

The University of Akureyri Erasmus Policy Statement

UNAK's international (EU and non-EU) strategy.

The Institution agrees to publish this overall strategy on its website within one month after the signature of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education by the European Commission.

The University of Akureyri (UNAK) is a national science- and education institution but at the same time a part of the international science- and education community. The University of Akureyri emphasises international relations in all its work as stated in the overall “Strategy of the University of Akureyri”¹. UNAK is a party to a wide range of bilateral and multilateral agreements on staff and student mobility and research collaboration.

All faculties have multiple Erasmus partnerships with active student and staff mobility. Because of the small size of UNAK and has been more on the receiving end of the partnership requests. However, for the upcoming new Erasmus+ programme the university will be focusing on taking advantage of those partnerships that are currently active and successful and dismiss other inactive agreements. When reviewing existing agreements or considering new international partnerships, priority is given to agreements of strategic importance and a satisfactory level of activity. Partners are chosen at three levels: University-wide partnerships, partnerships that are anchored in the main academic area and departmental or degree-specific partnerships. Decision-making structures reflect the level of the partnership. The decision on partnership is in the hands of the rector or dean of a relevant school or faculty in collaboration with the International office. This has also some strong influences from faculty staff where the initiation may often come from and is based on an informal ongoing partnership in research.

The backbone of international agreements is with EU-countries through the Erasmus+ but also in Asia, Africa and North America. However, UNAK's strategy has emphasised on arctic collaboration for years. The university has established its speciality both abroad and domestically as being a university with a strong emphasis on arctic issue. The strategic partnership projects have been successfully explored by the university in the last Erasmus+ programme (2014-2021) and these partners will hopefully be the core alliance of UNAK for the coming years.

Student mobility is considered an important activity to enhance the cultural and global awareness and experience of the entire institution, to facilitate international and intercultural understanding and collaboration and to strengthen the students' abilities to study and work in increasingly global and multicultural environments. Student mobility is considered with the provision of professional added value to current and future study programmes and workplace arrangements. UNAK aims to prioritize quality improvement of mobility, identify structural and practical barriers to mobility, optimize internal coordination of mobility placements. UNAK offers special courses for incoming exchange students on Icelandic language, Icelandic History and Culture and Icelandic Nature. These courses provide an international dialogue on cultural

¹ <https://www.unak.is/english/university/strategies-and-policies/future-vision-until-2023>

diversity and insight for students on Icelandic culture compared to their own culture. Classes are generally small which allows teachers to adapt their lessons to the proficiency of the incoming students.

With the focus on strategic partnership staff mobility is at the core of the institutions' quality improvement efforts. Knowledge and professional capacity is increasingly produced and development through international collaboration and often within the framework of strategic partnerships and alliances. Staff mobility aims to provide staff with insights into international trends within their field of work, new relevant knowledge and experiences and is considered the key to the overall efforts to develop an institution with a strong international profile.

UNAK has implemented the quality requirements that the Bologna-process demands with the use of ECTS, learning outcomes, learning agreements, quality council etc. and has been awarded with the Diploma Supplement label from the European Commission.

In it's international educational policy the University of Akureyri includes the following objectives:

- to increase and balance the numbers of both incoming and outgoing student exchanges
- to increase and balance the number of incoming and outgoing teacher and staff exchanges
- to strengthen the university status abroad as an arctic focused university
- to broaden and deepen the academic curricula by cooperation with other universities through student and staff exchange
- to increase participation in various intensive and multilateral projects
- to provide opportunities for both students and staff to engage in a dynamic partnership which also leads to awareness of cultural diversity and new perspectives
- to have all necessary information about international matters available online for our partners to access
- to provide a learning environment that offers both equality and respect with more variety of courses taught in English and solutions for incoming students.
- to guaranty good quality and practice in student, teacher and staff mobility by sharing new knowledge and ideas

UNAK's strategy for the organisation and implementation of international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training in relation to projects implemented under the Programme

UNAK has established an international academic coordinator who has an insight in the specific academic field and knows the need for internationalization within the field. Each faculty in collaboration with the office of international relations establishes its priorities in international cooperation and strategy in which way it fits best for the programs offered. The International relations office is then responsible of managing and organizing the student and staff exchange as well as other international projects that faculties might request.

The University is now developing strategy to increase number of courses taught in English and accessibility to courses for incoming exchange students to take. This will be one of the key points for increasing numbers of incoming exchange students but should as well encourage local students to go abroad as the learning environment would be more international and diverse. The increase of student and staff exchange will most definitely deepen the academic curricula and provide the possibility of establishing international multilateral agreements.

Exchange students are accepted on the basis of bilateral agreements and through cooperative networks (e.g. Nordplus and North2North) and the applications are processed by the relevant faculty applied to. Accepted student participate in courses and programs within the school on the same basis as regular students. They receive full credits (ECTS) for their work and grades or other kind of assessment is awarded on the basis of their performance.

Local students at UNAK are encouraged to take a study period abroad both as a regular exchange and placement if possible. Important factor in promoting activities within the programme is to facilitate exchange of information and opinions between the visiting students and the local students that either have just finished their periods abroad or are in the stage of planning such a stay. The introduction of a buddy system has also proven essential to mix together incoming exchange students and degree seeking students.

Expected impact of the participation in the Programme on the modernization of UNAK.

The Erasmus programme will sharpen the universities focus on priorities such as quality and innovation in teaching, enhanced links with the job market, and better recognition of skills gained through mobility. The focus on modernization as it introduced by the commission is very much related to the emphasis that the university has made in his general policy making. The focus is on increasing the quantity of higher education graduates at all levels. UNAK has formed a retention committee that is looking into causes of drop out and solutions towards retention that will enable students to graduate.

Mobility can have a positive factor regarding retention and could give students and also teachers new perspectives.

Another important issue is the enhancement of quality and relevance of human capital development in higher education. UNAK is devoted to quality issues in education and has a quality council that has been running for many years, focusing on enhancement of quality according to requirements made both by the Bologna Process but also by the government. This has proven to be an important factor for the university especially when it comes to mobility and the evaluation process of courses and their learning outcomes.

UNAK aims to build learning mobility more systematically into curricula which might eliminate unnecessary barriers for students. UNAK will also be looking into the preparation of applying for the ECTS label shortly and has already received the DS-label as recognition from the Commission. The third priority is to create effective governance and funding mechanisms in support of excellence. This is also a quality issue that UNAK has emphasized on such as effective and transparent governance as well as the supporting excellence in teaching and support with

awards every year. UNAK will focus on establishing better collaboration with the local labour market. This might involve improving conditions for graduates to gain practical experience, for example through high quality traineeships, can further facilitate their integration in the labour market. The university will aim to strengthen the knowledge triangle between education, research and business. It is evident that international mobility of students, researchers and staff, as well as the growing internationalization at the university will have a strong impact on quality and affect each of these key areas mentioned above.