

Munster Technological University Erasmus Policy Statement 2021-27

On 1st January 2021 Cork Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology, Tralee merged to form Munster Technological University (MTU), Ireland's newest, and first regional Technological University. The university was allocated a new Erasmus code by the European Commission: **IRLMUNST01**.

MTU and the Erasmus Programme

The Erasmus programme has been an integral component of the university's international profile, as MTU, and previously as CIT and ITT for almost thirty years. The successes of the Erasmus activities of the two previous individual institutions have now been merged within the MTU International Office, further strengthening opportunities for developing and implementing the university's overall Erasmus strategy.

Erasmus Priorities

Munster Technological University will continue to grow its Erasmus activity in the following areas during the next seven years of the Erasmus programme:

- Student mobility – incoming & outgoing, semester-long and short-term, virtual and blended with both programme and partner institutions.
- Staff teaching and training mobilities training and hosting staff mobilities.
- Long and short-term Erasmus mobilities for PhD students.
- Virtual and blended Erasmus exchanges.
- Innovative intensive programmes, building on our success in previous activity in this area, and embracing the blended model which has been introduced in the new Erasmus+ programme.
- International Credit mobility exchanges and KA131 international mobilities with institutions in partner countries.
- Coordinating and participating in Key Action 2 Cooperation projects.
- Participation in European Universities Initiative.
- Embedding Internationalisation at Home activities across the university.

Strategy

Internationalisation, and within that, the role of the Erasmus programme, is a key priority for MTU. The greater scale of the new University will, through its augmented resources, facilitate increased progress on all aspects of internationalisation. It is anticipated that a fully integrated international function will be in place by 2022, enabling a continual development process for Erasmus as the new programme evolves. The MTU Erasmus Policy Statement has been developed to provide a

foundation for the future development of a coordinated Erasmus vision for MTU. The Munster Technological University Internationalisation Strategy is currently being drafted. In the summary document 'Establishing Munster Technological University' submitted to the Minister of Education in February 2019 the following shared goals were highlighted under the university's commitment to internationalisation which will underpin the overall MTU Internationalisation Strategy, which itself encompasses the Erasmus programme in every aspect:

- Embed internationalisation into a high-quality teaching and learning environment;
- Develop and deliver global best practice in process, implementation and evaluation of its impact regionally and globally;
- Collaborate with world-class international partners in research activities, shared projects and initiatives and transnational programme provision;
- Recognise the social and cultural benefits of an international-orientated MTU learning and research experience;
- Support the socio/cultural and economic impact of MTU's international strategy in the wider region. Erasmus activities will support the overall internationalisation strategy in the following areas;
- Recognition of internationalisation as a cultural benefit

The need to embed internationalisation deeply into a high-quality teaching, learning, research and cultural environment will be met by means of:

- An internationalised curriculum
- The development of strategic international partnerships for mobility, collaboration, research, and innovation
- Acknowledging and supporting important role of staff mobility in the internationalisation process
- The facilitation of a global alumni network
- The incentivisation of international/Erasmus activities across the institution, in the allocation of time and key resources in recognition of effort and activity levels.

MTU's mission statement summarises this shared strategy; "To lead change and, through education, empower people for a successful future in a globalised world."

Policy Objectives:

Whilst MTU's participation in the Erasmus programme will continue to focus on increasing participation levels in student and staff mobility, both within and beyond Europe, through the KA131 and KA171 actions, the University will also explore and develop a number of other internationalisation and modernisation policy objectives* during the lifetime of the new Erasmus programme. These will include:

- Facilitating and encouraging digitalisation and innovation in teaching, learning through virtual and blended mobility, and in administrative processes.
- Promoting and implementing a higher participation rate in physical mobility, whether traditional semester-long mobilities or as part of a blended learning structure (in conjunction with virtual mobility), or COIL.

- Active participation in European Universities Initiative and developing and nurturing high quality strategic partnerships in education, industry and research.
- Enhancing clarity in recognition processes.
- Enabling wider inclusion regarding participation in Erasmus and internationalisation activities.
- Increased cooperation with international alumni and networks.
- Digitalisation of Erasmus systems and processes.
- Promotion of the Erasmus student card as an indicator of academic quality and cohesion.
- Enhancing existing student support systems, such as well-being and accommodation issues.
- Encouraging extended use of the OLS Tool for the development of language skills. *Detailed descriptions of the actions planned for the implementation of these policies can be found in the response to the sections below.

Expected Impact:

A recent analysis of Erasmus student mobility activities at the Cork campuses of MTU (formerly, CIT) between 2014 and 2019, showed the following trends:

- Almost a tripling of outgoing study exchange numbers.
- A steady increase in participation in Erasmus traineeships, including graduate traineeships.
- A 30% increase in incoming study exchange numbers.

Although the ratio of incoming to outgoing study exchanges was 5:1 in 2014, this had reduced to a ratio of 2:1 in 2019. Whilst there is no doubt that the presence of international students in the University enhances the learning, teaching and research experience within MTU, further work is still required to achieve a greater balance of exchanges. Many of the factors which mitigate against achieving a 1:1 balance, have been addressed during the past six years, through developing more mutually beneficial Erasmus partnerships with institutions who enable us to send more students abroad through offering a higher proportion of courses through English, the introduction of mandatory study abroad periods in some programmes, and an increased cohort of students opting to study languages.

Whilst physical Erasmus mobility may never be possible for some students, their routine exposure to an internationalised curriculum, and to other cultures and work practices at MTU will help to prepare them for working in an increasingly globalised environment. During the lifespan of the new programme innovative new measures will be explored to continue the internationalisation of the University. This will be a major focus, not only for the International Office, but across all levels, disciplines, function areas and campus locations, during the lifespan of the new Erasmus programme. Every opportunity will be taken to establish short-term blended mobilities through BIPs and COIL, to broaden the physical mobility opportunities for students.

Key Internationalisation Aims:

- Broaden participation in mobility and internationalised study through the implementation of short term, virtual, blended and traditional mobility pathways.

- Achieve an increased level of participation in staff exchange and strategic collaboration and research collaboration with our partners, through the KA2 Actions, and including the European Universities Initiative.
- Further enhance clarity in the transferability of different study pathways.
- Nurture in all students a greater sense of common identity with other educational systems across Europe through embedding the concept of the global nature of learning by means of internationalised curricula and the European Student Card. Internationalisation and within it, the Erasmus programme has been integral to the process towards the merger of ITT and CIT, as Munster Technological University. The greater scale of the new HEI will provide increased resources across the new university, to enable greater progression on the above elements of our internationalisation activity, with a fully integrated international function by 2022.

Envisaged Erasmus activities during 2021-27 (subject to a return to the Erasmus programme's mobility patterns prior to the impact of COVID-19)

- A 10% year on year growth in outgoing student mobility (post 2021), with an increased cohort of STEM students participating in study exchanges.
- A 20% increase in outgoing staff mobility (post 2021), due to increased engagement with the programme through experience with virtual and blended mobility elements in the curriculum.
- Development of Increased virtual mobility projects across disciplines, building on existing Virtual Mobility activities.
- Increase in the number of internationalised curricula and the integration of international components to all course provision in line with Internationalisation at home targets.
- A higher proportion of online courses to be introduced throughout the next seven years of the programme.
- The achievement of fully automated, paperless Erasmus management and reporting systems, with the implementation of the online learning agreement, on-line inter institutional agreements by 2023, with automated nominations and acceptances and exchange of transcripts added as they come on stream from through EWP.

Erasmus Partnerships Strategy

The development and nurturing of strategic international relationships is a key driver for the modernisation and internationalisation of universities. Throughout the life of the Erasmus programme, MTU, and previously, CIT and ITT, has developed strong relationships with international institutions, both in Europe and, during the past five years, in partner countries. These partnerships have created opportunities for student and staff exchanges and training, staff development and collaborative activities such as joint cultural and innovation projects and cutting-edge research. MTU will continue to seek and maintain targeted, high quality strategic partnerships which support facilitate these endeavours. The requirement to sign new bilateral agreements in preparation for the next phase of the Erasmus programme is providing an opportunity for a quality review of existing partnerships and the development of a set of priorities for the development of new links. Quality in partnerships will always take priority over the number of partnerships. MTU fully supports the Erasmus-driven European Universities Initiative, and is a partner in a current EUI proposal,

IngEniUm, whose final ambition is to create a single and completely integrated European University with ten units distributed throughout the Union, beginning with the interuniversity European Campus of Bio-Sciences and Engineering. The IngEniUm Alliance, with partners in Germany, Italy, Greece, Sweden, Romania, Poland and France, is born out of our shared ambition of enhancing the existing interuniversity cooperation between the partner Universities, and to move forward to meet the challenges higher education systems and institutions are facing. Student mobility, joint degrees, cooperation and research projects have contributed to create and consolidate bilateral and multilateral connections between us, and with many other HEIs in Europe and worldwide.

The current COVID-19 crisis has necessitated considerable innovation and reinvention in order to allow the continuity and completion of mobilities since the start of the pandemic. The modifications to our Erasmus exchange programme which have been necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic will provide us with a roadmap for the range of innovative internationalisation possibilities and non-traditional mobility models which the institution can develop and achieve during the next seven years of the programme. The new opportunities for students to engage virtually with peers and academics from partner institutions, through virtual and blended mobility will offer the study abroad opportunity to many more students, and these possibilities are being actively explored with academic colleagues. In response to the COVID 19 pandemic the MTU International office has begun work on promoting the adoption of virtual Erasmus/exchange across the University. The MTU international office was awarded National Forum funding to develop best practise and promote the adoption of virtual Erasmus/exchange across the University. The resources developed from this project will be made available as Open Educational Resources. Virtual Exchange is an objective good in of itself within the context of internationalisation at home, especially for student cohorts that have traditionally demonstrated lower rates of participation in physical mobility such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students with family commitments, and students from highly regulated programmes such as Nursing. Interdisciplinary virtual exchange projects can enable students from STEM and more niche academic programmes (where it can be difficult to find suitable modules overseas to join) to take part in an international intercultural engagement. Ultimately the objective is to benefit the 'Global Graduate' with much-needed soft skills that improve employability, including the ability to work in a virtual and intercultural environment. This in turn meets the institutional strategic objectives. Increasing Participation in, and Recognition of, Staff Mobility. The current COVID-19 crisis has also interrupted staff mobility activities. These mobilities will be re-scheduled, where possible, or will alter in format, again, providing a way forward for increased participation, as both physical and virtual mobility pathways are developed throughout the next seven years. The programme's new proposal for blended mobility will increase such opportunities for innovation in learning and teaching. Staff mobility has been a key driver in achieving an increased level of understanding of the learning environments of partner institutions, and consequently, in the level of student participation in Erasmus. The contribution of staff towards the internationalisation of the institution is now formally recognised through the rollout of a DELTA digital badge for Erasmus staff training which was launched by the Irish Erasmus National Agency and National Forum for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Students for whom obstacles to mobility persist, despite a range of accessibility interventions, will benefit from the increased availability of contact and collaboration with fellow students at the partner institutions through virtual joint projects. The presence of visiting students will also continue to provide them with exposure to other cultures, both in the classroom and socially, through the continued successful integration initiatives of the International Office, the MTU-funded and award-winning International Students' Society and the range of other MTU sports clubs and societies MTU's research centres such as NIMBUS and CAPP (https://www.nimbus.cit.ie/ https://www.cappa.ie/)

also welcome the opportunity to bring Erasmus research and internship students to work in their laboratories. The European student card will play a significant role in the Internationalisation at Home strategy of MTU. From first entering third level education, all students will become very familiar with the concept of internationalisation, understand that their home institution endorses the value of internationalised study, and become aware of the value of studying within the wider community of Europe and beyond.

Seamless and Prompt Academic Recognition.

Munster Technological University will continue to provide updated course information with clear credit value indicators for each module. An explanatory document from the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar, outlining the MTU grading system, will continue to be sent out with every transcript, and the Institute will keep pace with the latest developments of an ECTS grading scale. Prompt dispatch of transcripts will continue and be strengthened by the new EWP developments in this area.

Developing International Alumni Networks

The increased number of international students attending Irish HEIs, along with the high number of “local” graduates who opt to work abroad has created a significant resource of expertise, influence and mentoring potential for HEIs and their graduates. As the Erasmus programme continues to spearhead and support the internationalisation of HEIs and the development of a European Education Area through the next phase of the programme, the involvement of Erasmus alumni, whether incoming or outgoing, through alumni networks or professional networks will be an essential component of and asset to internationalisation activities.

MTU International Office, 2021