

**ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS) OF AALEN UNIVERSITY 2021 – 2027**

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- **Erasmus Activities, which are part of Aalen University's EPS**

**Erasmus Key Action 1 (KA1) – Learning Mobility:**

Mobility for Students and University Staff

**Erasmus Key Action 2 (KA2) – Collaboration between Organizations and University Institutions:**

Best Practices for Partnerships for Collaboration and Exchange

Partnerships for Peak Performance – European Universities

Partnerships for Peak Performance – Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programs

Partnerships for Innovations

**Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3):**

Erasmus Key Action 3 (KA3) – Supporting Political Development and Collaboration

- **Erasmus Policy Statement: Aalen University's Strategy**

More now than ever, the international exchange of students, but also researchers and academics is becoming a prerequisite for modern education, research, and innovation. Only an internationally oriented university can contribute to the processes of globalization, and simultaneously secure their own competitiveness. For that reason, Aalen University strives to further promote its internationalization, and position itself as more visible and attractive for international students. Thus, it is crucial to not only develop a custom and differentiated internationalization strategy, but also view internationalization as a holistic development, for which all university staff members are responsible. Internationalization, alongside digitalization and intentional networking of the university with companies and other universities, as well as other partners, thus belongs to the three defined interdisciplinary topics that affect all university staff members to improve synergy and improve the quality of these three foci.

Promoting the personal development of students is an essential element of Aalen University's higher education policy with respect to its educational mission, in order to prepare them as future professionals and executives in a Europeanized economy with a global orientation who are in a position to adopt both professional and social responsibility.

In light of this mission statement, the university has placed the goal of creating an environment that promotes competency-based lifelong learning in unique ways. Aalen University is thus steadily improving its initiatives and efforts towards internationalization, especially in cases where external factors exert a restraining effect, for example the introduction of student fees for students from non-EU countries starting in the university calendar year 2017/18. The average number of international students studying for one or more semesters is currently 460 per year, which unfortunately has only increased by 7% over the last seven years. In the same period, the quota of Aalen students who completed either a semester or internship abroad has increased by 20% and is currently around 300 per year. The outgoing-quota, based on the quota of graduates who spent at least one semester abroad is currently at 26%. The total number of partnerships has currently risen to 130. New partnerships were finalized or expanded bilaterally, particularly in Europe, the USA, and in Asia, but also through consortia, such as the Chinese-German University of Applied Sciences (CDHAW), the Mexican-German University Cooperation (MDHK), and the German-Jordanian University (GJU).

By participating in international projects in the framework of EU, federal, and state programs, the university's global network has expanded in the past years. Due to the employers' clearly communicated need for applicants with multilingual talent and experience abroad, the university strives for significant improvements to mobilities in both directions. Furthermore, Aalen University pursues the goal of creating an international campus, where students and lecturers of various cultures can come together.

In order to improve the educational attractiveness for international students, a variety of steps have been taken in the past years, including for example the expansion and restructuring of the courses offered in English in the direction of thematically oriented programs ("Aalen International Program"), the introduction of interdisciplinary short programs for strategically important partner universities, or the improved offers for German language courses, applicant trainings, and intercultural seminars.

Improving mobilities is seen as one of the most important factors in promoting an international atmosphere at the university. In order to further promote internationalization in the future, a university-wide "International Board" was founded in 2017, with participation from the University President's office, the International Relations Office, and all five schools, whose members are each appointed for two years by the University Senate.

To encourage more international students to study at Aalen, it is also crucial to initiate recruiting activities in target countries. In this regard, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have played a large role. In the case of Russia, the previous CIS countries have also been attributed special importance. In this way, various mobility projects have been implemented since the opening of Erasmus+ for partner countries, and even including partners in Israel, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as in Georgia and Russia. Further KA107 mobility projects with Armenia, Brazil, India, and South Africa were also proposed, but were unfortunately not approved.

Anchoring the European dimension in the form of the Erasmus+ Program in order to fulfill its goals presents an integral part of the university's plan. There is no other program that makes it so easy for university members, whether student, faculty member, or professor to be part of internationalization.

In this sense, the Erasmus+ Program serves not only to facilitate mobilities, but also as a vehicle to promote further internationalization at Aalen University. It is correct that new partnerships are sought out based on shared academic interests, but a geographical diversity regardless of specific priority regions is also desired. Living partnerships promote the service of so-called “caretakers” in the form of faculty members and professors, who look after both the mobile students and the maintenance of partnerships. Aalen University is aware of this connection, that through the framework of the Erasmus+ Program, relationships to partner universities can be maintained relatively easily at all levels: for students, faculty members, and professors, and thereby enables not only the acquisition of key competencies and intercultural sensibility of all participants, but also generates new “caretakers “ in unique ways, which then further positively influences internationalization. Synergy effects through mobilities for university members should also be made a goal, additionally accompanied by multilateral and network projects, in order to connect more staff in the university’s international activities. To this point it should be mentioned that Aalen University is currently working on creating a university-wide strategy towards internationalization in the framework of the DAAD-program HAW.International, SPitzE, which would connect all central figures at different levels of the university. A further measure in the project is the development and establishment of a further education program “Intercultural Competency” for university staff members in a standardized form to promote an international mindset, as well as the welcome and service culture at the university. The program should consist of various modules, and will include the module “Erasmus+ Mobility ST”, among others.

Aalen University wants to further develop its internationalization in diverse ways through its participation in the Erasmus+ Program. In this regard, Erasmus+ is an important tool for Aalen University. Aalen University’s principles, mission statements, and visions, last defined in the latest structure and development plan for 2019 – 2023, adhere completely to the defined goals for the European education system. So that living abroad for educational purposes should become a norm, Aalen University wants to see this international orientation reflected in everyday life. Aalen University’s campus should become a place where a practiced sense of community of international encounters and exchange between students, lecturers, and university faculty members can take place. Aalen University supports the resulting reforms of the Bologna Process regarding the recognition of degrees and contributes heavily by means of its Language Center, which simultaneously functions as a testing center for standardized language tests for English, French, Spanish, and German, as well as for the acquisition of other languages. The university has made online language course licenses for various languages available to all students and all staff members free of charge. In various study programs, a second language is even anchored in the course curriculum. English is considered a must. Aalen University is also making various efforts to ensure that everyone has access to a high-quality education, regardless of their social and economic background, and that people become aware of their European identity, the cultural influence of Europe, and its resulting diversity. The latter is expressed by Aalen University, for example, within the framework of a project recently applied for at the state level for the joint development with European partner universities of a module with a regional economic character. The module will include practical components for participating students in that the relevant partner regions and companies represented in the project will be briefly visited and familiarized with in order to make a concrete contribution in getting to know the respective labor markets and their possibilities. In this way, participating students should not only receive direct contact to potential companies for internships abroad, but also get to know Aalen University’s partner universities at the same time.

Regarding access to high-quality education regardless of social or economic background, Aalen University regularly approaches schools in order to encourage and motivate schoolchildren and potential future students through the institution “explorhino”, which is supported through a foundation. The new explorhino technology museum offers regular events and vacation programs in connection with this goal. As part of the institutional modernization and internationalization strategy, the explorhino program also serves to prevent future mismatches between supply and demand of competencies and promotes excellence in competency development at an early age. This program concretely encourages interest in STEM fields to prepare for existing careers and those that will soon be in demand.

All students in Bachelor’s programs at Aalen University must complete 3 ECTS in the framework of the General Studies program (1.5 ECTS for Master’s programs). In this way, students gain social credit points, as well as both interdisciplinary and key competences through events offered by the International Relations Office, among other things. Additionally, Aalen University has implemented an expanded structural model to assist students with special needs through the introductory stage by means of orientations, consultation, mentoring, and remedial courses, in order to achieve a higher rate of student success. Aalen University pays attention to current developments in course curricula that will be needed in the industry. Course syllabi are developed in close connection with companies, which offer representatives from advisory boards to act as lecturers, in the board of trustees, in the University Council, or in specific programs and (research) projects. In recognizing its responsibilities, Aalen University also promotes a strengthened sensitization to the topic of equal participation for women and men in both their education and careers, in order to prevent discrimination and guarantee equal opportunities. Aalen University strives to advocate for the individual potential of its students, lecturers, and faculty members regardless of gender identity, age, disability, religion, or race by offering various support and counseling offers.

Through Aalen University’s expanded structural model and the intensive interplay off all internal actors such as the Student Affairs Department, the Central Student Advising, the Career Center, the International Relations Office or International Center (including the Language Center), as well as Quality Management, the University Library, the E-Lead Center which is responsible for the digitalization of lectures, and the Fundamentals Center, as well as through external actors, such as through schools and career counseling from the Federal Labor Office, Aalen University actively achieves a networked higher education system to include positions for equal opportunities, diversity, and disabilities, and strives for inclusion, gender equality, and academic success. Students are involved equally and can achieve not only social and civic competences through the General Studies program, but also through modules regarding project management, which are anchored in the study programs’ curricula. In this way, ECTS are earned through practice-oriented projects organized together with the city, region, and other institutions, in order to address and solve local, regional, and societal topics and problems. Recently, such projects have also involved international Erasmus+ students. The same principle applies for the Innovation Center on campus, in cooperation with the city of Aalen, which emphasizes Aalen University as a hotspot for start-ups in striking ways. The Innovation Center has already brought several successful start-ups to life in the few years of its existence. More generally, Aalen University stands as the strongest university of applied sciences with regard to research for several years, based on the amount of third party funding and number of publications. Aalen University’s participation in the Erasmus+ Program also benefits Aalen University on a large scale, in that many final theses are assigned to international Erasmus+ students, and the resulting research activities thus contribute to the university’s partnerships.

By working closely with companies, third-party organizations, and foundations, Aalen University's consciousness lies in the interest of applying resources carefully, effectively, and efficiently, and in steadily improving the quality, exchange, and innovations in teaching and research.

To promote its internationalization, Aalen University regularly collaborates with other universities to implement international education projects in the framework of its own partner networks, as well as networks with strategic significance. Plans and projects must be in accordance with the university's internationalization goals. Since 2012, the university is a member of EUA. Additionally, the university is a founding member of the European network EUCLIDES to promote education in engineering fields (since 2000). The university has been and still participates in projects in the following educational programs: Erasmus Pilot Project (Germaniac, 1997-2000), Leonardo da Vinci II (Competence Assessment Tools, 2000-2003), TEMPUS (Bosnia-Herzegovina University Management, 2003-2006), ALFA (Plastinet, 2004-2006), LLP Erasmus (Technical Office Management, 2010-2013), and TEMPUS (ECBAC und Cap4Com, both inclusive extensions 2011-2015 as well as LLAFF 2013-2016). Further internationalization projects, funded at the federal or state level, were the DAAD in PROFIN (MOST KIND 2011-2013) to contribute to the integration of international students at universities and in the local community, in DIES as a coordinator for universities in Peru and Chile and Ulm University (ESDI, 2012-2015) to support the internationalization processes of all four universities, and currently in HAW.International (SPitzE, 2019-2021), to further develop Aalen University's internationalization processes. At the state-level, pilot measures to assist Baden-Württemberg scholarship recipients in integrating into the industry were tested (BWS plus, TOP, 2014-2017), as well as measures to improve the academic success rate in the framework of Aalen University's expanded structural model (MWK, ESMA, 2016-2020). Additionally, with support from Baden-Württemberg's economic ministry and together with three public universities in the region, the Welcome Office East Wuerttemberg was established to network international students with companies (WM, WISO, 2018-2020). Through the Ministry of Science MWK, measures to assist international students in their arrival and academic success are currently being tested (MWK, HASTEBISTE, 2019 until expected the end of 2021). As a founding member of the University Federation SouthWest Germany, the university is developing collaborative activities towards internationalization alongside joint study programs. In this way, the university is currently participating in a liaison office in Pune, India to promote collaboration between Indian universities and German companies located there.

The various key actions of the Erasmus+ Program, whether e.g. through mobility projects or collaboration between higher education institutions and other organizations, will play an important role for Aalen University in the future as well. For example, together with the Transport and Telecommunication Institute in Riga, Latvia and the Tallinn University of Applied Sciences in Estonia, an application was submitted for key action 2 of the project "European Framework and Platform for Support of the Academic Co-operation" – EUNIFORM, which is focused on improving the level of standardization in European and global education. This project should implement an open-source technology platform with the help of the universities in order to develop standardized curricula as well as double-degree programs and strengthen collaborations between European and international institutions. Erasmus promotes not only mobilities, but also the attractiveness of the university. With regard to increasing demands in the labor market, whereby applicants are increasingly expected to have experiences abroad, Aalen University achieves an important contribution to raising its level of education, and offers mobile students, as well as faculty members and professors numerous opportunities to realize this

trend. Thanks to the Erasmus Program in connection with the university's running commitment, the resulting effect is a wide array of offers for all university members, including international exchange students. For example, international students will be guided, counseled, and supported even before their arrival and until their entry into the labor market. The latter point is particularly important with regard to the demographic changes in Germany and the high number of expected shortage with respect to academics and engineers in the coming years. Together with regional companies, the explorhino foundation was also established to bring children and youth closer to technology and natural sciences through various activities, which also contributes to enthusiasm for a university education.

The university also participate in projects to improve the quality and relevance of a university education, currently with the recent application of the aforementioned project EUNIFORM in key action 2. Currently, more than a quarter of the yearly university graduates have spent at least a semester abroad, either for studies or for an internship. The university is aware that more measures must be implemented in order to increase mobility in both directions. This will qualitatively improve offers for education and mobilities and establish an attractive and safe learning environment. Corresponding measures, such as the easier or automatic system of recognition are integral parts of the new structure and development plan and will be gradually implemented at the university. Aalen University has been the strongest university of applied sciences in Baden-Württemberg with regard to research for several years. Connecting internationalization with research and its strong network of companies will be a consistent mission for university management. To this end, the university also strives to involve companies in the Erasmus Program. Recently, a state-level project was applied for, which would assist students from various European partner universities not only get to know the regions of these universities, but also gain practical experience there as well. With regard to improve the management and financing of projects, currently in light of third-party funds, Aalen University has implemented fundamental changes in past years (cost & activity accounting, double-entry accounting, separation accounting). Management of Erasmus is especially supported through quality management measures, for example through annual discussions across departments to set goals which will include the implementation of internationalization measures and mobilities. Erasmus is and will thus be considered in Aalen University's strategic decisions. This includes the vision in the coming years of realizing the international orientation of Aalen University's campus as a place where a practiced sense of community between students, lecturers, and faculty members can reflect the everyday international encounters and exchange. A university-wide and differentiated internationalization strategy will be developed by the end of 2021. This will include the vision and strategy for the coming ten years, as well as measures to activate strategically relevant partnerships which will expand and create further opportunities to study at partner universities, to complete internships and final theses abroad, to establish academic prerequisites to improve the outgoings-quota, as well as the improvement to language course offers for students, including in online formats. Finally, regular information sessions regarding applications for a stay abroad and to motivate students from all study programs beginning in the first semester will be conducted, and when new study programs are established, further English taught course offers will be created, professors from partner universities and guest researchers will be placed in lectures, and the university's commitment to internationalization will be honored in various forms. The programs concretely connected to the Erasmus Program, such as OLA, the Erasmus+ Mobile App, EWP, and digital IIA should be implemented parallel between 2022 and potentially by 2025, provided that no further unpredictable restrictions, such as Covid-19 currently, arise.