

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT

International (EU and non-EU) strategy

Algebra University College was established in 2008 as a private not-for-profit HEI and soon after became recognized as a part of the official Croatian HE system through process of initial accreditation. The founder of Algebra University College is Algebra Group, the largest national provider of adult and lifelong learning. Algebra University College is ranked 1st in the Republic of Croatia in respect to overall quality of programs and QA system according to the National Agency for Science and Higher Education. Annually, we educate around 15.000 students through various seminars and short educational programs in adult education, while in higher education we enrol some 350 new students each year. Our main campus is located in the heart of Croatian capital Zagreb. Many of our programs are authorized by world software and equipment manufacturers such as: Microsoft, Cisco, Oracle, Red Hat, VMware, Adobe, Autodesk, EC-Council, (ISC)² and others. We are academic and/or educational partner of all stated vendors, for most of them the only one in Croatia.

As a private HEI, funded mostly by our students' tuition fees and projects, we are quite aware of the importance of continuous development and we know that in dynamic market conditions, every halt or slowdown of growth and development really means a reversal in comparison to the constantly developing environment. We also know that our competitive advantage, the key of our survival as a private education supplier, can only come from internationally comparable quality and high values we give in return for the tuition.

Our mission is to create opportunities for Croatian and international students to acquire excellent skills and knowledge and build globally competitive careers in digital technologies. We are aware of our responsibility within the community and we therefore actively promote educational excellence in digital technologies in order to encourage economic growth and development of Croatian economy. In our teaching and research, we strive to create a value system coherent to values in which we strongly believe:

- high value received for the cost of service
- top quality of education
- operational and organizational excellence
- constant contribution to development of society which we live in

Since we were fully aware of the issues raised by the process of globalization, one of the main goals of our development strategy was to achieve the EU quality standards in HE and to better approach the EHEA and global educational markets. Therefore, in 2008 and 2009 we signed the first contracts for academic partnership with technology companies (Microsoft, Oracle, Cisco, SUN, IBM) which made it possible for the teachers, students and the employees to access the official teaching materials and software licences for the company's products. We currently provide best-assessed professional higher educational study programs in the Republic of Croatia according to the quality evaluation results obtained through regular re-accreditation and audit of QA systems conducted by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (national QA Authority). We completed our re-accreditation procedure back in September 2012 with excellent marks and positive accreditation recommendation and repeated similar results in 2019 with QA system audit. Even after re-accreditation process had been completed in 2017 for all other Croatian universities of applied sciences, we were evaluated as the best professional higher educational institution. We wait similar benchmark for the next 5 year period, potentially available only in 2022.

Nowadays, we hold Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) for the period 2014 – 2020, providing exceptional experience of studying and living abroad to our outgoing and incoming international students. Currently we have signed almost 90 Erasmus bilateral agreements with various foreign universities and additional more than 40 cooperation agreements and MOUs and have positive response due to the NVAO assessment as well as National Agency (ASHE) reaccreditation and the internal quality assurance system, positioning us as the best professional HEI in Croatia. Outside of Europe, we have signed agreements with HEI from Indonesia, Korea and China, while we closely cooperate with professors from Business School of Indiana University (Kelley School of Business) on our MBA study program. Based on strategic cooperation agreement between Algebra University College and Griffith College Dublin, we enabled our present and future computer engineering and multimedia students to make use of student mobility and study at two locations with the possibility of obtaining Croatian and Irish undergraduate diplomas in the field of computer engineering. This is a way of studying that implements all benefits of the Bologna process through student mobility which is very widespread abroad. When choosing a new partner, we pick partners and countries according to the analysis of our students' wishes and the fact which countries and courses they are mostly attracted to. Regarding short cycle programs, we provide our international students with quality and efficiency of teaching, great programs, great teachers and the best experience in Croatia during their stay. Students can participate in winter or summer courses apart from studying at Algebra University College. Students are provided with an opportunity to meet outstanding and ambitious colleagues from all over the world, visit some of Croatia's world famous landmarks and explore the rich historical and cultural heritage of our country. In addition, students also have the opportunity to enjoy unforgettable moments at quirky museums, in beautiful nature parks, as well as at incredible festivals and events.

In respect to Erasmus+ international cooperation, our first priority is the mobility of students, both for study and work placement, and mobility of teaching and other staff. The mobility of students is aimed at raising their skills and knowledge level and offering them the experience of studying or skills training in other cultural and educational environments. Student placements are of great importance in professional education, especially in the education of computer professionals, whose study curriculum requires a large proportion of skills training in industrial environments. This experience enhances their flexibility and competitiveness on the European labour market. The mobility of teaching and non-teaching staff is aimed at improving the quality of study and teaching processes, at exchange of good practices, and at improving the Institution's organization. The second priority is a multilateral cooperation between HE institutions, specifically curricula development projects and joined study programs. The aims are to constantly improve the existing study curricula to be recognized in other similar HEI's, and to develop integrated study programs that would enable us to issue a recognized degree – both at bachelor's and master's levels or at shorter continuing education for professionals. Therefore, from March 2018 all our Master study programs are held in English both for domestic and international students.

Strategy for the organisation and implementation of international (EU and non-EU) cooperation projects in teaching and training in relation to projects implemented under the Programme

The objectives we want to accomplish through international cooperation activities make a part of a broader set of objectives of the development of a relevant and successful educational institution, laid down in our Development Strategy and implicitly contained in our Vision. We aim to become the first choice for Croatian and international students interested in building careers in digital technologies

through development of excellence in all areas of our work: infrastructure, staff, applied research, cooperation with the industry and internationalization. The University College described international cooperation within the Strategic objectives with specific focus on international cooperation projects. We are members of the most renowned academic IT initiatives, providing additional value to our students and testifying quality of our work and dedication towards excellence. We are part of following academic partnerships: Microsoft Developer Network Academic Alliance (MSDN AA), IBM Academic, CISCO Networking Academy, Microsoft IT Academy, Oracle Academic Initiative, EMC Academic Alliance, RedHat Academy, VMware Academic Program (VMAP) and Tableau Academic Program.

Expected impact of the participation in the Programme on the modernisation agenda of Algebra University College is:

- Increasing attainment levels to provide the graduates and researchers Europe needs
- Improving the quality and relevance of higher education
- Strengthening quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation
- Making the knowledge triangle work: linking higher education, research and business for excellence and regional development
- Improving governance and funding

All together, they should improve outcomes of teaching and learning and we aim to manage it through continuous reflection and awareness of development of mentioned goals.

New Erasmus+ Programme Period (2021-2027)

In the new Erasmus+ programme period Algebra University College plans to continue employing good practices used so far, as well as implement new Erasmus Without Paper programme principles and adhere to new guidelines in order to adapt to the new digital programme era.

In the programme period 2014-2020, Algebra University College has conducted an extensive and thorough search to find partners in other EU countries whose programs are compatible to ours. Having found compatible partners, we signed Erasmus+ Inter-institutional Agreements and started fruitful cooperation with many EU countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Poland, Czech Republic and many others. Every year we had a chance to welcome even bigger and bigger groups of incoming students from partner universities who evaluated their student mobility for studies at Algebra with high marks. We provided English-taught lessons for incoming students on both the undergraduate and graduate level of studies, social and cultural activities of our Buddy Program, additional participation in Croatian Language and Culture course and continuing and on-time administrative and other support during the entire student stay.

Regarding our outgoing mobility, the number of interested students has been exponentially growing over the years, with substantial rise in interest starting from the last years. We connect the increase in interest with more social cohesion activities offered to our students, such as Buddy Program activities designed to connect incoming students with domestic students, which have created a melting-pot at the university campus, brought closer different cultures and showed the benefits of student participation in international mobility programs. Apart from Buddy program activities and events, we have organized many Erasmus+ promotional activities and info-days to acquaint our students with Erasmus+ programme.

In the past years we organized International Friday and International Weekend to gather representatives of foreign partner institutions and students to offer our students on-spot and firsthand information about mobility at partner institutions. We also provided yearlong individual student consultations for all students interested in mobility. Considerable effort was devoted to provide the students with the highest possible rate of recognition of ECTS credits and learning outcomes upon the completion of their mobility periods, having in mind the principle of maximum flexibility.

During COVID19 pandemic, Algebra University College successfully adapted to the new teaching environment by offering online classes and online taking of exams to all full-time students and students on mobility, who could continue their mobility in a blended way, after their physical mobility had been interrupted and virtual mobility began. To those students who, in the midst of pandemic and state lockdown, decided to return to their home countries, the International Office offered continuous support in the organization of their return and finding the most viable solution, until they safely returned to their home countries. The same assistance was given to our outgoing students who decided to return to Croatia and who, nevertheless, continued their mobility at foreign HEIs online. The same rules regarding the recognition of ECTS credits upon the completion of mobility periods applied to students undertaking blended mobility, as for students who completed their physical mobility.

Algebra University College continued informing students about new mobility options during the pandemic, taking into account the seriousness of the situation and the changed conditions. We organized a series of Erasmus+ webinars, which were followed by the release of the Call for Application. We are proud to say that the interest of students has not decreased and that they are more prone to taking part in new types of mobility, such as blended mobility.

In the new and digital Erasmus period, Algebra University College plans to fully digitalize all aspects of Erasmus mobility organization for students and staff, starting from renewing our Inter-institutional Agreements in the digital form, using Online Learning Agreements and Erasmus Dashboard system and popularizing the use of the new Erasmus+ mobile app among our students.

We have already started contacting our partners and discussing the details of renewing our agreements, with special emphasis on review old partnerships which are no longer active in order to see if there is a possibility of further cooperation in the digital period. We plan to continue in investing in the recognition of credits after the completion of mobility period for students in a transparent, efficient and fair way. Furthermore, we plan to continue offering our students assistance in finding quality traineeships, which would complement to their studies. The aim of staff mobility remains: providing our teachers and other staff with the possibility of taking part in meaningful activities that will enable them gaining knowledge and experience necessary for the advancement of their careers, as well as gaining knowledge and skills that will be shared with colleagues and students upon return from mobility. Staff mobility is an important tool in fostering partner cooperation, finding new partnerships, compatible programs for our students and sharing best practices in higher education and international cooperation. In the new programme period, we also plan to highlight the importance of environmental awareness among all participants of Erasmus mobility programme and raising awareness of environmental issues, such as air pollution caused by European air traffic congestion and accentuate the possibility of taking part in blended mobilities or even virtual mobilities to alleviate this problem.

An institution such as Algebra University College that strives to become a leader in providing high-quality education in the field of computer science and digital technologies will strongly commit themselves to fully employing Erasmus Without Paper initiative and digitalizing all its services.

