

## **ECHE 2021-2027: Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS)<sup>1</sup>**

The Free University of Bozen-Bolzano – unibz – was founded in 1997 as a multilingual, internationally oriented institution. Since its foundation unibz promotes the free exchange of ideas and scientific knowledge, linking itself to the European humanities tradition by promoting respect for democratic principles. The international orientation of unibz is further emphasized by its commitment to multilingualism and its international academic staff and student body. What makes unibz stand out among all Italian and European universities is the multilingualism of its courses and research activities. The three official languages - Italian, German and English - are used during classes, exam sessions, meetings and conferences. Thus, the university offers an ideal environment not only to acquire specific knowledge in the disciplines at the basis of each one's degree course but also to master the communication skills required by the labour market and by an increasingly globalised society, in full compliance with the initiatives related to the European Education Area.

unibz international population is currently up to 17% of the enrolled students (national average is 3,5%) and 35% of the tenured professors. 30 undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses are offered in the five faculties: Education, Computer Science, Economics and Management, Design and Art and Science and Technology. The teaching offer of unibz reflects its internationalization strategy with its primarily trilingual degree programmes, many of which are taught in English only.

Besides promoting in-house internationalization, unibz believes that mobility and international cooperation are equally important. The mobility of students and of the teaching and administrative staff as a means of personal development and professional lifelong learning is therefore encouraged. Through its networking with partner universities unibz has become an active participant in the large European Higher Education Area (EHEA). According to the latest figures provided by AlmaLaurea – the national interuniversity consortium which monitors the profile and the employment status of graduates in Italy –, 26,8% of unibz graduates have spent some time on exchanges abroad during their studies (the national average is 13%). International student mobility is currently guaranteed through 174 Erasmus+ and Swiss European Mobility agreements as well as bilateral agreements.

Moreover, unibz is affiliated to the ASEAN European Academic University Network (ASEA-UNINET), which aims at promoting the continuous internationalization of education and research. The strong international character of unibz is also reflected in the number of its partnerships with foreign universities, in its international study programmes with double or joint degrees and in the high percentage of foreign students and professors recruited from abroad. The university's Language Centre, an accredited examination unit for major international certificates, offers intensive preparatory courses to help students bridge their initial language gaps and supports students throughout their careers so that they can achieve and certify the language skills needed to complete their studies at unibz.

Culture, education and research are three key sectors for development and as such they represent major common goals for the representatives of the Euroregion Euregio

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was included in unibz's application for the award of the ECHE 2021-2027.

(Tyrol – Südtirol/Alto Adige – Trentino). This shared commitment has given rise to concrete actions to support mobility and exchanges and to foster research cooperation between the three universities in the Euregio area, namely the University of Trento and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in Italy and the University of Innsbruck in Austria. Since the academic year 2015-16, specific study and mobility programmes for students and teachers have been underway between the three partners: In particular, 66 mobility projects involving 2,000 students and 250 teachers have been financed through the Euregio Mobility Funds.

The main planning instrument of unibz is the programmatic-financial agreement signed with the Autonomous Province of Bozen-Bolzano, which defines the primary objectives and ensures the financial resources necessary for the functioning of the university.

The strategy of unibz pursues the following objectives:

1. To guarantee plurilingualism, which is the hallmark of our non-state university, and the further dynamic development of multilingualism by fostering a continuous improvement of the language skills of students and lecturers.
2. To increase the quality of teaching and expand the study programmes.
3. To increase the quality and quantity of the research activity.
4. To increase the transfer of scientific knowledge for the benefit of companies and professionals by strengthening the University's integration with the territory, which will lead to positive effects on a cultural, social, technological and economic level.
5. To enhance internationality within unibz by increasing the number of study programmes with foreign partners and of the international agreements as well as the percentage of foreign students and professors recruited from abroad.

Furthermore, unibz will take the following actions to implement a policy aimed at fostering the quality of teaching in a multilingual and international context:

- Establishing new innovative and internationally oriented study programmes designed in agreement with local, national and international stakeholders, which will guarantee multilingualism in the degree programmes (bachelor) and the possibility of offering a balanced number of Master programmes conducted in English only. In this regard, future calls will be planned so as to ensure a balanced composition of the teaching staff.
- Strengthening international collaboration by offering joint/double degree courses, for which unibz will offer sound administrative back-up, such as special admission procedures and help in finding accommodation for students but also individual support (e.g.; visa procedures, welcome/integration steps, etc.).

unibz also aims to strengthen its international PhD programmes in cooperation with foreign universities renowned for their scientific excellence. unibz intends to establish and promote an inter-faculty doctoral school that will act as an umbrella for the doctoral courses of its various Faculties, under which the teaching offer will be standardized with special focus on soft skills and interdisciplinary contents will be ensured in order to promote the sharing of knowledge and experience. Finally, the University will continue to focus strongly on the development of new teaching methods using the latest technologies (e-learning, blended learning), in full compliance with the new Erasmus policies.

In view of the above description of the unibz internationalisation policies and strategy, participation in the new Erasmus 2021-2027 programme is essential to enhance and expand processes that are already in their development or implementation phases.