

# Erasmus Policy Statement (Overall Strategy)

The Open University of the Netherlands has been awarded the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education for the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2021.

The Erasmus Policy Statement (below) sets out our institutional strategy in relation to the Charter.

## **OUNL's international (EU and non-EU) strategy**

The Open University of the Netherlands (OUNL) supports the EU Modernisation and Internationalisation Agenda for Higher Education, and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education is integral to the realisation of OUNL's institutional vision, plans and strategies.

We believe that open higher distance and online education is a power for good and makes a significant contribution to the society and whole world. We are committed to international excellence through the creation of world-changing research and high quality, innovative teaching and learning within an inclusive academic culture.

The OUNL was founded in 1983 as a university for open distance education. Soon thereafter, the OUNL's Educational Expertise Centre was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to provide an innovative stimulus to Dutch Higher Education by carrying out research and development work on technology enhanced learning. One of its results has been the development of an educational modelling language (EML), which in a slightly modified form was adopted by the IMS consortium as one of its specifications (IMS Learning Design). IMS LD is a language for modelling learning scenarios of any kind in machine readable, portable ways.

The OUNL develops and provides open higher distance and online education. There is a special focus on the use of new information technologies and of teaching and learning methods to provide effective, efficient, attractive and accessible lifelong learning facilities and education to the Dutch citizens. The OUNL has 26,000 students and about 750 employees. The main campus is in Heerlen. Spread over the Netherlands there are 13 study centres and 3 support centres. There are also 6 study centres in Flanders.

The OUNL lives and promotes the vision of Open Education to improve learning and teaching through innovations and to facilitate open methodologies and access as well as equity and quality education. Therefore, the OUNL conducts in-depth and multidisciplinary research into teaching and learning, specifically but not exclusively in distance, online and lifelong learning settings. The OUNL is the internationally recognised Top No.1 Dutch University for Online Learning. There is a special focus on the use of new technologies and innovative teaching and learning methods to provide effective, efficient, attractive and accessible lifelong learning facilities and education. Within the OUNL, the Welten Institute integrates expertise in the learning sciences and technology-enhanced learning. The Welten Institute is among the leading international research institutes in technology-enhanced learning with highest reputation and the biggest one in Europe in this field.

The faculties of the OUNL are responsible for the selection of partners for student exchange and international collaboration. The focus of the OUNL is on partnerships with other Open Universities and educational organizations worldwide sharing a common vision on Open Education. High standards are defined for the acceptance of new partners. The approval of the Management Board is required for signing an official Memorandum of Understanding with an international partner organisation. The OUNL follows the approach of a small number of international partners with high quality education and reputation. Main criteria for the selection of new partners are a common vision on Open Education, international recognition, student support and (current and potential) collaborations. All official partnerships of the OUNL with signed Memorandum are presented on the OUNL website. The established partnerships are reviewed and evaluated every three years assessing their quality and collaboration. Currently the regional focus for new partners is mainly sought in Asia, Africa and South America as these regions offer promising new opportunities and focus educational innovations and changes.

The OUNL cooperates and joins forces with international and European organisations, institutions and initiatives to improve Open Education, such as UNESCO, ILO, UNEP, ICDE, CC, ICORE, OEC, OERu, EADTU, and EDEN. In addition the OUNL has joined selected international associations (presented on the OUNL website) as member for strong contributions and collaborations towards common objectives. The OUNL is founding member of ICORE, the International Community for Open Research and Education, with more than 400 members worldwide. In particular, OUNL is hosting EADTU on its campus and is providing the current President of EADTU due to the common focus on open higher distance and online education.

To underline the involvement and interest of the OUNL in European projects, one key example will be presented: The Open Discovery Space (ODS) is the largest e-Learning project ever launched by the European Commission with 53 partners and a total budget of 15,6 Mio. €. ODS supports European schools in order to manage the next step towards openness and sharing in the context of education. For this purpose, ODS has created and established an Internet platform that centralizes the access to the various European repositories of learning content with a focus on Open Educational Resources, offering more than 900,000 resources as well as additional tools for their search, use, and re-use. In addition, ODS involved and engaged all stakeholders from the school sector in the production of meaningful educational activities by establishing a social-network style multilingual portal that fosters the exchange of experiences and knowledge amongst the stakeholders of the European school community. This social platform is currently connecting more than 3,000 schools that developed an e-Learning strategy and implementation plan, and more than 9,000 teachers in over 900 online communities moderated for and by themselves. Currently all ODS instruments and results are transferred into science disciplines including authoring tools for learning scenarios by the Inspiring Science Education (ISE) initiative, also supported by the European Commission with a budget of 9,8 Mio €. Participation in ODS and ISE is an important and exciting opportunity for the OUNL to share expertise and to learn and benefit from our close cooperation with other leading European educational institutions.

The OUNL has re-designed most of the Bachelor and Master Study Programmes for better meeting the learners' needs and changing demands from the world of work and society. During this process, several Study Programmes were translated into English to increase the international orientation and address students worldwide. Many PhD students are focusing international educational cooperation and research through participation in European consortia and projects.

By participating in the Erasmus+ programme, the OUNL is committed to provide a strong contribution and envisages achieving a sustainable impact in relation to the European Union's Modernisation and Internationalisation Agenda in Higher Education in all their five priorities:

1. More higher education graduates:

We believe that our open higher distance and online education should and will contribute to equity education for all by meeting and supporting the needs of the European students and society.

2. Better quality and relevance of teaching and learning:

We believe that our international research and cooperation on teaching and learning innovations is facilitating better quality education and increasing its relevance.

3. Increased mobility of students and staff and cross-border cooperation:

We believe that international mobility and cooperation is beneficial and fruitful for our research and education as well as vice versa.

4. Closer links between education, research, and innovation:

We believe that connecting this "knowledge triangle" can strengthen our exploitation of innovation potentials, our internal improvement cycles in education and research as well as our international reputation.

5. More effective governance and funding mechanisms for higher education:

We believe that our efforts in open higher distance and online education and related research are leading to better management and innovations towards our vision of inclusive and equity Open Quality Education for all.