

ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

OVERALL STRATEGY

The IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca (est. 2005) is a public academic institution organised as a graduate school and research centre.

Its tiny scale, 150 students on average and about 70 academics and 35 administrative staff, does explain the high selectivity but also the cutting-edge interdisciplinary education and community cohesion.

The main area of study is the analysis of economic, social, technological, and cultural systems. Ever since IMT's foundation, the School has distinguished itself thanks to the quality and innovativeness of its research and doctoral programs and its interdisciplinary nature, characterised by the complementarity of diverse methodologies derived from economics, management science, engineering, computer science, applied mathematics, physics, history, philosophy, archaeology, art history, cultural heritage law, and neuroscience.

Comprehensive internationalisation is an essential core dimension of the School, as clearly affirmed in the first article of the Statute "The IMT School functions as an international research university active in areas of elevated applicative value and as a graduate school and integrated campus dedicated to merit-based recruitment and the formation of professional élites for institutions, businesses, and the surrounding territory. The IMT School is located within the framework of European and international research and higher education, and operates with its own principles and instruments."

At IMT the international perspective permeates all of campus life, and also relations and partnerships across teaching, research, and "third mission" activities.

The institutional policy relies on the following characterizing principles, which are articulated in the Statute, in respect of equal opportunities and against any type of discrimination:

- Openness and international competitiveness in recruiting faculty and students: the selection of professors and researchers is carried out in accordance with international standards, in conformity with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. The IMT School attracts students with high potential, actively participating in international human capital exchange networks and measuring itself against international standards. The doctoral courses at the IMT School are held exclusively in English. The IMT School supports the systematic presence of internationally recognized external academics
- Residentiality, meritocracy, evaluation: a system of residential services, scholarships and honor-based loans form the foundation for the true right to study for deserving students and promote equal opportunities. The research and teaching activities of the IMT School are subject to evaluation, by means of quantitative and qualitative methods recognized by the international scientific community.
- Interaction with the territory and enterprise networks: the IMT School contributes to the development and internationalization of Lucca and its surrounding territory and promotes the enhancement and transfer of research results.
- The promotion of full and open access to the scientific literature produced by the IMT School, incentivizing their deposit in the institutional archive and the communication to the public, in accordance with intellectual property, confidentiality, and personal data protection laws.
- Efficiency and transparency of the organisational model: the IMT School strives for administrative and managerial efficiency and efficacy in the achievement of its institutional goals.
- Responsibility, honesty, integrity, and reciprocal respect: these principles apply to all of the members of the IMT School and all of their actions.



IMT is a disability-friendly organisation; the campus has no architectural barriers and accommodation specifically designed for disabled people is available. In the recent years, increasing attention has been given to sustainability and environmentally-friendly practices.

Since 2019, a free psychological support service in collaboration with the Local Health Authority is available to all the IMT community members and particularly to students, to solve critical moments that may arise in a highly heterogeneous, challenging, and competitive environment and to favour and protect general workplace well-being.

The School is internationally attractive and receives thousands of applications to its doctoral programs from around the world, every year. The doctoral programs are articulated in curricula that share common core courses and provide specialized training in the specific discipline of the PhD thesis. No tuition fees, disabled-accessible residential facilities, scholarships, and individual research funds are offered to all of the students to ensure equal opportunities; during their doctoral path there is continuous monitoring of possible issues through the students' representatives and the Joint Students and Teachers Board.

The PhD programs and associated benefits are fully funded for up to four years (it was 3 years until 2018), with the possibility of graduating after the third year. The extended length of doctoral programmes has also an impact on mobility and increases the opportunities for study, research, and traineeship abroad.

All faculty are involved in international collaborations and IMT's specially-designed campus fosters the ongoing presence of visiting scholars, who contribute to an intellectually stimulating and lively environment. Regular contact with visiting professors, scholars, and students (part of the "internationalisation at home" scheme) facilitates access to the international scientific community and the broadening of international relationships.

Since its foundation, English is the official language for teaching and working but free Italian language courses are offered to international students and scholars to allow them to increase their cross-cultural experiences, and foster their integration in the local community. On the other hand, English language courses are offered to the technical-administrative staff as the IMT community is multiethnic and all members need to interact in the "lingua franca".

Building on this background, the School has to promote and consolidate its standing, to be recognized by local, national, international organisations and institutions, and strengthen and develop strategic partnerships and collaborations.

Participation in the Erasmus Programme is a key factor to strengthen and establish partnerships and collaborations in the EU area.

The IMT School joined Erasmus in 2009 (obtaining the Extended Erasmus University Charter - EUC). Since then, participation in the Key Action 1 - Learning Mobility of Individuals, has increased, notably in the student mobilities for traineeships.

In the 2010/2011 academic year, IMT joined the Erasmus Consortia Placement "Talent at Work", which had been established the previous year by two nearby Tuscan schools of excellence, the Scuola Normale Superiore and the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (coordinator). This strategic cooperation has grown over the years and proven very fruitful both in terms of funding and learning and placement outcomes.

IMT actively seeks international partners for cooperation on research projects, joint doctoral degrees, research collaborations, and mobility based on their quality and relevance to IMT areas of interest. Institutional partners are largely found through academic and scientific contacts, and PhD students themselves, who are invited to attend seminars, conferences, workshops, summer schools abroad in addition to "at home" courses, are involved in expanding the international network. Moreover, the mobility and placement services serve not only as a backbone of activities but also as a hub for spreading news and information.

Outgoing mobility, though not compulsory, is considered a key point of the students' doctoral formation and fully recognised in their transcripts; the vast majority of IMT PhD students spend a period abroad for study, research, or traineeship. To promote student mobility, financial aid is granted whenever possible: as a matter of fact, all IMT student positions are tuition-free and, since 2019, about 32 PhD positions per year receive a



4-year scholarship on a competitive basis. In the case of mobility abroad, the scholarship is increased by 50% and possibly integrated by Erasmus funds.

Since 2010, more than 170 students have participated in Erasmus activities (more than 98% of them for traineeships) through a selection process consisting of an institutional call for both study and traineeships and a joint Consortium call only for traineeships. Both calls rely on transparent and inclusive criteria; in the last few years there were enough funds to cover all the applications.

High-quality and innovative traineeship mobilities in outstanding organisations, with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge, research, academic, intellectual and practical skills and competences raise employability opportunities. We have also observed that several post-doc positions are secured in the Erasmus host organisation or in the country where the Erasmus activities were carried out.

The first target is to maintain and possibly increase the number of outgoing students for traineeship and, most importantly, the quality of their mobilities, which are often seen as “pre-placement” activities.

Student incoming mobility is encouraged by free supervision, access to courses, wifi, facilities, library, reduced costs for board and lodging on campus, and also by the international multicultural environment in the setting of the historical town centre of Lucca.

Academic and administrative staff short-term outgoing mobility has started in 2015 and is very positively assessed by participants. In the next few years, IMT aims at increasing the number of high-quality outgoing mobility of professors, researchers, and administrative staff as a meaningful part of its internationalisation strategy.

As previously mentioned, the School does have a regular flow of incoming teaching staff; one objective is to better promote the Programme so as to attract more Erasmus visiting scholars.

More administrative staff incoming mobility is also considered as an excellent way to exchange good practices and to expand perspectives on European higher education systems.

Currently there are (8) ongoing *cotutelles* with higher institutions located in France, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium and a framework agreement for traineeships with a multinational company based in Liechtenstein.

In Europe, the School has two strategic institutional partnerships with the University of KU Leuven (Belgium) and the University of Alicante (Spain) for joint degrees and a partnership with the University of Leiden to share teaching staff. More collaborations are under development and the Erasmus programme can play a key role in establishing them.

Since 2019, the School is pursuing thorough and efficient management based on the *Lean Thinking* innovative principles and methods, whose two primary goals are the continuous sustainable improvement of processes in order to deliver optimised value to “customers” and the elimination of waste. The paperless Erasmus roll-out seems to be fully in line with the *lean* philosophy and may represent a powerful case-study to show how digitalising paperwork can be highly beneficial to all stakeholders involved and how the paperless approach may be extended to different contexts and processes.

Another essential long-term impact of the participation in the Erasmus Programme is the setup and strengthening of a sound European scientific network of higher education institutions, research centres, and companies for education, research cooperation, business and for actively contributing and supporting the creation of the shared European Education Area expected by 2025. Joining the European Universities initiative would be an important means to broaden European strategic cooperations with suitable partners.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ERASMUS+ ACTIONS

The IMT School’s mission has always been to push the frontiers of knowledge and to contribute to the formation of international professional élites for businesses and institutions.



Merit-based, open, transparent recruitment practices lead to the formation of international alumni, who can act as agents of development and change and promote inclusion, cohesion, and support in society. The alumni association, founded in 2018, provides further possibilities of exchange and cooperation at an international level.

Geographical (and social) mobility is a basic value for IMT, from recruitment to job placement, and participation in the Key Action 1 not only enhances the chances of qualified mobility for students, academics and administrative staff but also provides a structured and consolidated framework capable of facilitating and promoting the whole mobility process.

Besides, the transition to digital Erasmus and blended mobility will make participation more efficient and cost-effective. Another "side-effect" of the mobility of individuals is the consolidation of IMT's international experience, which also means an increasing recognition within the academic community.

In the context of the global economic crisis made worse by the coronavirus pandemic, IMT believes that Erasmus mobility, in its physical and blended realization, still represents a key factor not only for promoting the careers of students and their global employability but also to improve solidarity among European citizens. The School is also assessing the possibility of participating in the European Universities initiative, pertaining to Key Action 2, which would allow us to contribute to the development of joint study programmes, international teams to address common social challenges and to improve student exchange systems to be integrated into study programs.

ENVISAGED IMPACT OF THE PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

From a quantitative point of view, as far as the KA1 activities are concerned, we observe that though outgoing student mobility is not mandatory, in the last few years, on average 79% of students of a given PhD cycle take advantage of this opportunity and 50% of them choose to have an Erasmus mobility abroad, usually a traineeship, which has proven to be the most suitable kind of mobility for doctoral students.

Outgoing staff mobility involves 2 people per year on average (i.e. less than 2% of academic and administrative staff).

Incoming students and staff are less than 1 person per year on average: even though there is a regular presence of international visiting professors, scholars and students, most of them do not take the opportunity to participate as Erasmus KA1 beneficiaries, which may be improved with better promotion.

On the qualitative side, most of the outgoing student mobilities are towards highly renowned and qualified institutions or research centres and in many cases the traineeships may be dubbed "research traineeships" as their main purpose is to make the doctoral student acquainted with academic research at an international level. In several cases, the Erasmus mobility has represented the first step towards postdoctoral placement. Outgoing staff had teaching and training experiences in high-profile institutions as well. Feedback from all participants about their Erasmus experience has always been extremely positive.

In this context, the envisaged impact of the participation in the Erasmus+ Programme for IMT in the next years is to keep the excellent qualitative and quantitative results of outgoing student mobility for traineeships while preserving the possibility of mobility for study. Furthermore, IMT aims at somewhat increasing the outgoing staff mobility for training and teaching and attracting more and more incoming students and staff.

The quantitative indicators will simply be the number of agreements and participants in the various activities, while the qualitative indicators will rely on the quality of the information given through the different channels (web site, intranet, social media), on the list of host organisations and institutions, on the participants' assessment about their experience as stated in their final survey, on matter-specific feedback from the Joint Students and Teachers Board.



More promotion to attract incoming mobilities is also envisaged and to this aim we will work towards a closer involvement of the internal faculty.

Support for participants throughout all stages of their mobility will be reinforced through more detailed information on the web site, while keeping all the personalized assistance with setup, contacts with host organisations, paperwork, insurance issues, certificates, visa, travel details and so forth.

Participation in the KA2 action, particularly in the European Universities initiative would be another important envisaged impact; to this end the Tour4EU¹ agency is providing advice and some faculty members are currently involved in preliminary investigations.

The indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions are on an annual basis for quantitative indicators of KA1, presumably starting from the academic year 2022/23, when the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on physical mobilities should have been neutralised, whereas qualitative targets, and in particular, better communication and promotion through the web site will be already pursued in 2021/22.

As for the KA2 action – European Universities initiative, the participation is currently at the feasibility study, and the ideal timeline – given the current human resources - would be to be able to participate in a couple of years, trying to identify the “best fit” partnerships.

The long-term impact of Erasmus projects at an institutional level is the setup and strengthening of a sound European scientific network of higher education institutions, research centres, and companies for education, business, research cooperation and for actively contributing and supporting the creation of a shared European Education Area by 2025.

To be sustainable, each project under the Erasmus framework during the years 2021-2027 will fulfill the following general principles:

- adaptability, i.e. the ability to fit in occurring changes and to cope with unexpected circumstances, to be reached building a consistent yet open and flexible framework: we are currently dramatically experiencing this need, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- feasibility, i.e. the need to be properly sized, feasible, attainable, which takes into account both the School strategy and vision on one hand and its real means and resources on the other hand;
- scalability, i.e. the ability to increase in quantity or scope to accommodate unforeseen additional components; for example, currently we only cater for doctoral student mobilities, but in the near future we could have other types of students (e.g. Master students) or students enrolled from joint Programmes;
- extensibility, i.e. the ability to extend the project through the addition of new features or modification of existing features
- maintainability, i.e. the capability of correcting defects and meeting new requirements
- manageability, i.e. an organizational structure specifying roles, responsibilities, and duties to facilitate the management of the project.

¹ Tuscan Organisation of Universities and Research for Europe association, which promotes the interests of the Tuscan Higher Education system for research within the EU, strengthening internationalization and encouraging European project planning.