025.

In the past Erasmus+ programme period LAB has participated in more than 20 Erasmus+ projects, in the year 2020 LAB has 11 ongoing Erasmus+ projects and 7 being currently under evaluation. The new Erasmus+ period plays even bigger role in implementing LAB's international strategy. With the Erasmus+ KA2 and KA3 activities our envisaged impacts are for example to develop more deeper international collaboration with well-chosen partners and networks. In addition, KA2 ja KA3 activities will raise international visibility, improve global student recruitment and strengthen international research and development collaboration. Via the KA2 and KA3 actions LAB is able to strengthen the operational development on many levels and help in achieving the set strategic goals. Also, outcome as well the position in the competition is strengthened. Erasmus+ programme provide opportunity for LAB to develop its operations to carry out basic tasks as well as possible to explore new opportunities and to improve the quality.