

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT

2021 – 2027

“TODOR KABLESHKOV” HIGHER SCHOOL OF TRANSPORT

University international strategy

“Todor Kableshkov” Higher School of Transport - Sofia (HST) is a multi-profile university with over 95 years educational experience in the field of transportation. HST aims at developing knowledge and creating the best possible educational and research conditions in order to better contribute to the local and worldwide higher education systems. It implements its activities within the Bologna Process meeting all requirements to actively take part in EU educational and research projects.

HST appreciates the importance of international cooperation through mobility of students and staff as a powerful instrument for the establishment of fruitful cooperation with other European universities. Its partnerships encompass almost all Erasmus participating countries. However, the average number of active partners is round about fifteen. These are universities working in the area of transport studies. Most active partnerships are long standing and cover all Erasmus activities: student and staff mobilities, language courses, intensive programmes, joint research projects, etc. The university strategy does not foresee an increase of the total number of partners within the next stage of the Erasmus programme but is open to new partners, especially in the field of transport studies and education.

The main purpose of the Governing Boards of university (Rector, Vice-Rectors, Deans, Academic council, Faculty councils, etc.) is securing quality of all types of activities within the Erasmus programme. This purpose is a cornerstone of the international strategy of HST and it is characterized by some features:

- Concentration of all Erasmus activities* in a standalone management structure - Erasmus office. The Erasmus office holds regular meetings with Faculty Erasmus coordinators to inform them regarding the latest development of Erasmus programme, maintains contacts with partner universities, provides assistance to students and teachers (both incoming and outgoing), etc.

- Organization and implementation of an Induction programme.*

During the first week of their study, incoming Erasmus students attend an induction programme. They are given a general introduction to university life including information about principal support services, teachers, programme and eventual special requirements.

- All staff and students have the protection of *University policy for Equal Opportunities* which protects from any discrimination based on religion, race, age, gender, disability, etc.

- Academic and study skill support.*

Incoming Erasmus students learn a range of practical and personal Transferable Skills including Study Skills. Some of this material, e.g. time management, is covered in the Induction Programme. Students are explicitly mentored on their approach to both team/individual assignments and independent studies. Help with academic writing is available from the Erasmus office.

During their study at HST, students are assigned a faculty Erasmus coordinator whose responsibility is to monitor their academic performance, overall well-being and development. The university offers a range of support services, including one-to-one counselling and guidance on a range of topics dealing with emotional issues such as: stress, anxiety, student finance, budgeting, disability matters, etc. There is also language support available for students with specific difficulties (e.g. specialised terms in the area of teaching or individual research).

HST main learning resources are provided by its library (for books, journals, online resources and the like), and Information Systems and Services, which support campus-wide computing facilities.

- Support for Students with Disabilities.*

HST assures help, assistance and advice for disabled students providing them with

information about the university facilities (services, accessibility of campus, technical support available, etc.), guidance in study skills and advice on financial support arrangements.

If a student misses a block of learning due to illness or other extenuating circumstances, sufficient support is available to such a student.

-Promoting the benefits of the Erasmus programme.

HST encourages its students, academic, administrative and technical staff members to actively participate in Erasmus programme. The Erasmus office organizes information days devoted to programme specifics, benefits and requirements for participation.

HST is now trying to increase the number of students and staff members wishing to take part in the programme. Since one of the main problems in that area is language proficiency, the university is encouraging students and staff to acquire a better knowledge of English and acquire appropriate certificates.

University strategy for the organisation and implementation of international cooperation projects in teaching and training under the Programme

The university strategy for internationalization involves the following key elements:

-Creation of conditions for an increase in the number of student and staff mobilities not only to/from Europe but from other Countries;

-Investigation of possibilities for the exchange of good practice, as well as for promotion of university academic and administrative staff expertise worldwide;

-Support of all European initiatives and programs relating to contemporary economic problems, quality of student education and their future employment;

-Increase of the number of academic staff members participating in University Networks of Excellence and Knowledge;

-Improvement of the attractiveness of HST (quality of education, facilities, services, number of courses taught in English, conditions for joint research activities, etc.) to students, academic and administrative staff from EU and non-EU countries;

-Participation in actions that strengthen the link between education, research and business;

-Improvement of the system for selection of academic partners by the use of appropriate criteria, e.g. academic excellence, area of education and training, proximity, quality of study programs, opinion of former Erasmus students, etc. Particular emphasis will be given to the collaboration with institutions from the Middle East, Mediterranean and Turkey;

-Increasing of the number of courses taught in English;

-Development of joint Programs of Study;

-Improvement of the language proficiency of students, teachers and administrative staff;

-Updating of institution's web-page of Erasmus programme with day to day information.

The Erasmus University Charter and the Erasmus Policy Statement are available on HST website;

-Full application of the European System for transferring academic credits (ECTS) already applied to all of HST faculties.

Implementation of the fundamental principles

Non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion of students and staff

HST has taken measures to prevent discrimination (on any basis) with regard to the participation of teachers, non-teachers and students in the Erasmus + program. The University has developed and strictly adheres to *Rules for Decentralized Activities under the Erasmus + Program of "T. Kableshkov" Higher School of Transport*. It explicitly states that all activities regarding the Erasmus + program at HST are in accordance with the requirements of the Erasmus + Program Guide, according to which participation in the program requires the promotion of European values for respect human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

Within the organizational structure of HST, the management of the Erasmus + program is centered in an Erasmus office, which is a specialized unit for international cooperation and mobility.

A major function of this office is the management of outbound and inbound mobility activities for students and teaching staff (also for non-teaching staff), including the organization of selection procedures for participation in the Erasmus + program. A basic rule in this organization (including its actual conduct) is the equality of participation in these procedures by each member of HST's teaching, non-teaching and student staff. Selection of students and representatives of the teaching and administrative staff applying for mobility or an Erasmus + project is carried out by *the Erasmus Office Coordination Board* (consisting of institutional and faculty coordinators and student representatives) in compliance with clearly defined criteria stated in the *Rules for Decentralized Activities under the Erasmus + Program*. The activity of the Erasmus office is carried out with complete transparency of the decisions made, which are brought to the knowledge of the university staff (by clearly defined and well-known information methods of dissemination).

Promoting civic engagement and active citizenship amongst Erasmus students during their mobility

Civic engagement and active citizenship are skills that create the conditions for the functioning of modern civil society in a democratic structure such as the European Union. People who are civically active and voluntarily commit themselves to solving pressing problems in society, have the necessary knowledge of their rights and obligations, actively work to protect their own and others rights and to respect the obligations of all members of society. The civic activity of an individual and his/her commitment to solving certain problems implies a good knowledge of the structure of society as a whole, its individual institutions and the mechanisms of interaction between different institutions at local, national and international levels.

Accordingly, HST has accepted the understanding that the development of civic engagement and student active citizenship should start at the beginning of students study at the university and continue at each subsequent stage of this study with increasing weight and scope, and at its end each student (including Erasmus students) should:

- know and explain the main functions and mechanisms of local, state and international institutions;
- know basic human and civil rights and obligations;
- express a reasoned and informed position on topics of public importance;
- express active citizenship and makes suggestions for solving current problems.

Each year, a *Youth Science Forum* is held at HST under the motto "I know and I can!", which includes a large number of local students and, traditionally, all Erasmus students enrolled to study at the university at the time of the forum. Under the guidance of mentors (university professors), students present reports on topics of public concern. In this way, the civic engagement and active behaviour (citizenship) of outgoing and incoming students before, after and during their mobility is further encouraged (not only within the learning process).

Recognition of all credits gained

HST highly appreciates the importance of student and staff mobility implementation as a powerful tool for establishing fruitful cooperation with other European universities. The University carries out its activities within the framework of the Bologna Process and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), meeting all the requirements for active participation in EU educational and research projects. In this regard, HST uses two internal regulations: *Rules for decentralized activities under the Erasmus + program* and *Rules for organizing student mobility and recognition of educational credits and periods of study*. These rules promote transparency and mutual trust between the partner higher education systems, thereby achieving automatic mutual recognition of periods of study and further training of students in accordance with the specifics and principles of the Bologna Process. University governing boards (Rector, Deputy Rectors, Deans, Erasmus Office, Academic Council, Faculty Boards, etc.) are responsible for the proper implementation of the rules. Of course, the overall activity of university in this field (rules, procedures, cooperation with national information centers for academic recognition and higher

education institutions, updating of the current catalog of courses taught to Erasmus students, issuing diploma supplement, criteria for recognition and others) will be gradually refined to achieve full automatic recognition of all credits received as a result of study abroad mobility.

Measures to support, promote and recognise staff mobility

HST encourages its academic, administrative and technical staff to participate actively in Erasmus + program. The University Erasmus Office regularly organizes information days on the specifics of the program, its benefits and requirements for participation. In addition to providing information, the Erasmus office of HST offers any other support to teachers and administrative staff wishing to carry out mobility abroad, for example: organizing selection procedures with complete transparency of decisions, assisting in the preparation of Staff Mobility Agreement (for teaching or training) and other necessary documents (also presentations), liaising with partner universities, assistance during mobility, preparation of an individual report after respective mobility, recognition of mobility

Faculty Erasmus Coordinators are responsible for informing teachers and administrative staff from relevant faculties about the opportunities for Erasmus + mobility and for assisting them in this activity, such as:

- Integrating mobility into the staff member's annual workload pattern;
- Taking into account the results of mobility in the determination of teacher's evaluation appraisal;
- Supporting the creation of new professional relationships for departments, administrative units and university as a whole.

Visibility, promotion of the activities and communication of Erasmus+ programme principles

The promotion of Erasmus + activities will be mainly implemented through the regularly organized at HST:

- Information Erasmus days.
- Specialty Day.
- Career day.
- University Open Day.
- Student Management Day.
- Other events such as conferences, celebrations, graduation of students, etc.

These major events highlight the benefits of Erasmus + program through presentations of the Institutional and Faculty Erasmus Coordinators. Also teachers, non-teachers and Erasmus students (incoming and outgoing) present presentations on their achievements in the scope of their mobility. It is important to say that managers from companies which are potential employers of students are traditionally invited to participate in these events. In such a way, they learn about the features and benefits of the Erasmus + program, including the students' achievements.

A guarantee that the principles of the Erasmus Charter will be well communicated and applied by all members of HST staff (teachers, administrative staff and students) is the existence and very good functioning of the Erasmus office of HST. All Erasmus+ program activities are covered by the university internal rules, the compliance with which is a top priority of the activities of the Institutional and Faculty Coordinators. Full transparency of the decisions taken by the Erasmus Office is completely ensured (through information on the institutional website, announcements on the internal information system, presentations during the Erasmus + information days and other ways).

Expected impact of HST participation in the programme on its modernisation

The Erasmus programme plays a significant role in the international policy and strategy of HST and as a corollary has a considerable impact on the quality of higher education, vocational education and training. The institution's participation in Erasmus programme will lead to:

- Improvement of teaching quality and intensification of the internationalization of education and research through individual, group and institutional contacts within implemented mobilities;
- Enhancement of students' employability, further professional development and personal capability for innovation due to their study or training abroad which gives them good opportunities to get specific knowledge or training in fields not available or not well developed at HST;
- Increasing of the reputation of university as a unique educational and research centre in the field of transport.