**INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY OF THE HIGHER AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL OF VOCATIONAL STUDIES IN ŠABAC**

**INTRODUCTION**

The three-year undergraduate degree in Higher agriculutral school of vocational studies in Šabac is harmonized with the Bologna Declaration, as well as with the European standards of high education, which entails more efficient and time-effective studying and possibility to study in more than one HEI. The emphasis is on the continual promotion, improvement and modernization of teaching processes and the increase in the number of practical classes in which students are trained how to apply new technologies and newly acquired skills. When enrolling in our school, students can choose one of the seven study programmes. The number of courses per term is reduced compared to what it used to be, and all courses duration is one term. It is also possible to opt for certain courses that originally belong to other study programmes. This is how studying in our school strives to meet the needs of economy regarding individual professions. In addition, communication and cooperation with teaching staff is improved in this way.

**VISION**

The vision of Higher agricultural school of vocational studies in Šabac (HASVS) is to develop itself into a modern European high education institution acknowledged for its graduates’ achievements and to join the sphere of European education as an equal partner. Merging its own professional and other resources with the resources from the environment, HASVS meets the needs of service users, owners, employees, management, business partners and the society in its entirety.

Through the internationalization, HASVS strives to give the strong contribution to the strengthening and improvement of its reputation in the country and abroad. It hopes to become a partner recognized by international higher education and research institutions, with high educational standards which provide students with the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills in compliance with the needs of the society and planned regional and national development. Consequently, this leads to the advancement of society at large.

**PARTNERS**

As for the partners and the regions we choose our partners from, we do not exclude any geographical areas, but since choice will be primarily based on partners’ quality, enthusiasm for cooperation and similarity of vision, this inherently leads us to the partners from the countries in the region, because we have both similar goals and challenges (such as being quite inexperienced in the process of mobility, the challenge of becoming a more attractive educational destination for students from well-developed countries, etc.) Hence, our focus will remain on the region.

Both EU and non-EU member states from the region are our main target group concerning the choice of partners. Over the past few years, we have signed bilateral cooperation agreements with a number of faculties and universities (e.g. *Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra* <https://www.uniag.sk/en/> ). We have established institutional agreements for staff and student mobility and other forms of cooperation with these institutions. In addition, we intend to further extend this type of cooperation to institutions from other countries with which we have bilateral cooperation.

Also, we are inclined to choose partners with whom we already had cooperation in the past in the form of successfully realized projects (e.g. EDUECO, AGRIVOC). The already established mutual trust is a good starting point for our future work.

Therefore, our foreign partners will be selected according to their skills and professionalism, but also according to the similarity of our goals and the ways our institutions function. Our staff makes efforts to develop a database including schools and institutes similar to ours, operating in various European countries. Special attention will be paid to confirming if other schools and institutions’ formative offer would be similar or complementary to ours. Face-to-face meetings or Skype meetings will be organized with selected partners’ teachers/staff/managers in order to get to deeply know them and develop together a common collaboration strategy.

**DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

Our strategy is focused on four long-term objectives:

* Strengthening the position and international reputation of HASVS;
* Developing international and intercultural awareness of students and teachers;
* Continuous improvement of study programmes and increasing their relevance for the current labour market;
* Intensive exchange of skills and knowledge through the mobility of students and staff aimed towards a European Education Area.

**STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

HASVS hopes to achieve the following goals through participation in Erasmus+ projects and mobility schemes:

1. **Enhancement of teachers’ competencies and curriculum development**

We find these two objectives so intertwined that they conveniently blend into one common goal: to modernize teaching content and align it with regional and global economic needs. We believe that general quality of a HEI is significantly improved through mobility and cross-border cooperation. Enhancement of teachers’ competencies is one of the main objectives of teacher mobility, which should lead to the improvement of their knowledge, knowledge of teaching methodologies and design of the curriculum. Acquiring knowledge about the work of other foreign HEIs and business entities with teachers and sharing experiences could lead to the modernization of school work. Connecting with foreign lecturers in realization of research projects and preparation of teaching and science materials would certainly raise our teachers’ competencies to a higher level.

 We can recognize the following pattern of benefits: participation in Erasmus + programs -enhancement of teachers’ competencies-curricula development-becoming more visible and attractive to foreign students and teachers - the presence of foreign students increases the reputation of the school and, through their contacts with local students, leads to increased awareness of and interest in European and other modern values-better positioning of the School in the European educational area.

1. **Providing new experiences to students as well as improving their competitiveness in the labor market**

Student mobility will contribute to the general goal of **ensuring graduates leave higher education with the skill sets they and the modern economy need**, as well as tackling the potential future skills mismatches. Students’ participation in mobility contributes to the developing of transnational skills, self-organization and independence, professionalism and collaboration, as well as gaining significant experience, international friendships and necessary competences. Of course, a special emphasis is put on the development of students' awareness of European values. In this way, future employees who already possess internationally recognized competencies for remarkable career paths are created and recognized by European as well as world values. This can and certainly will create positive changes at a national level**, linking higher education with business for excellence and regional development**, as well as **making sure higher education institutions contribute to innovation in the rest of the economy.**

1. **Improving governance and funding**

The exchange with other European and international institutions allows to find better solutions for the School’s governance and funding. **The participation in projects encourages an institution to make the best use of the human and financial resources available.** The matured experience in other countries could be usefully shared and developed. Moreover, as already mentioned, the internationalization itself is an element of attractiveness for a number of students, consequently causing an increase of funding and a higher sustainability.

**STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES FOR INTERNATIONALISATION**

We are determined to take the following measures in order to enable the implementation of the Strategy:

-Empowering the International Relations Office with competent personnel with clearly defined competencies in the implementation of activities;

-Introduction of periodic evaluation of the internationalization process;

* Sustainability as an imperative of all strategic goals and accompanying activities;
* Supporting vulnerable social groups;
* Inclusion of students in providing the direct support to incoming students (Buddy programme).

**INTERNATIONALIZATION AUTHORITY**

Internationalization of HASVS is carried out by the International Relations Office with the support of the HASVS administrative unit and with approval of the Head of School.