

OUC International (EU and non-EU) Strategy

For the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) internationalization aims to achieve its mission as open and distance teaching university with global reach, offering quality innovative programs to produce employable graduates. OUC's international policy seeks to establish a growing network of HEIs, research, governmental and business partners in EU and third countries, to provide a basis for the development of internationally oriented teaching and learning and collaborative research and knowledge transfer.

This Strategy stems from the Strategic Plan 2012-15 approved by OUC's Governing Board seeking to exploit the international context by a holistic approach aiming to :

- Establish a high quality in-country presence -Offer innovative programs for the needs of society, industry and labor market, primarily in Greek/English, with future target also to other languages
- Offer programs jointly with esteemed partners
- Enhance international recruitment -Internationalize curricula and align syllabus with international norms
- Establish sound partnerships to provide quality transnational education and research
- Improve student and staff mobility -Establish international alumni base.

(a) International partnerships are driven by reciprocity (mutual benefits and balance of mobility), commitment (internationalization is an investment and requires a long-term commitment to OUC students, staff and partners) and quality (seek highest standards). Currently, OUC has over 3700 students, the vast majority from outside Cyprus. A key aim is to diversify recruitment activities, geographically and academically, to have a more stable overseas student body (beyond Cyprus and Greece) and be less vulnerable to an increasingly volatile marketplace allowing OUC's steady growth.

Strategic partnership is underpinned by key principles :

- OUC seeks to work with partners with similar vision and capabilities/capacities that OUC values.
- OUC recognizes the benefits of a diverse portfolio of HE partnerships, given the breadth of OUC's mission.
- OUC recognizes the importance of partnerships with long-term perspective and focus on mutual benefit.

(b) Strategically there is need to focus on specific regions for geographical and linguistic coverage and on priorities according to the OUC's objectives. The identification of these regional priorities is based on matching existing strengths, expertise and capacity identified in each region. OUC focuses on partners presenting the needed capabilities and countries with the right opportunities. An analysis of recruitment trends indicates that parts of the Middle East/Mediterranean offer significant opportunities for growth, while for mobility purposes EU countries prevail. Although fairly young, OUC managed to establish a sound collaborative network with EU and non-EU institutions. The geographic spread of existing partners ranges from Israel,

Russia, Spain, to Ukraine, Greece, Austria and other countries. Through this network, the University is participating in large-scale projects funded within the framework of LLP, FP7, Tempus and Interreg. Opportunities for all staff members are given to participate.

(c) OUC's main objectives for mobility are to :

- increase proportion of outward student mobility for placements, promoting quality structured traineeships abroad to gain international experiences/skills.
- encourage Faculties for overseas study/practical training in all programs, especially PhD.
- initiate outward mobility for studies, encouraging and supporting all students, including those facing difficult circumstances to study abroad. Still, acknowledging that most OUC students find it difficult to undertake a significant period abroad because of family obligations or employment, a key objective is to embed elements of international education in all OUC programs.
- Ensure sustainability of international activities by expanding student numbers, research activity and international curricula.
- Improve support for all staff mobility and increase externally funded collaborative research projects for staff exchanges.
- Develop new and existing international partnerships to attract incoming students and academic staff, also bilateral
- agreements with enterprises to increase the trend of inviting experts from industry to OUC.
- Expand support for students in English language proficiency, academic literacy and career development.
- Promote virtual mobility for adult learners experiencing difficulties for mobility abroad.

A priority area is to enhance teaching partnerships to offer joint programs in all 3 cycles when compelling strategic reasons arise. Joint degrees allow OUC to build on its own capacities & utilize the expertise of renowned universities. As of 2013 OUC is offering 3 joint Masters with local and US HEIs. A flagship action is to establish collaborations with prestigious academic institutions for joint PhDs, to attract the best researchers, benefiting from access to additional resources and gain international experience, while OUC academics can strengthen existing research collaborations.

Explicitly mentioned in OUC Strategic Plan 2012-15 is forming key EU and non-EU partnerships with HE and research institutions, governmental and private organizations and intensifying participation in EU/international cooperation projects. Most common approach of engaging in projects at OUC is the 'bottom-up'; academics develop proposals (shared interests with staff at other institutions), while institutional participation is also actively pursued and OUC is engaged in various projects funded by EU and international programs. Participation of admin staff is also promoted in large and small-scale projects, such as Erasmus/Grundtvig mobility, learning partnerships and multilateral projects.

A key strategic aim is to establish links with renowned academic institutions for joint degrees offered in English to expand and achieve a balanced subject base and increase proportion of EU

and non-EU students. OUC also seeks to intensify the international impact of its research by enhancing active partnerships to address major global challenges (eg climate change).

Internationalization of competitive academic programs will be systematically addressed, focusing on content, expected knowledge and skill gains. OUC plans to establish collaborations with local and foreign enterprises (Knowledge Alliances actions), to offer ECTS accredited programs that meet student and labor market needs, ensuring graduates are equipped with transferable skills. Foreign enterprises, improve opportunities for student mobility for traineeships.

Participation in collaborative projects is strategically decided when proposals are sound, economically viable and OUC can sustain activities/obligations as partner/coordinator. For projects to be implemented under Erasmus4All the targets are :

- increase quality mobility numbers,
- provide opportunities for international education and knowledge transfer to students/staff,
- increase externally funded collaborative research and
- engage in curriculum development to enhance the academic subject range covered.

Expected impact of the Erasmus Programme on the modernization of OUC

Erasmus4All provides excellence range of actions and funding opportunities for OUC to improve quality of programs and research, improve mobility, expand international research, modernize curricula, diversify funding base.

OUC is distance teaching promoting LLL and providing programs that emphasise on quality, relevance and graduate employability. It aims at underrepresented groups who cannot attend conventional universities and its eLearning mode is tailored to the needs of a diverse student body. In 2012 OUC begun to carry out substantial curricular reforms and restructuring of its programs and within Erasmus4All it plans to utilize funding for curriculum development with EU and non-EU partners.

As the sole local provider of distance education OUC sets a goal to work with domestic enterprises in the design/delivery of degree programmes and training courses, exploiting ICTs potential to enable personalized learning experiences. In 2013 it starts a strategic partnership with KPMG to offer training courses and will apply for ESF funding for MOOCs offering to certain target groups. OUC eLearning platform and the e-University project are key enablers. Another target is to improve the relevance of OUC's programs to the needs of the wider economy and offer students' prospects to acquire knowledge and transferable skills and to gain practical experience in partner institutions. Utilizing the Program's innovative actions-Knowledge and Sector Skills Alliances-OUC plans to work with national and regional stakeholders to promote university-business and support regional centers of excellence in areas like energy, climate change, ICT, e-government and e-health.

Being a DT university limits students' ability to participate in mobility and OUC sets policies to tackle the main obstacles to adult learners' mobility. Utilizing its eLearning methodology and platform, OUC plans to invest in collaborative projects focused on open courseware and development of open educational resources. OUC will further support its students by providing access to Virtual Mobility opportunities, so OUC students are invited to attend MOOCs provided by other DL universities www.openuped.eu ensuring academic recognition of ECTS gained, while OUC is designing its own MOOCs within this platform.

OUC's strategy underlines the quality of teaching, research and services provided. To ensure academic staff opportunities for professional development, OUC is working towards applying the HR Strategy for Research logo. In coming years, more emphasis will also be placed on Marie Curie actions and securing funding for postdoc research.

As public spending in HE diminishes, OUC aims to secure additional funding sources and maximize its resources. OUC has also approved target performance budget allocations to the various departments and resources are channelled on targets assuring quality. Dependence on state grant has diminished enhancing OUC's autonomy as additional funding sources are pursued: tuition fees, EU and private funds.