

All Erasmus Actions have been a significant driving force of the internationalization strategy of Riga Technical University (RTU), providing benefits for individuals, institutions and societies. As a cornerstone of the Latvian economic development that provides specialists most needed in the labour market, RTU sees the provision of international cooperation and mobility opportunities for its students, staff and partners all across the world as one of its main responsibilities and missions.

The European Commission's vision of European Education Area coincides with the strategic internationalization goals of RTU on many levels. Being one of the leading universities in Latvia in KA103 mobilities and the leading university for KA107 exchange, RTU is tirelessly encouraging individuals to use the opportunities offered by international credit mobility initiatives. RTU also emphasizes international studies, teaching and training experiences not only as desirable, but absolutely essential to each individual willing to obtain the necessary skills to be competitive in the global labour market, including mastering several languages, increasing inter-cultural communication skills and obtaining contacts from all across the world.

One of the most significant actions contributing to the creation of a European Education Area is the European Universities Initiative. There is no doubt that this initiative will change the higher education environment in Europe in general as well as each higher education institution individually. As a university that aims keep up to date with the tendencies of European education and constantly improve, RTU has joined a network of universities across Europe and is currently participating in the process of creating EUt+ - the European University of Technology confederation. EUt+ will seek to establish a new model of a university that is highly inclusive, active both at the local and European levels, and create excellence and benefit Europe's society, economy and culture. By joining this initiative, RTU aims to be an active part of building the European Education Area, especially by promoting the European identity, Europe's cultural heritage and diversity.

By participating in the Erasmus program, RTU aims to continue strengthening its internationalization strategy and be an institution that's constantly developing within and along the European Education Area for the benefit of its students, staff and partners.

ERASMUS Key Action 1 – as mentioned before, RTU is the leading higher education institution in Latvia in terms of student and staff mobilities implemented within the framework of Erasmus KA107. Erasmus KA107 has proved to be an essential internationalization tool after the end of the lifespan of Erasmus Mundus program, helping RTU to maintain and expand its international cooperation network. Diversifying the international student community and increasing the overall number of foreign students and staff at RTU is one of the main strategic goals Erasmus has helped to achieve. One of the overarching goals of the RTU strategy is Quality Study Process, namely, the University aims to ensure prestigious, internationally recognised high-quality studies that train internationally competitive, analytical and creative specialists who ensure growth of Latvian national economy and who are able to participate in lifelong learning. Two of the main tasks to achieve this goal are to increase the share of foreign students in the total number of students as well as increase the share of foreign guest lecturers in the total number of academic staff. It is expected that the quantitative goal related to both these indicators will keep rising in the following years, making international credit mobility indispensable.

ERASMUS Key Action 2 – Erasmus KA2 has given RTU the opportunity to be involved in numerous large-scale projects dedicated to developing innovations in different inter-disciplinary areas, proving that much more can be achieved when institutions cooperate under Erasmus, sharing their experience and expertise. Cooperation between different sectors and specialities, as a basis for development of new and innovative products and modern education content to ensure interdisciplinarity is one of the main horizontal principles listed in RTU strategy and Erasmus KA2 will continue to play a significant role in ensuring the interdisciplinarity needed for successfully achieving RTU's strategic goals.

Many KA2 projects have emerged from partnerships established within KA1 and vice versa. Alignment between the different Erasmus Actions has led to the expansion of cooperation networks, development of joint research projects and an increase of joint international scientific publications, all of which are listed as key strategic goals of RTU that could not be achieved as successfully without the Erasmus program. One of the overarching goals of the RTU strategy is Research Excellence, namely, high quality scientific research to match the demand of Latvian national economy and international economy, with comprehensive involvement into international, state and field research programmes and integrated in the study process. One of the tasks listed as essential to achieving this goal is increasing the number of publications in the citation databases (*SCOPUS* and *ISI Web of Science*) with foreign co-authors. That cannot be achieved without a tight network of partners and it is expected that Erasmus KA2 actions will continue to be essential in achieving this goal as the number of expected publications increases year after year.

One of the main targets RTU wishes to achieve by continuing its participation in the Erasmus+ Programme is sustainability. Year after year, the different Erasmus Actions have provided an irreplaceable tool for student and staff exchange, cooperation in science and research, as well as development of innovative solutions and advancing institutional internationalization strategies.

RTU is proud of being a university with a very diverse and thriving community of foreign students from more than 70 countries from all across the world. When enrolling at RTU, incoming foreign students not only have the chance to get to know Latvian and European culture better, but they also become ambassadors of their own countries and cultures, helping local RTU students and staff widen their horizons and break stereotypes. Being able to study and teach in such a diverse environment helps all parties involved increase tolerance and accept diversity. International credit mobility opportunities provided by the Erasmus+ program have been essential in helping RTU diversify its community of international students and staff.

In the last years, the number of incoming students has been higher than the number of outgoing students. That has helped RTU to rapidly increase the overall number of foreign students and strengthen its image as one of the most multi-cultural higher education institutions in Latvia. RTU is planning to continue this upward movement, however, it is planned to invest more efforts to increase the number of RTU students going abroad and using Erasmus+ opportunities.

It is predicted that Erasmus+ will play a more significant role than ever before in both processes - maintaining an upward trend of incoming students and increasing the number of outgoing students - especially taking into account the current situation in the world and the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic which undoubtedly have a significant impact on international mobility.

One of the main obstacles that limit student mobility abroad is the lack of recognition of academic qualifications, which is still very topical, especially in Erasmus+ KA107. There are many higher education institutions outside Europe who are trying to follow the principles of the Bologna Process, but are still lacking proper recognition mechanisms. By continuing cooperation with universities outside Europe within the framework of Erasmus+ KA107, RTU aims to directly contribute to the development of academic recognition mechanisms in its partner universities in the following years to ensure more and more students from partner countries use the opportunity to study in Europe.

It is also important to note that Erasmus+ KA107 is often the only possibility for students from partner countries to gain international education experience and study in Europe. RTU cooperates with universities from all across the world, many of them located in war-torn countries or countries tormented by other political or economic struggles. For many partner universities, RTU is one of the few universities in Europe that regularly offers scholarships for students and training/teaching opportunities for staff within the Erasmus+ program, making Erasmus+ essential for the personal development of the mobility participants and an irreplaceable internationalization tool for the said universities. In the following years RTU is aiming to increase the number of mobility placements it can offer its partner universities, to make sure the most talented students and staff can benefit from everything European education has to offer.

In the following years, RTU hopes to achieve an even tighter fusion with the European Education Area and be in line with the pledge made in the Rome Declaration of March 2017, namely, to "to work towards a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity". RTU hopes that the EUT+ consortium will be successful and have the opportunity to contribute to the development of European higher education and creation of a new model of a university, helping Europe to become a pioneer of higher education fit for the 21st century.