

## **Erasmus Policy statement (EPS)**

The Institute aims at increasing its international cooperation both in terms of joint projects and research as well as student and staff mobility.

The Institute aims at including 10 % of actively studying students in student mobility and to have at least 1 in- and/or outgoing teaching staff per semester to be enrolled in the program. The aim is to broaden the scope of international relations, developing cooperation not only with those universities and higher education institutions with whom there already are existing cooperation agreements, but also beyond. Participation of students in student mobility offers them international experience and broadens their competence. The acquired ECTSs will be accepted as part of their curriculum, after a previous consultation with the Faculty of Theology at the Institute in order to guarantee compatibility with the content of the curriculum at the Faculty.

Staff mobility contributes to raising academic competences and helps to establish long-term connections that lead to innovative projects, networks and joint research. In view of incoming academic staff, the Institute proactively intends to invite specialists whose field of research is not yet very well advanced in Estonia, e.g. ecotheology and similar.

Cooperation projects will play an important role in the internationalization plan of the Institute. The current development plan for years 2018-2021 includes as one of its aims an active and successful participation in international networks and the vision statement regards the Institute as a center of education and research that is internationally and ecumenically well recognized. Therefore the participation in international cooperation projects and networks that support the vision and the mission of the Institute, needs to be intensified.

Staff and students who are interested in mobility will be advised by the Erasmus coordinator. The Head of Development of the Institute in cooperation with the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and the Council of the Faculty makes proactively proposals in view of the participation in international cooperation projects.

The EELC Institute of Theology aims at participating in Erasmus+ mainly in the following areas: the mobility of higher education students and staff; partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices. The average age of students studying at the Institute is above 30 as many of them are already acquiring their second higher education degree. This means that student mobility has been somewhat complicated for some of the students due to family and job situation. However, the Institute has decided to be more proactive in approaching students

and discussing with them possibilities for student mobility that would suit their concrete situation.

Academic staff has also been encouraged to be more proactive in looking for opportunities to teach abroad and to intensify their contacts to partner institutions. The Institute also intends to become more proactive in contacting academic staff from abroad, inviting them to teach at the Institute, in particular in those fields where there is still a certain lack of competence in Estonia. The Institute also aims at increasing international cooperation; one concrete example is a project application “Innovative Religious Education Network: educating to the religious diversity” that has been submitted by Asociația Vasiliada as the main applicant (for period 2020-2023), together with partner institutions, including the EELC Institute of Theology.

During the times of increasing xenophobia and lack of hospitality, the Institute sees as part of its mission the strengthening of dialogue and emphasizing the dignity of every human being, and through this project the Institute hopes to contribute to this aim.

As already stated above, the current development plan for years 2018-2021 includes as one of its aims an active and successful participation of the Institute in international networks and the vision statement regards the Institute as a center of education and research that is internationally and ecumenically well recognized. As of May 2020, the Institute has created the position of the Head of Development. One of the primary tasks of this position is to develop the international cooperation of the Institute which also includes the intensified participation in Erasmus+ programme.

In past few years, the participation of the Institute in Erasmus+ has not been so active as initially planned. Some of the reasons have been indicated above (e.g. the age and family situation of the students). However, in the work plan for the second half of 2020 and 2021 as well as for the next strategic period (2022-2025), Erasmus+ will play an immensely important role as the Institute has included an increased international cooperation among its top priorities. Whereas in the previous years the Erasmus+ coordinator was working only on 0,1 basis, she is now supported by the Head of Development, whose task is to develop activities in the framework of Erasmus+ and to promote them. The Institute has set a strategic target of including 10 % of actively studying students (i.e. who are not currently on academic leave, etc.) in student mobility and to have at least one out- and/or incoming teaching staff per semester being involved in Erasmus+ activities. We hope to reach this target by the beginning at the next strategic period (2022) at the very latest. Through international teaching staff and offering some courses in English, we hope to be able to

welcome at least one incoming international student per year as well.

In the coming 3 years, the Institute hopes to participate in at least one Erasmus+ cooperation project (cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices). For the academic year 2021/2022, the Institute aims at developing a curriculum in the field of conflict resolution and peace building which would be unique in the Baltic context. Erasmus+ would be of a huge benefit in this process.

The main aim of these activities is to increase competence of both the students and the staff of the Institute, and to share with our partners experiences and competences from the Estonian context in the fields our partners could benefit from (good cooperation between different denominations, high level of religious freedom in a very secularized country, etc.).