

## 1. ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS) 2021-2027 ENGLISH VERSION

### 1.1 Erasmus activities included in your EPS

In this section, you need to tick the Erasmus activities covered by your Erasmus Policy Statement. Please select those activities that your HEI intends to implement during the entire duration of the Programme.

#### Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) - Learning mobility:

The mobility of higher education students and staff

#### Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) - Cooperation among organisations and institutions:

Partnerships for Cooperation and exchanges of practices

Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities

Partnerships for Excellence - Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees

Partnerships for Innovation

#### Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3):

Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3) - Support to policy development and cooperation:

### 1.2 Erasmus Policy statement (EPS): your strategy

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency.

What would you like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does your participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into your institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

(Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

Howest University of Applied Sciences is a creative, innovative and entrepreneurial university of applied sciences with +8200 students. Through its bachelor, associate degree and postgraduate programmes, with a future-oriented approach, Howest trains competent, immediately employable professionals able to respond to developments in our global society. Howest works for and intensively with the regional and international work field, integrating forward-thinking, socially relevant and skill-oriented education, valorisation-oriented research and service-oriented approaches into its study programmes. Howest is an open and pluralistic university of applied sciences, with respect for diversity. Howest's core values are "serve - empower - care".

Institution-wide, internationalisation is firmly anchored in each of the three pillars of our decree, namely education, research and service to society. The international dimension is an explicit part of the Howest Mission-Vision-Values, the Strategic Plan, the Quality Criteria for the study programmes and the HR policy.

Howest forges international partnerships with organisations with similar values and DNA. These collaborations underline Howest's European and global commitment and mutually reinforce the innovation and quality of its education, research and services. Howest actively participates in funding programmes with an international focus, of which the EU programmes, including Erasmus+, are by far the most important. The geographical determination of the international partnerships and activities not only takes into account the learning objectives and the needs and the specific character of the field of study, but also aims for a European focus with attention to cross-border and intercontinental cooperation.

An essential part of the future-proof, practice-oriented profile that characterises Howest graduates is, on the one hand, digital skills and, on the other, international & intercultural competences (IC) they acquire throughout their studies. Howest strongly stands behind these important spearheads of both the European Education Area and the Erasmus programme. Howest develops internationally competent graduates by integrating an international dimension into all of its bachelor programmes and by actively stimulating the students towards international/intercultural learning experiences. Our associate degree students also work on international skills that are in line with work field expectations and have access to international/intercultural learning experience(s). The structural embedding of internationalisation within the study programmes follows the five tracks listed below, which each programme develops in line with its specific approach and character. The successful implementation of each of these five pillars for Howest internationalisation fully depends on our participation in the Erasmus programme.

° **Internationalisation@home (I@H)** from the first academic year, during which curriculum content and teaching methods & components with an international focus are central, as well as having international (guest) lecturers / professional specialists and collaboration with international students, both physically and through COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) methods.

° **Outgoing student mobility**

Achieving outgoing mobility for all Howest students is a key objective of our international operations. In doing so, we actively pursue the Flemish and EHEA/Bologna objectives regarding "mobile diplomas" and knowledge of foreign languages. After all, a stay abroad for study or internship is the perfect way to combine achieving learning outcomes with sharpening the necessary social and personal skills, leading to internationally and intercultural competent graduates with an increased awareness of their European identity and global citizenship. The study programmes include mobility windows for study abroad, internship and short-term mobility within their curriculum. In parallel, Howest organises a varied range of affordable and high-quality mobility options, individually or in groups, during the academic year or during the holiday period, which also includes *blended mobility*. From the second bachelor year, Howest is strongly committed to offering short-term mobility projects, given that it lowers the threshold for long-term mobility in later study years, and is also the only opportunity for a significant group of students to actually take the step abroad. For such projects, an online component using COIL can enhance a short stay abroad.

Erasmus+ is responsible for roughly two thirds of the student grants for long-term mobility for study or internship, supplemented with scholarship programs from the Federal, Flemish and Provincial authorities.

Howest guarantees the fulfilment of the crucial conditions for high-quality mobility, in particular, a facilitating educational organisation, funding via grants, supervision and guidance of students before, during and after their mobility, integral recognition of credits acquired during every type of mobility, and monitoring the quality of mobility. Howest safeguards equal access to international mobility for students from underrepresented groups, providing specific types of support to make the various forms of international mobility feasible for those target groups. Howest continues to digitise its international mobility administration and processes.

° **International campuses through incoming credit and diploma mobility**

Howest aims at having a diversified student population, through, for example, international campuses with maximum integration of international and local students. As a leading player in the higher education landscape, Howest profiles itself in its areas of expertise with an ICT focus as a 'European center of excellence.' Thanks to English-taught bachelor programmes or postgraduates and via both in-person and at-distance education, Howest recruits international degree-seeking students, professionals and graduates in search of such specialisations. In this way, Howest contributes to the *brain gain* of talent to West Flanders. In addition, our programmes welcome exchange students from partner institutions via English-taught semesters/courses, through the creation of a tailor-made offer or the organisation of short, international study programmes. This incoming credit mobility is largely sponsored by the Erasmus programme. Howest wants to optimally meet the specific needs of those international students in terms of accommodation, services and international-community building. Howest is also making efforts to enable inbound mobility from partners from non-industrialized countries.

° **Outgoing staff mobility**

Howest actively encourages its staff to engage in international outreach and collaboration, both academic and work field-oriented, and expects its lecturers, researchers and policy officers to regularly gain international experience and integrate the international dimension into their educational methods and approaches. After all, employees with an open mind and international focus are a basic condition for successfully anchoring an international dimension in the study programme and raising students' awareness about it. Howest therefore gives formal recognition to its staff for

their internationalisation work by including it in their work package and through periodic evaluation. Howest strives for a sustainable mobility policy. Erasmus+ is the main co-financier of our personnel mobility.

#### ° International projects

Howest encourages study programmes to coordinate or seek partnerships in subsidised, international projects that add value to its teaching, research or service mission. National and international funding sources are used for this, with support from the Research or Internationalisation services. Active participation in international projects is a breeding ground for curriculum - and other innovation, and increases the effectiveness and image of the study programmes. In the field of digital technology and its application within education and the professional field, Howest is a much sought-after knowledge partner, and is also looking for cooperation with state of the art, international organisations. In addition, Howest encourages each degree programme to participate in one of its structural projects in low and middle-income countries, with a view on capacity exchange and jointly working with our local partners towards the Sustainable Development Goals as formulated in the UN 2030 Agenda. After all, the Howester's open view of the world also implies social commitment and responsible global citizenship. The development of the Howest Foundation will help achieve that goal.

For the further rollout of the five aspects of its internationalisation strategy, Howest will continue to rely actively on EU support, in particular the Erasmus+ programme.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

As outgoing and incoming student and personnel mobility are spearheads of our internationalisation strategy, Howest will continue to participate annually in the KA103 and KA107 calls. These will contribute significantly to our achieving the following objectives: Howest aims for 20% "mobile diplomas" with 15 mobile ects by 2025, and for a steady increase in "mobile diplomas" with 10 mobile ects towards the 33% target of the Flemish government. With the growth we have achieved in outgoing students since 2014-15, we are on the right track: from 137 or 13% mobile diplomas (with 15 ects), to the almost 18% in the period 15-17, to the decreased 16% (191 mobile dipl.) last year, with a peak in 2017-18 of 18.5% (243). Reaching the target 20% will largely have to be done through the Erasmus programme, where the greatest growth potential lies in internships abroad. Within Erasmus KA103, we have steadily increased from 100 outgoing students in 2014 to 181 in 2020. The number of incoming Erasmus students has also increased by 49% in the last 6 years to 84 this year. Outside the Erasmus framework, we also welcome about 30 students from intercontinental partners every year. We want to further increase the total number to +150 a year as incoming credit mobility plays a major role in achieving our Internationalisation@home objective of internationally diverse campuses with active cooperation between local and foreign students. We have seen the English-language semesters organised by our study programmes within their curriculum grow in the past Erasmus+ period from 12 in 14-15 to 21 in 19-20. Incoming teachers also contribute to that I@H goal, and Howest will intensify its efforts to recruit professionals through the section "STA from the European work field". Through annual submission of KA107 projects, we aim to further expand our student exchanges with our partners in focus countries USA and Taiwan/China, and to bring students and staff from Kazakhstan, Uganda and South Africa to Howest.

Finally, it should be noted that the coronavirus adds a major factor of uncertainty in the formulation of mobility objectives. Online classes/internships suddenly became part of long-term mobility. Howest is open to further exploration of such a *blended path*, but also remains in favour of a "physical" international study or internship semester.

Thanks to active recruitment for international mobility among students from underrepresented groups, Howest annually manages to send more students from low-income groups via Erasmus than the share that this target group represents within the total student population. We will continue to make maximum use of category 1 grants to enable that group to participate fully.

The international coordinator of the study programme is responsible for the preparation, supervision and debriefing of mobile students. In addition, with reference to and inspiration from its comprehensive support programme for students going to the global south, the International Office set up a pilot project in 2019 for a comprehensive support trajectory for mobility to industrialised countries, including European destinations. We will roll this out institution-wide during the next Erasmus+ period. Howest will also continue to maintain its support measures for language preparation for mobile students, which, in addition to the Erasmus OLS, consist of financial incentives for individual further training and the free 'English for Exchange Students' course.

Howest will also continue to participate in the Flemish consortium for internships after graduation, through which we annually realise mobilities, despite the fact that all of our graduates have already completed internships during their studies.

Howest expects its teaching/research staff and its employees to work internationally and to gain international experience at least every three years. We are already realizing this objective, monitored through the central services' travel registration tool and included in the personnel evaluations. In 18-19, we registered 316 foreign business trips,

which represents 60% of the number of full-time equivalents in those personnel categories. 22% of this happened with Erasmus KA103/KA107 funds. We aim to increase that to 25-30%.

Given the importance of short-term mobility projects within our internationalisation strategy, Howest expects a lot from the new Erasmus programme in this area: after the end of the Intensive Programs (IP) from Erasmus, our courses have continued to organise their IPs together with their European partners, often with a blended mobility approach, to reduce the mobility costs for the students, and by using KA103 resources for the lecturers. The prospect of new Erasmus funding for this concept will certainly give it a boost, as we expect it to double the number of IPs, with a significant increase in the number of jointly developed courses within partner consortia, in which European students participate together.

Howest considers participation in international projects with both academic and work field partners as a cornerstone of its strategy (see Part 1) to attain constant curriculum - and other innovation, to optimise Howest-wide embedding of digital skills and entrepreneurship in all its curricula, and to allow practice-oriented research to flow into education in an international context. Howest aims to, at minimum, double its participation in various KA2 projects. In the current Erasmus period, 7 study programmes participated in 6 approved KA2 Strategic Partnerships, 1 of which was under Capacity Building. For Call2020, 5 study programmes submitted another 5 projects, which include 2 in coordinator roles, and Howest is a partner in the European Universities application "European Universities alliance for TEchnological CHallenges" (101004014). Through the EUniversiTECH alliance, the partners want to share knowledge about the digital approach in higher education within Europe and to apply it to the professional context. This objective fits seamlessly with the Howest strategy and meets the high need for digital skills in the future labour market, as demonstrated for Flanders by AGORIA in its report "Be the change. Shaping the future of work." (2018).

Currently, 3 Howest degree programmes have integrated English (whether online or offline) modules into their curriculum that were developed within KA2 partnerships and are now offered jointly. There, too, we aim for further expansion through new Erasmus KA2 participation. It is the Research, Service and Entrepreneurship Office that supports study programmes with entering into Erasmus KA2 partnerships. The standard flow of the Howest Project Office provides an assessment of the added value of the project for their education, application-oriented research or services and provides the necessary guarantees regarding co-financing and quality assurance.

What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.) You are encouraged to offer an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

Thanks to participating in Erasmus+, Howest aims to **achieve the following goals** by 2027:

- ° + 20% of our graduates will have completed an internship or study semester abroad of at least 15 ECTS. We anticipate that an approval of our European Universities alliance EUniversiTECH will generate an increase in mobility to those partners. This should help reduce the negative impact of 2 current challenges to our outgoing mobility: the corona crisis and the integration of associate degree programmes in 2019 at Howest, which make up a quarter of our student population but have a less internationally-oriented profile.
- ° comprehensive support framework for Erasmus students rolled out Howest-wide (by 2022)
- ° fully digitised Erasmus mobility administration, incl. use of the European Student Card for incoming and outgoing student mobility (by 2023)
- ° each study programme generates sufficient incoming student and staff mobility so that all its students are able to collaborate intensively with international students, teachers and professionals from the field (I@H)
- ° a small increase in our number of English-taught semesters, through which incoming credit mobility is created.
- ° further increase of the Erasmus share of our outgoing staff mobility up to 25-30%.
- ° doubling the number of short-term blended mobility projects, with a corresponding significant increase in the number of jointly developed courses within partner consortia, in which European students participate together.
- ° doubling the number of KA2 Partnerships for Cooperation/Innovation and the number of participating study programmes. Continuation of existing initiatives with an eye on increasing the impact of their outputs.
- ° doubling of the number of study programmes that integrate foreign-language (online) course units into their curriculum that have been developed together with international partners.
- ° steady, further growth in the number of staff who obtain C1 certification in English.

° intensified cooperation with our partners in the global south through KA107 and KA2 projects, based on equality, which implies, among other things, inbound mobility, and the deepening of joint curriculum development and practice-oriented research.

° Through the pending “EUUniversiTECH” European University alliance, Howest will further sharpen its expertise in digital technology and its application and make its findings available to European HE and the work field. In case of non-approval, the partners will launch their testing grounds via Erasmus+ KA2 to set up virtual curricula and initiatives, ranging from Innovation Weeks in collaboration with companies at Howest, to online courses, semesters and a full virtual master. In doing so, they will develop the necessary frameworks for the recognition of virtual mobility and will, where necessary, enter into dialogue with policy-making authorities. Howest has already integrated COIL-based modules into its curricula, thanks to its participation in the KA2 project “CO-PILOT: Co-operative Online Peer-assisted Intercultural Learning in Occupational Therapy”, and intends to continue to pursue that path in the new programme period. The corona crisis, which has painfully demonstrated the usefulness of and need for the further digitisation of higher education, reinforces the relevance of such projects and increases the demand for expertise from institutions that are technology and innovation-oriented and that have made the smooth transition to online education.

° Howest does not currently strive to develop joint degrees with EU partners, but as soon as the Flemish government grants universities of applied sciences the power to offer professional masters, we will develop such programmes in a number of spearhead areas in collaboration with European partners.

Additionally, by mid-2021, Howest will further increase the visibility of its (international) projects by automatically linking the approved projects in our Project Office database to their publication on the website of the study programmes in question.

Howest closely **monitors** the rollout of its internationalisation strategy. A set of 15 “Howest Internationalisation Indicators,” structured in accordance with the five pillars of our internationalisation processes, with associated targets, is used for internal quality assurance and external audits. The monitoring includes quantitative and qualitative objectives. The results of mobile student satisfaction surveys and surveys of all graduates are included. In addition, the International Office systematically shares Erasmus final survey feedback from outgoing and incoming participants with the study programmes, with recommendations and further follow-up by the campus coordinators for internationalisation. The semestrial Howest International Forum also creates a platform for monitoring, exchanging good practices and optimising our internationalisation and Erasmus work. For its international projects, Howest controls the following characteristics through its Project Office: sufficiently innovative; in collaboration with the international work field; a cross-curricular or transdisciplinary nature; promotes entrepreneurial spirit and creativity among students and staff; socially relevant, and assurances regarding sustainable impact.

The intended growth and deepening within the five pillars of our internationalisation undertakings, thanks to Erasmus+, will have a significant **impact** in the form of:

- ° a further increase in the degree of internationalisation within Howest itself
- ° an increased international image of Howest
- ° further digitisation of our educational offer and the further development of digital skills in degree programmes that are currently the least advanced in that area
- ° Innovation in higher education through interconnection with the partners of our European University and/or the KA2 partnerships for Cooperation/Innovation
- ° Innovation through dissemination and introduction of technologies/methodologies in the local and international work field, with which we are connected through KA2 partnerships, student internships and projects and employed alumni.