

WESTERN SERBIA ACADEMY OF APPLIED STUDIES



INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGY

May 2020

1. Introduction

Western Serbia Academy of Applied Studies (hereinafter: Academy) is a higher education institution established in 2019 by merging two independent institutions, both with a tradition longer than 40 years in providing higher education – the College of Applied Sciences Užice (now Užice Department) and Valjevo Business School of Applied Studies (now Valjevo Department).

In compliance with the Bologna Declaration and Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Serbia, our study programmes are aimed at achieving European standards in the fields of technology, informatics, management, tourism, health care., food technology, environmental protection and occupational safety and health.

As an academy of applied studies, we are fully aware of the dynamics of the development of professional education, which exceeds traditional teaching methods and therefore, through the establishment of laboratories and cooperation with industrial partners, we seek to provide our students with opportunities of combining theoretical and practical knowledge and acquiring specific competencies required by employers nowadays.

We are also fully aware of the globalization process transcending national boundaries and making knowledge accessible to everyone. By pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Academy aims at active participation in the implementation of higher education internationalisation.

2. Internationalisation – definition and importance

‘Internationalisation at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education’ (Knight, 2003: 2)¹. It raises the quality of education and research, thus benefitting both students and teachers, and making an effective contribution to the society.

Internationalisation is a two-fold process. On the one hand, it represents the increasing awareness and acknowledgement of foreign values, standards and achievements, and on the other hand it involves presenting one’s own achievements and system of values, as well as creating conditions for their recognition and acceptance abroad.

As an accredited higher education institution, the Academy is devoted to achieving the goals of the Bologna Process and therefore to establishing and developing international cooperation. Our international cooperation is primarily directed to former Yugoslav republics, but also to other European countries and beyond.

3. Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives of the Academy regarding the higher education internationalisation process are as follows:

- 3.1 Increasing the international mobility of staff
- 3.2 Increasing the international mobility of students
- 3.3 Modernising study programmes and promoting the ‘internationalisation at home’

¹ Knight, J. (2003). Updating the definition of internationalisation. *International Higher Education*, 33: 2

3.4 Establishing strategic cooperation, partnerships, and capacity building.

3.1 Increasing the international mobility of staff

The Academy encourages and strongly supports the participation of academic and non-academic staff in international mobility programmes, guided by the principles of transparency and equal treatment. To this end, they are provided with full administrative, legal, technical and linguistic support and granted paid leave. Owing to flexible timetables, after short-term leave, our teachers can easily make up the lost classes, whereas in case of long-term absences, the Academy shall provide the appropriate substitute teachers. The Academy shall regard staff mobility as a means of professional development and the indicators of internationalisation shall be included as the selection criteria for the election/re-election of teachers.

Staff mobility brings numerous benefits not only to the individuals participating in mobility programmes, but to the institution as a whole as well. By gaining international experience, employees build their competencies and improve their professional knowledge and foreign language proficiency. The exchange of good practices with teachers in higher education institutions abroad contributes to the modernisation of teaching methods and study programmes. As to administrative staff, they learn how to support the process of internationalisation in a highly professional manner.

Personal contacts of employees with their colleagues abroad shall serve as the basis for establishing inter-institutional cooperation.

Furthermore, teachers with international experience are more eager to support student mobility, which is also one of our strategic objectives.

The Academy shall try to attract a greater number of visiting lecturers from foreign HEIs and world-renowned experts in the fields covered by its study programmes, providing them with the necessary administrative, legal, technical and linguistic support both before and during the mobility period. In this way, the Academy will enrich its academic offer and increase its profile in the region and beyond.

3.2 Increasing the international mobility of students

Through its participation in the Erasmus+ programme, the Academy will increase the international mobility of students for studies and professional development, guided by the principles of transparency and equal treatment. Credit transfer, which shall be documented in the Transcript of Records and Diploma Supplement, shall facilitate the recognition of student achievements during the mobility period and encourage a greater number of students to take part in future mobility programmes. Through the participation in mobility programmes, students acquire international experience, develop intercultural awareness and improve their foreign language proficiency, thus enhancing their employability and ensuring competitiveness on the global labour market.

Both outbound and inbound students will be provided with the necessary administrative, legal, technical and linguistic support. Before mobility, the Academy will organise free English courses, as well as courses in other European languages on the Academy's curricula.

Given the fact that the instruction in all study programmes offered by the Academy is delivered in the Serbian language, we will seek to attract more students from the former Yugoslav republics. In cooperation with institutions delivering the Serbian language courses, we will organise online Serbian courses for incoming students.

Our employees and students are obliged to ensure full integration of incoming students into the academic and social life.

3.3 Modernising study programmes and promoting 'internationalisation at home'

The aim of internationalisation is not to benefit only the minority of students and staff who will spend time abroad, but to focus on the integration of a global dimension in the design and content of curricula and teaching/learning processes in order to ensure that a majority of students, who do not participate in international mobility programmes, develop skills and acquire knowledge required in the globalised world. Therefore, the Academy shall seek to ensure 'internationalisation at home' through the modernisation of existing study programmes and accreditation of new ones, and through their harmonisation with the programmes offered by higher education institutions in other countries, as well as by bringing guest lecturers from abroad.

Both students and staff will be provided with the necessary linguistic support in order to improve their foreign language proficiency as a prerequisite for taking part in the internationalisation of the Academy.

3.4 Establishing strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building

In order to build its own capacities and position itself according to its strengths in education, the Academy shall strive to establish and strengthen the cooperation with developed European countries and their higher education institutions. In addition to the implementation of mobility programmes, the Academy will participate in joint project and research activities with these institutions.

The Academy also seeks to establish and develop cooperation with industry and businesses with the aim of facilitating the integration of theoretical and practical education, thus helping students develop specific competencies and therefore successfully respond to the demands of the labour market, scientific and technological development. By encouraging entrepreneurship through the development of students' entrepreneurial skills, the Academy will make a contribution to the reduction of the unemployment rate and the economic prosperity of the whole region, and the country as a whole.

4. Conclusion

In order to ensure the implementation of the internationalisation strategy, the Academy shall further develop the international relations office by including competent staff, with clearly defined responsibilities. The periodical assessment of the process of internationalisation is also a must.

The Students' Parliament shall ensure that our students provide incoming students with all the necessary support.

The Academy shall continue to promote its research capacity through the organisation of the international scientific conference 'Science and Higher Education in Function of Sustainable Development', as well as through the participation of its teachers at seminars and international conferences in the country and abroad.