

D

original language
 working language

Erasmus Policy Statement (EPS)

In order to complete this section, please refer to the instructions given below. Please note that your EPS shall be given wide visibility in your Institution and must be published on the web page of your Institution.

The EPS should set out the overall Erasmus co-operation strategy of your Institution in relation with its mission statement, underlying its Erasmus cooperation plan as well as any other activities to be proposed in the framework of the Life-long Learning Programme (LLP).

I

a) Please describe briefly (max 600 words) your Institution's strategy, objectives and priorities for its Erasmus activities (mobility, multilateral projects and thematic networks) and any other actions in the context of the Life-long Learning Programme (2007 – 2013).

b) Please also provide information on the following points:

What specific actions are planned to give visibility to Erasmus activities and what type of publicity will be given to the Erasmus University Charter and the EPS ?

What kind of arrangements, if any, does the Institution ensure to comply with non-discrimination objectives (e.g. actions related to gender equality, integration of disabled students and staff, enhancement of social and economic cohesion and combating of xenophobia and racism)?

box allows max 600 word

Strategy

To encourage staff and students to participate in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and thereby to contribute to the development of the UK within the European Union as an advanced knowledge society, with sustainable economic development, a more highly qualified work-force and greater social cohesion.

Objectives

- To contribute to the Europeanization of the West Midlands and the UK through our staff, students, graduates, consultancy and research.
- To extend provision of high quality opportunities for lifelong learning in Europe (including visits, work placements and study placements) in collaboration with partner universities and enterprises.
- To provide degree programmes producing graduates with expertise and experience needed by employers in a global economy.
- To develop and deliver high quality and innovative collaborative programmes and research, underpinned by ICT-delivered content, services, pedagogies and administration.
- To promote European language education for staff and students.
- To attract more European students, lecturers and researchers to enrich the life and work of Aston.
- To encourage participation of men and women of all ages, including those with special needs and from disadvantaged groups, regardless of socio-economic and cultural background.
- To foster a sense of European citizenship based on understanding and respect for human rights and democracy, and encouraging tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures.
- To cooperate in the development of quality assurance of European HE, building on Aston's well-established procedures for the assurance of quality and standards.

Priorities

The University shall:

- Establish a Steering Group, with representatives from each School, to oversee European policy initiatives and disseminate good practice.
- Promote expansion of mobility of teaching and support staff and students to European universities and enterprises.
- Forge closer relationships with a limited range of high quality European institutions.
- Develop a Diploma Supplement to enhance our students' degree certificates and to facilitate the academic and professional recognition of our awards across Europe.

Specific Action to Give Visibility to Erasmus Activities

The University will:

- Post its Erasmus Policy statement and extended Erasmus Charter on its website.
- Promote Erasmus activities within its website, prospectus and student handbooks.
- Organise sessions for students promoting benefits and opportunities for study and work placements abroad, including talks by incoming exchange students and/or teaching staff from partner institutions and by returning Aston students.
- Provide intercultural training courses for students going on placements abroad.
- Publish exchange student profiles on its website.
- Develop new high quality collaborative programmes, such as its exciting joint MSc programmes to be offered with European partners from 2007/8.
- Maintain its University-wide Language programme to provide students and staff with open access to modern language learning resources.
- Maintain its Languages for Life programme to raise the profile of language learning in primary and secondary schools.

Compliance with Non-Discriminatory Objectives

The University will ensure that:

- Publicity about Erasmus activities stresses that special needs/disability, socio-economic status, gender, age or ethnic background are not barriers to staff or student mobility.
- All staff and students are considered equally for participation in LLP activities.
- Students from a variety of backgrounds who have successfully completed placements abroad are used to promote LLP activities to their peers and act as "role models".
- Outgoing students with disabilities are provided with support and advice on finding suitable placements and contacted regularly by Aston staff for progress checks.
- Incoming staff and students with disabilities are supported through the Disability and Additional Needs Unit.
- A Placement and Employability Hub is provided to reduce disadvantage in work placement opportunities and to raise awareness of the value of placements.

II

Quality of Academic mobility activities: (max 400 words)

What kind of specific measures are implemented in the Institution to ensure high quality in academic mobility activities?

Details should be provided on: recognition and credit systems, the provision of information on curricula, information and counselling of outgoing students, tutoring and integration of incoming students, provision of student services (in particular accommodation), preparatory and refresher language courses, support and acknowledgement of staff mobility.

box allows max 400 words

Aston is truly international in character with a multi-cultural community enriched with students and staff from 80 countries worldwide. The International Student Support Network co-ordinates the excellent range of welfare and support services provided for international students.

Aston operates in accordance with the QAA's COP on Collaborative Provision and the Aquarius Handbook of Practical Tools for the Quality Assurance in International Student Exchange developed as part of an Erasmus-Mundus programme. Mobility is permitted only within the context of bilateral agreements between Aston and its partners which stipulate that outgoing students must be provided with appropriate support and information from the receiving university. Individual study placements are quality assured by Aston staff, via visits to partner institutions to ensure that curriculum content, teaching and assessment are of a standard appropriate to the Aston programme's aims and objectives. Staff and students also keep in contact via e-mail. Placement students sign a binding learning agreement endorsed by both institutions. Staff ensure there are common understandings about the nature and level of credit given, and the calibration of marks awarded (ECTS is very useful in this respect). Active links between the academics of both institutions are vital in agreeing curricula issues, providing students with academic advice prior to and during the study period; and in understanding and evaluating the teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Outgoing students are issued handbooks providing all the necessary information on modules and their pre-requisites available at the host institution, and the culture and background of the host country. They are normally briefed about what to expect by final year students who have already completed placements. Study undertaken abroad counts towards students' final degree classifications and is recorded on their transcripts. Some students also achieve additional qualifications from the host university.

Incoming students are issued a handbook detailing Aston modules and their pre-requisites, and are required to provide evidence of appropriate background knowledge for specific modules and to demonstrate English language competence. Students must complete all required work, both coursework and examination elements in order to gain credit for their chosen modules. Incoming Business students are allocated an Aston "foster" student to help them settle.

An Advanced Certificate in English Studies programme is provided for exchange students which aims to enhance international students' English language skills and to foster a deeper understanding of British life and culture within the broader context of European Studies.

III. Quality of Student Placement Activities: (max. 400 words)

What kind of specific measures are implemented to ensure high quality in student placements? Give details on: how the work-programme and the placement agreement are prepared and implemented. Please describe the practical arrangements agreed between the parties. Please specify also the monitoring and evaluation of the placement period as well as its recognition in the curriculum.

Most Aston programmes provide for a work or study placement, and Language and International Business and Modern Language students are required to spend a year abroad. Aston has systems to ensure the quality of placements, preparation, support and monitoring. Aston has well-established links with companies and organisations.

As preparation for placement, students are offered employability workshops on communication, teamwork, CV writing, application forms and interviews, and receive information about their host country. Non-language students are offered voluntary language courses. Students have access to reflective learning through Personal Development Planning (PDP) which increases confidence and skills awareness.

Companies have to guarantee they meet the University's policy and requirements relating to health and safety. Before confirming their placement, students seek School approval to ensure the quality matches the professional level of their subject. The training contract includes details of activities, person specification, amount and level of training and line management structure. Aston keeps in contact with students via School placement officers and tutors. Companies are expected to provide a mentor and assure support for integration into the placement.

Monitoring structures assure quality. Students complete a health and safety form to verify compliance. The placement officer and tutor keep contact with students by email, phone and virtual

learning environments. Tutors visit students abroad. School Programme and Teaching Committees ensure the relevance of the placement experience; approve new developments and incorporate employer and student feedback into the curriculum. The University's Quinquennial Programme Review considers the role and effectiveness of placements in meeting aims and objectives of programmes. Programme specifications include learning outcomes related to placement activity. Students have praised the placement experience and the benefits for securing employment.

Students receive credits for their placement on presentation of a report and Personal Development Plans. These measures provide proof so the industrial experience can count towards membership of relevant professional bodies.

Qualitative data collected includes records in log-books, emails, conversations with the tutor and placement officers and reports. Students complete questionnaires that provide a quantitative basis for evaluation reports.

The University Placement Officers Group (UPOG) oversees the administrative and record systems for placement students. UPOG ensures that all Schools comply with precepts of the QAA's COP on Placement Learning. The University has commissioned research into the placement experience of students from under-represented groups with more traditional students.