

European Policy Statement

General framework:

As an educational institution Viaa aims to contribute to the quality of human society. Internationalisation fits very well into that general framework for the overall goal of the internationalisation policy of Viaa, Christian University of Applied Sciences, is to educate future professionals who are internationally and intercultural competent, and aware of their position in a globalising society. They need to be aware of their responsibility of contributing to a sustainable and inclusive society at a national, European and global level. In particular as a Christian institute, Viaa strives to emphasize an understanding and caring attitude towards the vulnerable groups in society and the world.

Digitalising education, creating online options as well as implementing virtual mobility as a means for internationalisation at home, are areas Viaa will work on in the next coming years. Erasmus+ provides opportunities to explore and expand these options with the present partners in Europe, as well as to expand the partner network and seek new areas of inter-institutional collaboration. Elaborating digital education also helps to reduce emission by travelling.

Collaboration nearby, in Europe, provides options to reduce the footprint of internationalisation. Viaa intends to limit the number of flights and to promote travelling by train.

Participating in the Erasmus+ programme helps Viaa to achieve the overall objections mentioned above. Europe is the nearby world outside the Netherlands. By creating possibilities for mobility and international collaboration through Erasmus+, Viaa students and staff experience the enriching experience of international and intercultural collaboration at a short distance in the European Education Area. Virtual or physical exchange provides students with the opportunity to widen their horizon on their future profession and the European labour market. Staff exchange and inter-institutional collaboration open ways for modernising education.

Program activities:

Viaa intends to take part in:

1. KA 103: individual mobility of students and staff.

Viaa has a partner network in Europe. As a rather small HEI, it has been the intention to limit the number of partners and to focus on the quality of the partnerships.

In the coming years, Viaa will continue with solid relationship management to stimulate the exchange of students within the network and to intensify the mobility of staff. Requests or other options for new partnerships will be considered concerning the aims of Viaa, options for an exchange mobility and the topics of mutual interest prospective partners offer.

The quality of the partnership, in terms of to what extent exchange of students and staff, and collaboration on educational content takes place, is evaluated every year. During visits to partners or their visits to Viaa the evaluation of the partnership is a topic of the discussions.

For the creation of an international atmosphere and to provide internationalisation at-home experiences, it is important to have incoming international students. To attract international students, Viaa needs to have a relevant offer of English taught courses. In collaboration and reconciliation with partners, Viaa determines how to adapt and expand the present course offers.

2. KA 2: Inter-institutional collaboration.

The focus areas within the inter-institutional collaboration are the exchange of knowledge; modernisation of education (in particular by offering shared modules by blended learning) and cooperation in research.

As an example: One of the Viaa teachers created, and already examined in practice, a programme for students in all study programmes. In this programme, the students carry out a case study within a small group of students at the home institution. In an online meeting with a student group of a partner institute, they discuss their findings. Afterwards, they reflect on the different views based on differences in context and cultural background. In this example elements of internationalisation at-home are combined with an online exchange. Some partners of Viaa already expressed their interest in this method, called SWITCH, and for the future, Viaa seeks collaboration with partners to implement SWITCH in a wider of an online shared course between two or more institutes.

Another area of collaboration with European partners is research on shared topics of interest. On the topic 'Spirituality in Care' Viaa is in the lead in a European network. Some other areas of interest are: 'Calling and Profession', and 'The ethic of...'

Impact:

The impact of the participation of Viaa in the Erasmus+ Programme will be an enforced international atmosphere in the entire institution. For incoming students it must be clear: studying at Viaa means that you will meet students from different European countries. You will have a class with them, you meet with them online. Your teachers show an intercultural attitude and are fluent enough in English to teach their courses in-depth for a mixed student population.

To achieve this desired situation, Viaa has to develop the following areas and boundary conditions:

- Teachers who work with international students are international and intercultural competent: fluent in English at C1/C2 level; well aware of and trained in the theory of intercultural sensitivity. They all have a certificate for both areas. (2022)
- Students are used to read relevant literature in English in every study program, and are fluent in English at a minimum level of B1. Those students who plan to go abroad master level B2.
- A flexible institution-wide course offer, which is appealing for the Dutch as well as incoming international students, about a common topic for all study programmes (2022-2023)
- An increasing number of incoming students for study, or a mixed programme for study and internship:

2022: 5 students/semester

2024: 10 students/semester

2026: 20 students/semester

- An increased number of Viaa students going abroad to international partners in Europe:

2022: 5 students/semester

2024: 10 students/semester

2026: 20 students/semester

- When it comes to teachers exchange: Viaa will strive to achieve the numbers of 2 teachers exchanges both ways, as mentioned in each Inter Institutional Agreement in the partner network..
- Viaa participates in a KA2 project, coordinated by one of the European partners. (2022)

A blended and shared course offer in collaboration with a small network of Erasmus+ Programme partners: Under KA2 Viaa, together with several of the closest partners, creates a semester of courses and other educational activities with limited travelling, many activities online (COIL) Visiting and outgoing guest lecturers will be a part of it. (2025). The use of European Student Card easily allows students to participate in this blended learning environment.

Especially this last stage will have a firm impact on the institution as a whole since the digital facilities needed for it will have to be available, and be spread to all levels of the education at Viaa. The present experience during the Covid-19 period may have a positive impact in this area.