

Erasmus+ Policy Statement

The Open University of Cyprus (OUC) is a public university offering exclusively open and distance education. It was established in 2002 and enrolled its first students in 2006. Our mission is to open up higher education to all and promote lifelong learning, allowing everyone to tailor their educational path, irrespective of age, time, location or life circumstances and socio-economic background. With approx. 3700 students in 50+ countries, programmes offered in Greek (for the majority of OUC degrees) and in English at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels in both traditional and cutting-edge scientific fields, OUC is one of the largest HEIs in Cyprus and is developing into a leading institution in promoting open & distance education in Europe. Committed to open education and lifelong learning, OUC supports the EU's Modernization and International Agenda for Higher Education and the EU's Digital Education Action Plan. The University is also fully committed to implementing the Bologna Process (all its degrees are designed based on the European Credit Transfer System – ECTS and all modules are designed based on Learning Outcomes - LOs), and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Reforms. Committed to quality, OUC also supports ENQA's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Being a research-oriented institution, OUC hosts a number of research labs that operate with national & European funding, participates in several nationally and internationally funded research and development projects, and is a member of several renowned university networks.

The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education is integral to the realization of OUC's Strategic Plan and its Internationalization Strategy, which ties closely to the overall institutional plans and aspirations. More specifically, OUC seeks to exploit the international context in a holistic approach aiming to:

- Establish a high quality in-country presence.
- Offer high quality Programmes of Study tailored to the needs of society, industry & labour market, primarily in two languages of instruction (Greek and English).
- Offer programmes of study jointly with other renowned Universities and in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Degrees Programme.
- Enhance international student recruitment.
- Internationalize curricula and align syllabus with international norms and breakthroughs in the respective scientific fields.
- Establish high-quality and mutually beneficial partnerships to promote quality transnational education & research collaborations and implement capacity-building projects.

- Facilitate and support student & staff mobility in such a way that spending time abroad to study and learn becomes the norm, ensuring that members of the University community have a strong sense of their European identity. Establish an international alumni base.
- Facilitate inclusive education and open access to higher education so as to support the following EU's objectives: "15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning, at least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have completed some form of higher education, while the share of recent graduates in employment should be at least 82%".
- Facilitate the development of students' digital skills.
- Fully exploit the use of ICTs in education and develop further eLearning modes of delivery.

Given that international partnerships are a core element of OUC's Strategic Plan, the University chooses carefully its strategic partners. The choice of partners is driven by reciprocity, mutual commitment to quality & interdisciplinarity. OUC seeks to work with HEIs that share a similar vision (strategic 'fit'), recognize the benefits of a diverse portfolio, and focus on mutual benefits (risk assessment). The aim is to establish partnerships that a) provide added value to the University's students & staff, b) increase networking opportunities for its faculty & researchers, c) facilitate student and staff exchanges, d) enhance OUC's global reach/reputation, e) allow the University to improve from the best practices of other HEIs. Many of our existing partnerships are the result of individual links between academic staff, while others have been introduced through research projects, Erasmus+ Inter-institutional agreements, existing partners or other university networks. Our partner institutions are diverse, reflecting the different needs and priorities of our Institution, staff and students. OUC's Internationalization Strategy aims at building links with partners from EU and non-EU countries, so that students and staff can have access to mobility opportunities, while due consideration is given to choosing partners that are leaders in teaching and learning so as to learn from their best practices and improve our own educational environment. OUC's specific focus in terms of geographical priorities lies in Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa. Moreover, OUC has a specific focus on partners that demonstrate synergies with the University and its vision, and to this end, OUC is involved in a 'European Universities' proposal with other European Open Universities, aiming to establish a student-centred, digital and inclusive "The Open European University". OUC's strategic directions with regards to degrees and research include, amongst others, eLearning methodology and technologies to support inclusive access to education and to promote virtual mobility, Digital Transformation in Education, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Environmental Sciences and Sustainability, Culture, Heritage and Civilization, and Professional Qualifications.

In regard to mobility, OUC is committed to extend the range of mobility opportunities offered to its students and staff and ensure their recognition. OUC's main objectives in relation to its participation in the Erasmus+ programme are to:

- increase proportion of outward student mobility for placements, promoting quality structured traineeships to gain international experiences/skills.
- safeguard a steady flow of outgoing student mobility for studies, encouraging and supporting all students, including those facing difficulties to study abroad.
- increase STA and STT for personal and professional development, and increase incoming staff mobilities.
- Ensure sustainability of international activities by increasing student and staff mobility 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 invite experts from the industry to teaching at OUC.
- Promote blended and virtual mobility for adult learners who find it difficult to engage in physical mobility and offer additional financial support to potential beneficiaries from disadvantaged backgrounds and people with disabilities.
- Ensure that mobility periods spend abroad are recognized by OUC and partner Universities.

In all OUC international activities we recognize the important of monitoring and evaluation of joint projects and partners, as well as benchmarking with other universities to inform our future policies and strategy. The following are OUC's priorities for the 2021-2027 period in relation to the EU's Modernization and Internationalization Agenda in Higher Education:

- **Increase attainment levels to high quality tertiary education in line to the needs of society and the economy:** Open access to education is one of OUC's core values. We believe that inclusiveness and diversity are important and we support our open admissions system, policies and practice. Our distance learning strategy and robust eLearning Platform and tools and policies for recognition of prior formal learning support our commitment to widening participation and inclusivity.
- **Improve the quality and relevant of higher education and research:** OUC fully supports ESG and the principles and guidelines of the Cyprus Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education. The University's diverse portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate distance learning programmes includes inter-disciplinary, traditional and cutting-edge scientific fields. In developing new Programmes the University is carrying out market research and feasibility studies to ensure alignment to the needs of society and the economy. OUC's online degrees and eLearning Platform allow students to develop their digital skills and prepare for the digital era. Strategic partnerships with the industry

and 3rd cycle degrees allow the University to align its Programmes to address labour needs and to develop industry-academia cooperation. Moreover, OUC will utilize the Erasmus+ Programme to promote mobility opportunities for its students and staff for personal and professional development and to allow them to develop transferable skills and competences.

- **Strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border collaboration:** Being still a relatively young University, we do believe that learning from the best-practices of others can improve our own capacities and abilities. Working with partners in the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme we will deepen our knowledge and experience in other educational systems and processes, and working with more experienced open & distance universities will guide our future directions and teaching & learning strategies. Through cross-border collaboration and mobility activities our staff will enhance their expertise and will also share their know-how with their colleagues. The Programme will also help us to attract foreign students and academic staff.
- **Making the ‘knowledge triangle’ work:** OUC will continue to work in partnership with other Universities, local and international public and private bodies, businesses and industry and in university networks to tackle challenges in education, research and innovation. Through educational and research collaboration, we aspire to integrate into society and industry and develop basic and applied research for the benefit of the economy and the local, national and European communities. The integration of industrial experiences into degree programmes, especially in the fields of pure and applied sciences, can also allow OUC to penetrate into the labour market and train graduates to effectively meet the changing needs of today’s labour market. Moreover, OUC aspires to develop further its professional development programmes and to establish itself as a Lifelong Learning Professional Development Provider.
- **Improving governance and funding:** The Open University of Cyprus is a public University and about 50% of its budget is state funding. Its additional sources of funding (e.g. tuition fees, funds from national and European research programmes, EU funding, etc.) are re-invested to support the University’s academic development plans. In terms of governance, efficiency, effectiveness and focus on quality are core values. The University’s academic and administrative staff tailor their actions to adhere to the University’s strategic plans and directions.