

Internationalisation @VUB as a Strategic Choice

Dear Guests,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our university is honoured and delighted to welcome the EURAXESS bus on its very first stop before leaving Brussels on a 2 months tour, visiting 29 universities in 22 countries in Europe.

Indeed, hosting the EURAXESS Roadshow is for our university an opportunity to emphasise our commitment to internationalisation of research and education. In fact, we want to encourage and support the mobility of our students, researchers and staff.

Since knowledge knows no boundaries, we are committed to expanding knowledge through research, promoting excellence in teaching and learning, providing accessible and affordable education, advancing academic and economic development in our region, and enhancing student and research success in all that we do.

As a leading centre of knowledge and research in the capital of Europe we are aware of the importance of researchers' and students' mobility for the enhancement of their career.

Therefore, since 2009 the VUB has in its Strategic Planning identified **internationalisation** as one of the top priorities for our university.

Our commitment towards internationalisation includes, among other plans, the establishment of attractive English programmes and the further development of the Brussels University (which includes our sister university, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Vesalius College and our association partner, Erasmushogeschool Brussel).

In the past 5 years several projects were approved by our board of directors to strengthen various aspects of internationalisation and mobility, both for students as well as for researchers and staff.

With a growing number of master and PhD programmes in English, our international students and researchers population witnessed a vast growth. The increase of our international student and researcher

population also implied a growing demand for adequate support and information services in English.

At the same time we have worked on developing a coherent strategy to promote our international relations and international competitiveness. This strategy includes:

- promoting cooperation and exchange with other countries inside and outside the EU
- international collaboration in research and education. (as an example I can mention the growing number of joint-master and joint-PhD programmes).
- International education experiences for all students
- Integration of international academic staff and students
- International students recruitment and funding;

To underline the central role of internationalisation at the highest level in our university a vice-rector for international policy was appointed.

Internationalisation implies in the first place mobility. A two-way mobility for students and researchers: both incoming and outgoing.

For all students, the exchange of case studies, cultures, ideas and values is an enriching experience. We therefore encourage each student to participate in the exchange programmes, starting with the “old” Erasmus in the early nineties, followed by Socrates and Lifelong Learning Programmes, and since January of this year, the Erasmus Plus (Erasmus+) programme, combining all schemes for education and training.

For our early-stage and senior researchers, and for the academic staff, research mobility is not only an advantage on their academic record but more and more a must.

On this issue our university does not stand alone. International competition in the field of research and development (R&D) is stripping Europe of its best talents. We actively want to encourage our researchers to leave and go abroad but only so we can welcome them back with new insights, experiences and knowledge.

To be able to hold its own researchers and develop as a worldwide centre of excellence, Europe must implement – and has been implementing - joint priority actions to prevent brain drain to regions offering better

prospects. This partnership aims to create a framework for joint priority actions for different Member States concerning the systematic opening up of recruitment, pensions and social security for mobile researchers, attractive employment and working conditions and improving training and skills.

The various initiatives in the framework of Horizon2020 are designed to help realize these objectives.

Thanks to the EURAXESS initiative, with its four components: “jobs”, “services” “rights” and “links”, all researchers and researchers-to-be have access to adequate and accessible information.

Our university had joined this initiative and is currently working out several plans to insure coherent and comprehensive services and support for our incoming and outgoing mobile researchers and staff.

Following its commitment to implement the Charter and Code for Researchers, including the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R), the Vrije Universiteit Brussel was awarded the **“HR Excellence in Research” logo** by the European Commission, as one of the first universities in Flanders.

This acknowledgment by the European Commission is not without obligations. To maintain the logo, we are committed to implementing an inclusive human resources strategy for researchers.

And last but not least, at times when universities in Flanders are facing serious challenges related to the financing of research and education, we cannot afford losing the battle for excellence and innovation. With the EU, and the EURAXESS initiative, and many other funding schemes and ambitious projects under Horizon2020, we keep working together on strengthening our research and our education in a global world through internationalisation and mobility.

Ladies & gentlemen,

Allow me to end by saying that “a university will be international or will not be at all”.

Thank you.