

# **Institute of Tourism Studies Erasmus Policy Statement**

## **programming period 2021-2027**

### **1. What does ITS want to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does ITS participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into ITS institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?**

The Institute of Tourism Studies is the only school on the Maltese Islands which offers a holistic approach to the Maltese Tourism and Hospitality Industry. The Institute of Tourism Studies main aim is not only to open its doors to national partners but also to international partners to ensure that our students and even staff widen their experience, knowledge and skills.

For the Institute of Tourism Studies, the Erasmus Programme is a very crucial instrument in achieving one of its objectives, which is that of continuing to expand its international collaboration to be able to provide our students the best possible learning experience. ITS believes that the students learning experience should not only be focused locally but also it is of utmost import for them to gain knowledge overseas to further expand their knowledge and skills to making them fully prepared for this competitive, highly demanding and growing industry.

ITS has signed memoranda for understanding with several educational institutions related to tourism and hospitality. MOUs were signed with Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Finland in which our 2<sup>nd</sup> year Degree in International Hospitality Management students will follow a 4-month study period as part of the curriculum, Institut Paul Bocuse in France in which our 2<sup>nd</sup> year Degree in Culinary Arts follow a 4-month study period as part of their curriculum. Moreover, the academic semester abroad is an incorporated and obligatory part of the curriculum, therefore making the Erasmus funding a crucial element since financial support to these students abroad is given from the Erasmus funding. Furthermore, ITS also utilises the Erasmus Programme for student mobility placements which are also an embedded part of these Degree student's curriculum. Apart from these MOUs, ITS has also signed MOUs with the University of Malta, MCAST and an agreement with the Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management. Additionally, we are also in academic collaboration DAN Europe for a Bachelor of Science in Diving and Safety Management and Diploma in Climate Friendly Travel. Both of these courses have been established in the new 2020/2021 prospectus. .Moreover, the Erasmus Programme is not only focused on our students but also on our staff members, this is because as ITS long-term strategy is to increase cooperation with Erasmus chartered educational institutions, it strongly beliefs that our academic and administrative staff

should be given the opportunity to continue enhancing their area of knowledge, exchange good practices and also experience different international cultures.

What ITS would like to achieve and continue to achieve:

1. Participating in the Erasmus Programme will give ITS the opportunity to grant more exchanges and placements for our students. Furthermore, since ITS is a vocational school which means emphasis is put on giving hand-on education, it makes it more attractive for secondary school students to continue their studies at the institute and increase employment opportunities. Studies have shown that Erasmus students have a 'better predisposition for employability' than students who did not study/work abroad. Furthermore, the study has also showed that upon returning back home, Erasmus students had increased their graduate employment advantage by around 42%. This is one of ITS main goal, that once our students graduate immediate employment
2. Student mobility exchanges can also serve for the transfer of 'good practices' that can be implemented in the specific educational institution. Certain good practices can also be related to attainment levels – such as an introduction of a student assessment policy (in line with current student behaviour towards learning).
3. ITS highly believes in the importance of mobilities as it enhances various aspects related to both student and staff learning. Funding for staff and mobility are crucial for the institute to ensure that once our students graduates from ITS, they are fully prepared to work within such a competitive and demanding industry. Moreover, mobility is an embedded compulsory part of ITS Diploma and Degree level studies and currently the majority of mobility opportunities are in Finland, France and in Europe. Prior Brexit, the United Kingdom was a prime destination mobility for both students undergoing their mobility placement and for our staff mobility, however the Institute of Tourism Studies has been working very hard to find new partners within other EU countries to experience cross-border cultures and encourage students and even staff to learn other languages.
4. Student mobility improves the quality and relevance of higher education this is because they are used as 'tools' and 'mechanisms' such as student mobility placements to target the gap between education and work place. Moreover, student placements encourage modern practices happening in the industry together with other vital aspects such as softs skills and the promotion of different cultures.

5. As part of ITS internationalisation strategy, one of our aim is to further increase and improve collaboration with international partners, and participation in the Programme will strengthen the relationship ITS already has with the local and international hospitality industry. It is important to mention that ITS and the industry work hand in hand. The industry in relying more and more on ITS to prepare students in the best possible ways to work in the industry since Tourism is expanding a lot in the Maltese islands. Therefore, constant direct contact with the industry stakeholders to attempt to forecast and identify what type what type of technical and soft skills the industry will require in the years to come. Research will help to identify the required skills, as well as assist in the development of creative and innovative processes required to excel and develop the industry in the region.
  
6. It is ITS strategy (i.e. cross-fertilisation of ideas, interculturalism, language and personal development) to promote EU funded projects to maximise the full benefit and enhance the mobility of students and staff within the EU and non-EU countries. ITS tries its utmost to maximise the full utilisation of allocated funds for EU projects. Our ITS motto 'developing people' through continuous personal development to staff members and international experience to students.

## **2. What Erasmus actions would ITS want to take part in and how will they be implemented in practice at ITS?**

The Institute of Tourism Studies would like to focus on the following Erasmus Actions: KEY ACTIONS 102, 103,107 and Key Actions 2 projects.

The Institute of Tourism Studies has a vast experience in Key Actions 102 and 103. Both of these actions are utilised for student mobility placements, student mobility studies, staff mobility training and staff teaching assignments. Students who follow a Diploma Level in Events and Leisure has to undergo a twelve-months work placement abroad as part of their curriculum. ITS applies for funding for the students whose employer do not offer a wage, therefore funding is vital. KA103 is also highly important for ITS because students who follow a Degree in International Hospitality Management and Culinary arts must undergo a 4-month mobility study period abroad and also a mobility placement in Europe as part of their curriculum. ITS utilises the Erasmus Programme to help these students during their studies and work placement. It is also important to point out the practice of having mobilities embedded into the curriculum and the Erasmus funding utilised to support students during their time abroad, has been highly praised by the national Maltese agency (EUPA) as there's a higher chance of such funding to be successfully utilised.

Furthermore, since 2018, ITS has started participating in Key Actions 2 projects and currently we have two active projects. One of the projects which was granted in 2018 (KA204) specifically deals WITH giving people within the community who are either already working within the industry and want to have an upskill of their already acquired skills and knowledge or else to the people within the community who are currently unemployed and want to start working in the industry. Participants will have the opportunity to start a basic course in literacy, numeracy and basic ICT skills, then move on into courses such as Customer Care and house-keeping, and they will also have the opportunity to undergo a work placement within the industry. In order for this project to be successful, ITS has collaborated with TCTC, MHRA, Institute Paul Bocuse and Haaga-Helia. The other KA 2 (KA202) project focuses on quality assurance in top management. This project focuses on the lack of formalised expertise that has been identified within this area which causes a barrier and limits uptake. Often institutional leaders will have never received any formal training in QA-management, and this, while having significant expertise as to what constitutes quality education, will have limited expertise in how to translate that mission and vision into a management based system on clear quality objectives, backed up by steady processes that will assure the adequate planning and realization of activities leading to the achievement of those objectives, as well as monitoring and analysing processes that will enable continual improvement. Therefore, this project is aimed at giving top management the right training and as a result, a properly implemented quality management system will allow an institution to understand the requirements of all its stakeholders, including students, industry and society, and then to design a mission, vision and strategy that addresses those requirements. In order for this project to be implemented, ITS have partnered up with several partners from Slovenia, Czech Republic, Portugal and Belgium, therefore strengthening our objective to further increase international cooperation and also to ensure the best possible quality of learning to our students by also focusing on training in top managerial positions.

Additionally, in 2020, for the first time, ITS has submitted a KA107 application and it has been successfully chosen for funding. The Institute of Tourism Studies has always had its prime focus on collaboration within Europe, which although several collaborations have been done such as with China, ITS was still limited in its collaboration. This KA107 project is divided into 3 individual projects with different countries such as with Sudan where it focuses on sustainable tourism and niche tourism. ITS has recognized the present need to update and diversify aspects of its curriculum to make it more relevant. E.g. 'sustainable tourism' is now a core subject relating to all aspects of tourism, and now needs a work-based, tangible context for developing and delivering the course. To internationalize the course is also an objective, and liaising with an international partner(s) can provide solution

The second project is with Uzbekistan where ITS aims to utilize its resources to help in capacity-building of 2 partner institutions in Uzbekistan in these two areas. Conversely, partnership with these institutions would broaden and deepen the knowledge, skills and competencies of ITS and hence add value to the academic and work-based education

available at ITS for Maltese and international students. ITS hopes to capacity-build utilize its knowledge and expertise in the teaching of specialized English (one partner university), and develop a 'farm-to-fork' base of knowledge for food procurement and preparation, and establishing of agritourism, creating a work-based curriculum item for niche tourism and sustainable tourism' in the process (one other partner university)

The third and final project is with the University of Kairouan Tunisia with the main of utilizing its human resource capacity and knowledge base, for example the teaching of English for Tourism, and upgrade certain ITS course by starting to create a body of knowledge about history and culture that more intimately ties our past with that of our country neighbours such as Tunisia ITS offers 'English for Tourism' utilising a course/instructor accredited by the University of Cambridge qualification, in addition to integrating field-trips into the course to meaningfully embed language-learning into a relevant context. Moreover, as ITS is now in the process of taking its first intake of students reading for the Master of Arts in Heritage Interpretation. Clearly for ITS to have a partner institution that would facilitate these master students to extrapolate aspects of Maltese heritage and culture to beyond our shorelines offers many exciting possibilities in terms of research and future added cooperation.

It is quite clear that during the last programming period, the Institute of Tourism Studies has grown. Participation in these projects will help ITS in achieving its objectives of our institutional strategy which is to further strengthen and enhance cooperation with the local stakeholders and also with international partners and also to further diversity our curriculum by offering new courses. Furthermore, another ITS aim is to fully prepare students for the industry and it does so by not offering local education and training but also to send these students abroad to further widen their knowledge, practical skills and give them an overall holistic growth.

### **3. What is the envisaged impact of the participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on ITS?**

The envisaged impact of the Erasmus Programme on our institution will be on a large scale. One of the main targets of The Institute of Tourism Studies is to attract more students in joining one of its courses or for students who are already studying at ITS to further progress with their studies at the Institute. During these last three years, this objective is being met as more students are either furthering their studies or more students are joining ITS, in fact the applications which were received during the 2019 intake increased by 90%. Therefore, due to this massive increase, we are envisaging an increase in mobility targets for students and also for staff members. The Institute of Tourism Studies is envisaging that throughout the next programming period we will be sending 15 staff members abroad, 30 student mobility studies and 30 student mobility placements

In order to ensure that implementation is being done a high level standard with the main aim of utilising all the funds, several meetings will be held by the Erasmus Department together

with ITS Management team, the Curriculum Department and the Internship Department which works hand in hand when it comes to study mobilities and work placements mobility abroad. These meetings are held on a regular basis where discussions are made on how we can improve our student's Erasmus mobility, what course modules will they be following abroad, the duration period etc... Discussions are not only done within the ITS team but also with our partner institutions/hosts abroad as communication with them to ensure a smooth mobility experience for our students is crucial. Additionally, during their time abroad, constant contact is kept not only from the Erasmus department in which the Erasmus coordinator sends regular updates e-mails or calls to the students, but also ITS management team plans visits to the host institutions where they could see our students learning and practicing. Furthermore, ITS CEO highly encourages our administrative and academic staff to go on Erasmus for the exchange of good practices but also highly promotes them to visit our students.

The KA107 project will soon kick-start as we had just received the results. In fact, the universities will soon be contacted to organise the first virtual meeting (since we are currently during the pandemic) to begin working on the project's deliverables. Furthermore, due to the Covid-19, the EUPA which is the Maltese Erasmus Agency has offered an additional 12-month extension in which ITS have accepted to ensure that this project will be successfully delivered.

As for KA2 projects, during our current experience in such area, ITS have learnt a lot particularly that communication is key for successful cooperation and implementation. ITS team together with local partners and international partners are in constant contact via e-mails, skype calls and telephone calls to ensure that the targets of the projects are being met. Transnational meetings which are part of these KA2 projects, are used for partners to meet face to face and also to discuss the progress and what needs to be done and improved.

The long-term impacts which are being envisaged;

1. The Institute of Tourism Studies will further strengthen its collaboration internationally.
2. Strengthen its cooperation with local stakeholders
3. Students who have graduated from ITS will have enough knowledge, skills and experience due to their time at ITS as well as their Erasmus mobilities which will help them find immediate employment.
4. Impact on the local community thanks to KA2 projects and also a focus on quality assurance in top-managerial positions.
5. Development and modernisation of the curriculum.

#### **4. Measures taken within ITS to respect the principles of non-discrimination, transparency and inclusion of students and staff**

The Institute of Tourism Studies offers full access to all participants and strives to ensure the best possible outcome for all. We cater for diverse cultures as well as participants who are already in industry but who are looking for the opportunity to upgrade their knowledge, skills and studies.

We do our best to cater for the diverse needs of those participating as they are presented to us. This includes a mixture of blended learning and the possibility of different entry and exit points. All this is discussed with all stakeholders and participants in order to come up with the best possible outcome.

The Institute of Tourism Studies believes that regardless of any specific status, every student with a disability is entitled to the same level of inclusion and course participation. Therefore, as an educational institution, we strive to help and accommodate students with disabilities as much as possible.

We also have a system in place for online learning where participants have the possibility to make use of different platforms offered. The Institute also offers ongoing support through its Student Support Service where participants can access the services offered and obtain the help, they need at a given time.

#### **E. Measures to implement the European Student Card Initiative, and promote the use of the programme's Erasmus+ mobile App to students.**

At the start of each academic year, the Curriculum and the Erasmus Department holds an information session for students who will be going abroad for the academic studies and their work placement mobilities. During these sessions, the Erasmus coordinator will explain the benefits of the card and explains the process of how one could obtain in. Additionally, a video will be shown during the sessions to fully demonstrate how it works. This video will be taken directly from the ESN website.

Moreover, the Erasmus App will also be promoted. Once again, a video taken directly from [erasmusapp.eu](http://erasmusapp.eu) will be shown to the students. The Erasmus coordinator will highlight the importance of this app because not only several updates in relation to Erasmus are available, but also students could see what social activities students there are in the village/town of their host country. Furthermore, to make things easier and efficiently for our students, the Erasmus coordinator will emphasise that the OLS which the first test is obligatory, is easily accessible on the app and also they will have direct accessibility to their Learning Agreement.

## **5. Actions to implement and promote environmentally friendly practices in the context of the Erasmus+ programme.**

To start implementing and promoting environmentally friendly practices, as previously mentioned in the above paragraphs, the Erasmus Department will be promoting the use of the Erasmus App particularly for the Learning Agreement. In the least two and a half years, ITS has tripled its Erasmus mobilities particularly SMS and SMP mobilities and by having the learning agreement being done electronically, not only it saves time but also saves tons of paper.

## **6. Actions to promote civic engagement and active citizenship amongst our outgoing and incoming students before, after and during mobility**

The Erasmus coordinator will be in active contact with outgoing and incoming students during and after their mobility. During the mobility of ITS outgoing students, the Erasmus Department will be in active contact with the students by sending them e-mails to check up on them and to see if everything is going fine. The Erasmus department will also receive any queries from students during their mobility. Additionally, the management team will organise skype calls and telephone calls with students and occasionally they will visit them abroad. After their mobility, ITS students are highly encouraged to share their experience with other students. In fact, last year, the Erasmus coordinator during a meeting with students who were going on their SMS and SMP, a previous ITS student who went on an Erasmus talked during the information session, explaining her experiencing and even answering any queries from students which arose. This was very important as students will feel more at ease hearing from another student who has actually experienced what they will be going through. ITS is planning to do the same in the upcoming years. Additionally, in 2019, ITS has published several small extracts and photos from previous ITS students who went on an Erasmus mobility, explaining their amazing experience in one short sentence. These were uploaded on ITS social media to promote Erasmus+. In the upcoming years, ITS is planning to do the same.

Incoming students are very important for ITS and it is our objective to give these students the best Erasmus mobility experience. The Erasmus coordinator is in charge of receiving application from partner universities/institutions, once all the documents are received and

the course chosen and time-table sent, the Erasmus coordinator requests a short meeting with the incoming students to give them a quick tour of the school and also a small package with information such as school regulations and information about Malta. Furthermore, incoming students also meet with the Guidance coordinator to make them feel more comfortable and welcome. During their mobility at ITS, the Erasmus coordinator is in constant contact with the students and available in any queries/problems arise. After their mobility, the Erasmus coordinator keeps quite a close contact with the students, in fact the Erasmus coordinator still receives e-mails from previously students such as queries to talk to lecturers who used to teach them a subject for their dissertation.

### **7. ITS commitment to implement full automatic recognition**

Our students who undergo a Higher Education Erasmus+ Student Study Mobility and an Erasmus+ Student Mobility Placement are all accredited. The Institute of Tourism Studies has adopted a strategy where it utilises Erasmus+ funding for those 2<sup>nd</sup> year Degree students whom as part of their obligatory part of their curriculum must undergo a 4-month study period abroad and also a 4-month work period abroad as well. This strategy has been highly praised by the National Erasmus Agency (EUPA) because there is a much higher probability that Erasmus funding will be utilised all. Currently to date the Institute of Tourism studies has three Degree courses; Degree in International Hospitality Management in which 2<sup>nd</sup> year students must undergo an their second academic semester at Haaga-Helia, University of Applied Sciences in Finland and the a work mobility placement abroad, Degree in Culinary Arts in which 2<sup>nd</sup> year students must undergo their second academic semester at Institut Paul Bocuse in France followed by a work mobility placement and Degree in Gastronomy on which students only have to go abroad for their mobility placement. All of these mobilities are an obligatory part of ITS curriculum and upon successful completion 30 ECTS for SMS and are given and also recognized by the Europass document.

In the last few years, ITS has been welcoming more students and the number of students undergoing a Degree course has indeed tripled from 2016. This has resulted in ITS applying for more funding due a higher demand. ITS is projecting that these numbers will continue to increase and will make more use of Erasmus funding as new Degree courses are launched.

### **8. ITS measures to support, promote and recognise staff mobility:**

The Institute of Tourism Studies highly beliefs in long-life learning and also highly supports its academic and administrative staff too continue learning. ITS not only focuses on SMS or SMP mobilities but also on Staff Training and Staff Teaching Assignment. Moreover, at the start of each academic year, the Erasmus Department holds an information session for both STA and

STT in which the Erasmus coordinator carefully explains what is an Erasmus mobility, the benefits of a mobility, how to apply, the documents which are required, how each document must be filled, funding and any other queries which might arise. Additionally, during management meetings, staff who underwent an Erasmus mobility are asked to speak during these meetings to share their experience and encourage other first-time applicants to apply for a mobility. Furthermore, during Erasmus days, the Marketing team at ITS uploads several extracts and pictures of staff members on social media such as on Facebook to promote such mobilities. Additionally, in 2019, the Director of Corporate Services together with an academic staff member appeared on a national tv show in which they talked about Erasmus and its benefits for not only students but also for staff members. As part of recognition, staff members are presented with a Certificate of Attendance upon successful completion of the mobility.