

In the following sections of the application form, you will need to explain how your institution will fulfil the ECHE principles if the Charter is awarded. You are encouraged to consult the [ECHE Guidelines](#) for support in completing this application.

Please note that your Erasmus+ National Agency will monitor your Erasmus Policy Statement and your answers to the questions given in the application. The Erasmus+ National Agency reserves the right to request more information on your activities and propose supplementary measures, for the purposes of monitoring and implementing the Charter principles by your institution.

1. ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

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 Area¹ and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

Original language (and translation into EN, FR or DE if the EPS is not in one of these languages)

The year 2020 marks the 20th Anniversary from the year when the University of Malta (UM) joined the Erasmus Programme. The programme was introduced at a time when Malta was preparing for accession to the European Union and there was a strong sense of commitment towards the benefits that would be derived from our participation in EU programmes focused on the three main pillars of education, training and research. There was a large scale movement to gear the University to participate actively, to tap into the funding available, to expand mobility, implement ECTS and the Bologna process, affirm its position in the European Higher Education Area, open doors for collaboration, build and upgrade research facilities, upscale human resources, internationalise and progress.

As a University with a history that is traced to over 400 years, a rich cultural legacy that was strongly influenced by European movements and the Anglo Saxon tradition, the last twenty years have been marked by unprecedented development which was achieved with incredible speed and flexibility.

The UM's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (<https://www.um.edu.mt/about/strategy>) approved by the UM Senate on the 30 May 2019 and the UM Council on the 21 June 2019 reflects the evolving state of higher education, society, industry and the economy. It focuses on students' experience, resources, contribution of the academic community and the University's impact on the nation as well as the insights of the wider University community and social partners. The strategy, developed following consultation involving 15,000 students and staff and external stakeholders is supported by an implementation plan and strategic commitments for each academic year. With a whole chapter dedicated to International Outlook, the focus on the UM's European and global engagement is very strong throughout the whole document. UM Internationalisation is seen as intrinsic to our existence and our decision-making processes go very much beyond the local. This has the case throughout the University's history in view of our strategic maritime position and the international influence this brought about along with our bi-lingual context (Maltese/English) which is considered one of our strongest assets. The fact that teaching at the University is conducted in English has empowered the UM to attract a large number of international students and academics to pursue their studies or their academic career here.

A semester abroad is considered as an integral element in our study programmes with measures in place to ensure accessibility, support and recognition. Erasmus+ currently accounts for approximately 90% of UM study mobility overseas*. The University has registered marked increases in outbound mobility over the past 5 years and whilst plans need to be adjusted to take into account the COVID-19 situation, the commitment, as indicated in our strategic plan, is to support, provide and ensure wider and stronger student participation in mobility programmes at all levels of study. Strong investment is being made at this time to procure tailor made software to fully embrace the Erasmus Without Paper project which will certainly improve our efficiency in the long-term.

The University also has a very strong policy regarding engagement in joint programmes, having taken the leap of developing a fully-fledged joint degree during the earliest rounds of the Erasmus Mundus programme. The University is currently involved in 4 active Erasmus Mundus Joint Degrees with further applications in the pipeline. The University also runs a number of other joint, dual and collaborative post-graduate degree programmes with universities in the EU, the US, India, China and Australia.

The exchange of staff provides opportunities for the creation of richer programmes that promote wider diversity, the engagement of staff from other universities to deliver teaching, assess and evaluate programmes, measure and audit in line with European and international benchmarks, provide supervision and research openings in areas that are locally not available. Visiting staff and external examiners are an intrinsic part of the UM's teaching structure. As the only full-fledged national University in the country, external also means international. This has been further strengthened through our successful engagement in Erasmus+ international credit mobility which has brought financing to activate and support international collaborations that were previously not possible.

Erasmus+ staff mobility also provides opportunities for training of administrative and technical staff, an activity that is very effective and allows us to enhance our knowledge and capacity through on-site training and learning and exchange of good practice which is impossible to achieve in the local context. This action continues to be very popular and Calls for Application generally oversubscribed. Special focus has been made on enhancing this activity in the Strategic Plan.

Projects that focus on capacity-building and policy development provide frameworks of engagement and a commitment for implementing measures and key actions that allow us to remain at the forefront of future expectations. Larger scale networks and alliances (such as the "European University of the Sea (SEA-EU) Alliance project approved in 2019 in which the UM is a partner) provide platforms for deep and cross-disciplinary European and international cooperation through which we actively participate, bringing in our experience, our resources, to

¹ For more information on the priorities of the European Education Area, such as recognition, digital skills, common values and inclusive education, please consult the following website:
https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area_en

share and learn in a wider context.

We are currently engaged as coordinators and partners in several other Erasmus Key Action 2 and 3 projects focusing on partnerships, innovation, capacity building and policy development. These projects provide a platform for strong engagement with other Universities and actors in upskilling, knowledge transfer and capacity building with a particular focus on our region.

COVID-19 has certainly forced us to re-think our immediate present and future. As strict measures of isolation, social distancing and border closures took over, we rallied to ensure that we provide our students with the virtual learning platforms necessary for them to continue their studies and provide them with logistical and psychosocial support through this challenging period as they sought to stay or return home. At this stage, it is still very difficult to gauge just how long and how wide the impact will be on our plans and targets especially with regard to mobility actions which have been hardest hit.

Until physical mobility is restored, students will miss the cultural richness of leaving their homes and travelling hundreds or thousands of miles to meet peers from all over the world and make new experiences. The rest of us will join meetings without leaving our homes and offices. We shall conduct enriching discussions through virtual means but the human element of contact, of experiential learning will be lacking. Growth of ideas comes through exchange and social interaction especially in our local context where the University of Malta is the only fully-fledged teaching and research University on the island.

Virtual delivery has been catapulted to the frontline and Universities, such as ours, made huge leaps putting into practice what had been the outcome of research projects that had been conducted over the years and the investment that was made in facilities and equipment that allowed us to shift swiftly in an extremely limited timeframe. This experience has also served to help us prepare ourselves fully for virtual mobility opportunities that will be introduced in the new phase of the Erasmus+ programme

It is in times like these that the capacity to call a 400 year old university "modern" certainly rings true and the flexibility that was shown to transit into this new unplanned reality in the shortest of time-frames. The forward thinking that is being employed in planning the coming months and years also shows that the UM moves with foresight and has the will and capacity to be proactive and adjust rapidly in order to continue with its mission and strategy.

* Study mobility undertaken as part of a course of study lasting a minimum duration of one semester and for which ECTS are awarded.

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.

Original language (and translation into EN, FR or DE if the EPS is not in one of these languages)

The University intends to continue consolidating its participation in Erasmus+ Key Action 1. Erasmus+ is the flagship mobility programme at the UM and close to 400 UM students received support and funding to participate in Erasmus+ mobility in 2018/2019. We have registered increases in outgoing participation rates over the past 5 years. The UM currently hosts just close to 500 Erasmus+ students per year. Following years where the number of incoming students was far larger than the number of outgoing students we are now seeing a reduction of the gap. This was achieved through several actions undertaken at all levels including but not limited to the increase in the grant levels available for Malta as an outermost country and also through encouraging a policy through which Inter-Institutional Agreements providing for student mobility are not entered into unless they provide an equal opportunity for students on both sides to participate and are only signed after a thorough examination of the study-unit offer.

Just over 80 members of staff received support to participate in teaching and training activities during the same year. STT and STA actions are generally oversubscribed. A rigorous selection process involving external (i.e. international) assessors who evaluate applications based on pre-established criteria is in place. Their results are submitted to a selection board to which the NA is invited as observers and funds are awarded according to scoring with a reserve list drawn up. Administrative and Technical staff at the UM are given priority in the award of STT funds in view of the fact that aside from STA, members of the academic staff are provided with academic work resource funds and other seed and research funds for their teaching, training and exposure abroad.
<https://www.um.edu.mt/studentlife/internationalopportunities/erasmus/umstaff>

A 'recommended mobility period' is in place for every course at undergraduate level and a good number of taught post-graduate programmes*. In view of the evolving nature of programmes and the introduction of new programmes, this is an ongoing activity that requires regular revision

A requirement that has been in place since the introduction of Erasmus at the UM, is that all study mobility and traineeships that are undertaken as part of the established study programme are recognised and accredited as part of the degree. Research-type placements conducted by masters and doctoral research candidates are not accredited since they would be registered for "by research" rather than taught programmes and the stint abroad would be very much in connection with the research project they are undertaking, the use of facilities or joining research teams that are not available locally or working jointly with other teams on wider projects. The University is committed to promote Erasmus+ research placement opportunities among this segment over the coming period and this will

certainly be encouraged through the SEA-EU European Universities' project that the UM is involved in.

More focus will be made on the promotion of traineeships to be undertaken following graduation. This action has had little take-up so far in view of the excellent employment opportunities that are available locally for young graduates and therefore we need to analyse the situation in order to seek opportunities that would attract students to pursue a training experience abroad. This might gather speed in the current scenario as a number of mobilities might not take place in the forthcoming academic year in view of the COVID-19 situation and therefore students will seek opportunities for mobility following graduation.

The University is committed towards increasing mobility of students and staff and widening its participation in KA 107. The UM has been very successful in this Action and is currently actively engaged in partnerships with 37 Universities across 20 countries. Wide dissemination takes place through information events, social and digital media and in-house communication channels to ensure that information is spread out to as many new potential beneficiaries as possible thus increasing and diversifying participation. Should budgets increase it may be possible to extend student mobility from the current levels. At this point the focus, in view of the budget limitations has mainly been on staff mobility.

The UM has also been very pro-active and successful in supporting incoming and outgoing students with special needs. Providing and supporting access is a key measure which strongly features in our operations and our intention is to continue enhancing our outreach to ensure the successful participation of students and staff with special needs, moving along with new developments and keeping up our pro-active approach towards this policy. <https://www.um.edu.mt/studentlife/internationalopportunities/erasmus/umstudents>

Over the past year, the International Office, as the main office managing and running the Erasmus programme has been involved in wide consultation with other offices, external consultants and service providers to meet the Erasmus Without Paper objectives.

The unexpected challenge brought about through COVID-19 will lead to a situation where growth plans in terms of mobility numbers will be put on hold. A debate is developing across the world regarding the offering for the next academic year with an increasing number of universities indicating that they will not offer physical delivery, opting for online delivery or a blended approach. A number of programmes, particularly those focusing on placements in the community, medical and health sciences will be hardest hit and we certainly expect very low participation across other areas in view of the prevalent limitations. Aside from logistical mobility considerations, the economic damage that has been experienced will certainly lead to a higher percentage of students withdrawing their interest.

As indicated above, this experience has served as a mass testing exercise for the implementation of virtual mobility that will be introduced via the new Erasmus programme. Virtual learning should be implemented as a complementary activity to meet internationalisation and inclusivity initiatives and goals. Virtual mobility should not replace the Erasmus physical experience. The richness of delivering lectures and conducting placements in an international setting with students from different countries interacting and exchanging ideas, their local shared experience, the external academic contribution cannot be replaced with a virtual setting. International students currently account for 12% of the UM's student community so there is a strong international presence on our campus.

In terms of participation in Partnerships for Excellence – the UM is currently a partner in 4 active Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees. Two of these programmes have been running successfully for several years and have a very wide international participation and standing. The other two were approved over the last 2-3 years and are therefore "younger" programmes. These last two programmes are led by a UK University so solutions will need to be found for the successful continuation of the two programmes post-Brexit.

We are awaiting the outcome of results regarding new EMJD applications submitted during the last call. A number of other Joint Degrees are in the planning stages. The UM also runs a number of other successful joint programmes which are not under the EMJD heading. The University strongly believes in these joint initiatives as they embody strong principles of internationalisation, the possibility of delivering opportunities in areas that are unique and the collective academic contribution that leads to new research and thought development. A flexible approach is adopted towards the creation and development of joint programmes, whether these are led by the UM or another partner university. Formal structures are in place to provide support for proposals to be drawn up, advice is provided for aspects concerning finance, accreditation, visas, mobility and all other relevant aspects of the application.

As previously mentioned the UM is a partner in the "European University of the Sea (SEA-EU) Alliance (<https://sea-eu.org/>) project approved in 2019 and over the past months the activity in the different areas of this large scale project that involves the whole University have been gathering speed. There is a very strong commitment to ensure the success of this project across the six partner Universities and the UM has taken a very active role in the different areas (Education, Research and Development, Mobility, Quality and Ethics and Communication). A follow-up application SEA-EU Doc focusing on PhD studies was recently submitted and other applications for other Key Actions and other funding programmes are planned for the future.

The UM is currently involved in 8 other Key Action 2 and Key Action 3 projects. There is wide-ranging participation and the current project topics are extremely varied – medical education for Universities in the Middle East, IT systems for touristic valorisation of landscape and cultural heritage, upskilling of therapy radiographers and staff in the Air Transport sector, skill gaps for micro entrepreneurs, increased creativity and motivation among younger participants focusing on tackling early school leaving, mental health and social inclusion for marginalised children, up-skilling and guidance in prisons, etc. Interest in participating in these Key Actions remains very strong and academic units of the University who seek to participate in such projects as coordinators or partners are supported by the Research Support Services Directorate (<https://www.um.edu.mt/rssd>) and the Project Support Office (<https://www.um.edu.mt/finance/projectsupport>) which have been specifically set up to lead, guide and support.

* Since some taught programmes are only one year in duration it might not always be possible to include a mobility semester.

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.

Original language (and translation into EN, FR or DE if the EPS is not in one of these languages)

At the University of Malta, the Erasmus+ Programme is centrally managed by the International Office (IO) which presently has a team of 7 full time members of staff who are guided the Director and the Deputy Director who provide direction, translate strategy and policy and monitor the running of the programme on a day-to day basis and by a Manager whose main focus is the financial management, audit and monitoring. This ensures that standard operating procedures, rules, policies, recommendations and guidelines are adhered to at all times. A pro-active approach and rigorous internal and external mechanisms of checking and control are in place to ensure sound management. An excellent working relationship is retained with the National Agency. As the major beneficiary of Erasmus+ funds locally, the UM is a key player in the field and as the only publicly-funded fully fledged University, there are strict lines of control and obligation in terms of the UM's participation and commitment in the programme. The intention is for the University to increase its participation over the coming years continuing to focus on quality rather than just numbers. This has been the guiding principle since the programme's introduction 20 years ago. Although figures are of utmost importance, providing a quality experience for all (incoming and outgoing) programme participants is key.

The IO provides support to all Erasmus+ incoming and outgoing students and staff along with all other international and visiting students, Erasmus Mundus, Fulbright and several other international schemes and scholarship programmes bringing in students from around 100 different countries. We currently cater for approximately 1600 international students (degree, exchange and visiting) during the year. Our brand new website launched this year is our main reference point for information and communication <https://www.um.edu.mt/international>. We also have a number of social media channels that are kept active and updated.

We provide support from the pre-departure/pre-arrival stage all the way until post-mobility/graduation. Dedicated staff cover particular regions where we have strong collaborations, or by level of study or task specific (eg visa support, internships,). Orientation programmes are held at the start of each semester and students are split by type (eg foundation students, Erasmus+, international exchange, etc) to ensure a targeted approach for better understanding. Students are supported by officers who are available to them throughout their stay and can assist at various levels and different needs – from the administrative aspects of registering and opening a bank account to the more complex and delicate situations that require professional intervention, psycho-social support, legal and critical assistance beyond office hours. The IO has in place specific guidelines on handling students in distress and students are provided with guidelines on how to handle situations of distress including the persons to be approached, the standard operating procedures, the lines of confidentiality, internal and external support actors, etc. The University also has available a Wellbeing Center through which a wide range of services are provided including counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers, doctors and a range of other professional services that are provided for free to all students. Support is also provided through ACCESS (the office that provides assistance to students with special needs and disabilities), the Law Clinic (free legal advice and intervention run as a programme by the Faculty of Laws), the Chaplaincy (which apart from spiritual assistance, also reaches out and provides support to students in need, organises voluntary experiences locally and abroad). English is used as the medium of communication and instruction throughout the University so international students do not experience the disadvantage of missing out on important communication because it may be in a language that they have little knowledge of. Exchange students joining the UM are expected to have at least a B2 level in English.

Students' and staff wellbeing is key and there is a strong culture towards supporting international students and staff. This is embodied in the Strategic Plan and in the various guidelines and protocols that students and staff have at their disposition. The UM has invested in the design of emergency protocols and training of staff on Mental Health First Aid, Identifying distress, suicide intervention, bullying, harassment and several other key topics.

The University Residence provides accommodation for international students a few kilometres away from the University with an hourly free shuttle running between the campus and the residence. Another University-managed hotel is available within walking distance. Private accommodation (apartments, hostels and home stays) is also available. A brand new Campus Hub residence is currently under construction on the UM main campus in Msida. This will replace the current residence and include a mixture of entertainment and commercial facilities thus creating a new living space on the actual campus which is in a very central part of the island.

Outgoing students are supported by the International Office from the application stage to the post-mobility stage and there is constant liaison with the academic coordinators appointed for every course and the administrative officers in the different faculties, institutes, centers and schools. There is a strong focus on quality in terms of management and ensuring that students who experience difficulties pre-departure, during mobility and post mobility are assisted. They are advised to turn to the IO at all times and we intervene as necessary, guiding them through the simplest procedures to the more complex or critical (cases where students might need to interrupt their mobility in view of serious situations – medical issues, loss, etc). We continue providing support post-mobility particularly in these cases, roping in the UM services that are available.

Processes of selection run through standard operating procedures and involve a number of checks and controls that

are open to internal and external scrutiny. Documentation and information is securely recorded and stored. The national agency carries out regular meetings, on-site monitoring and audit visits through the year.

The University has been implementing a number of measures to ease the difficulties that students may experience when preparing for the mobility experience. Apart from the enforcement of the mobility semester across all courses there has been a very strong drive for a number of years at the level of Senate (the UM's highest academic body) to ensure that mobility is perceived to be a standard element in a student's study programme which all Faculties, Centers, Institutes and Schools are encouraged to actively support. This has certainly bore fruit and the last application round showed a marked increase in terms of applications cast. Academic and administrative coordinators in the different departments provide advice and assistance on academic matters to incoming and outgoing students. These "figures" work in liaison with the International Office which works closely with the Registrar's Office, the Pro-Rectors and other units of the University (eg exam scheduling, ACCESS, Wellbeing, Finance) to ensure that students are well supported and their whole Erasmus experience is positive. As stated previously, the shared guiding principle in the implementation of mobility programmes is quality - with constant monitoring and improvement, ensuring accreditation, information flow, communication and transparency.

The main challenges that currently limit growth in terms of outgoing numbers are:

- Language – students have a strong preference towards opting for study placements and traineeships where instruction/supervision is delivered in English. Although the number of universities providing instruction in English has increased, content might not be as relevant/at the level required to match the mobility semester.
- With the UK moving out of Erasmus, we have been actively seeking to find alternatives to make up for the loss of seats that we shall experience. UK Universities currently host roughly a third of our Erasmus+ students. UM has a very strong affinity with the UK in view of our anglo-saxon tradition, our past and present links, accreditations, affiliations, etc. (this also covers a number of accredited clinical/community placements/teaching).
- The number of students joining the University of Malta at undergraduate level is not growing in view of the decreasing birth rate and the opening up of other higher education opportunities. The number of students proceeding with post-graduate studies and other offerings (part-time, evening, diploma, certificate, etc) is increasing however, these might not necessarily be able to partake into the programme in view of other work and personal considerations. Short-term mobility opportunities are being sought for these students and we understand that this is under consideration for the new Erasmus+ programme.
- The local job market offers excellent opportunities for young graduates and students. In certain courses, it has been very difficult to get students to go abroad during term time and/or through the summer since a fair number are gainfully employed. This presents a particular challenge for us when trying to engage students particularly from the Business, IT, Engineering and Science-based programmes.
- COVID-19 – as mentioned in the previous two sections, the negative effects of the pandemic will seriously dent the projections and targets that we had established for the upcoming 5 years.

In the current circumstances, the main short and long term action points that focus will be made on over the next programming period include:

- Erasmus Without Paper –The plan is to complete the transition over the next 3 years.
- Providing continuous support and development to ensure that our services meet the needs of the programme, our students and other beneficiaries. Working closely with student organisations so that their involvement and contribution is formalised as part of the support structure.
- Constantly seeking opportunities to promote and enhance the programme's visibility especially among groups that might require special support and advising them about the support available.
- Reviewing all existing inter-institutional agreements
- Continuing the search for new partners
- Addressing specific areas where mobility is still limited or is on the decrease.
- Promotion of post-graduation traineeships with a particular focus on using the scheme to provide alternatives for students who missed out on the opportunity in view of COVID-19.
- Extending participation in KA 107.
- Focusing on closing the gap between the number of incoming and outgoing students.
- Implementing new actions that will be proposed via the new Erasmus+ programme.
- Active involvement in SEA-EU to ensure that we actively exchange students and staff within the partnership.
- Discussing with the NA, our Research Services Support Directorate and the Pro-Rectorates to explore sustained participation in other KA2 and KA3 projects if and where possible depending on our capacity, interests and resources.