Erasmus Policy Statement (Overall Strategy) 2014-2020

The State University of Rome “Foro Italico”, the city’s fourth state university, is the only Italian and one of the few European vocational universities entirely devoted to sport and exercise science. It was created in 1998 from the upgrading of the previous Higher State Institute of Physical Education and as the direct heir of the National Academy of Physical Education established in the late 1920s in the especially developed and world famous monumental sport complex of “Foro Italico” in Rome - a jewel of modern rationalistic architecture involving such stunning structures as the “Marble Stadium” of Athletics, the Academy of Fencing, the 100,000 seat Soccer stadium, the Swimming stadium, the Tennis stadium, etc., which hosted the 1960 Olympic Games and still are the almost daily venue of national and international championships.

The university is a small yet prestigious institution, widely open to international cooperation, and enjoys a relevant international status, thanks to its history, facilities, the quality of its teaching and continuing-education activities, the strong emphasis on research and scientific achievement, the consistent strategy of internationalization. This has led, over the years, to strongly promote research and teaching mobility, develop European programs, and establish official agreements with about one-hundred universities in Europe, North and South America, Northern Africa and other regions.

Internationalization has been particularly pursued and the Bologna Process strongly promoted from the very beginning.

This was done by establishing, already in 2000, a European Master in Health and Physical Activity, and a subsequent doctoral program, with a number of partners particularly involved in sport science and public health issues in several EU countries, such as the University of Vienna, the German Sport University of Cologne, the University of Southern Denmark in Odense, the Norwegian Sport University in Oslo, and associate partners in the UK, France, Belgium, Holland, Greece, Portugal, and other countries. The program has been running for now over ten years and has been fully recognized in the various countries, ending up in a joint degree signed by all partner institutions and giving right to a corresponding national title. This highly successful European Master has also given rise to related initiatives (such as Intensive Programs on Physical Activity for Children, or for the Elderly, coordinated by the University of Odense; the project of a European Bachelor in Physical Activity and Lifestyle, coordinated by the University of Groningen, etc.). The European Master has also been effectively used as an instrument in a number of Tempus JEP developed and coordinated by the Foro Italico University with its partners to promote the Bologna Process and the upgrading of sport science teaching and research in such areas as the Balkans (Albania, Kosovo, Fyrom, more recently Serbia, etc.) and Northern Africa (Egypt, and through it other Arab countries). This is also strongly contributing to other EU actions to promote development in critical areas (such as the extensive ToT Programme for Sports and Physical Education Teachers in Kosovo, coordinated and conducted by the university and its partners, etc.).

Internationalisation initiatives have also been undertaken in the context of master and doctoral education in pedagogy, particularly the area of special education and disabilities, with important partnerships established in France, Brazil, Russia and other countries.

International cooperation in teaching and research is obviously widely developed in the areas more specifically related to exercise science, with Faculty members involved in intensive teaching periods in Portugal, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, etc. Exchanges in teaching and research in the biomedical area (especially sport medicine) are also being developed with Argentina, promoting student and teacher mobility and the use of e-learning technology. Exchange programs in the area of health and sport science are also being developed with some US universities and sport companies with special emphasis on short courses and Summer schools involving public health as well as interdisciplinary perspectives: philosophical, historical, cultural, sport as a means of inclusion, etc.

Programs involving sport as a vehicle for development and peace are also being developed, in relation to intercultural city environments, areas of crisis, post-emergency situations, etc.

The strategy of internationalization is also focused on staff training and retraining, promoting exchanges with numerous institutions and companies.

Of course, research is highly internationalized and intensive cooperation is developed with many countries; the university also hosts, or participates to, international bodies, congresses, or research centers (such as in biomechanics and physiology, sport medicine and biology, psychology, pedagogy, and other areas).

Despite its small dimension, the university has the past years been granted 3 Tempus JEPs as coordinator, 2 Leonardo TOI as partner, and 2 IP (1 as coordinator, 1 as partner); it also takes part to a Consortium for Erasmus placement and one for Leonardo People in the Labour Market.

The successful results achieved in the training of students, teachers and staff belonging to beneficiary countries in the two JEPs in the Balkans and the one in Egypt, serve as a sound basis for the implementation of future international projects.

The university, together with its EU partners, is now planning to extend the Bologna Process and curricular reform in sport sciences to other countries and universities of the Balkan Region, also implementing a joint
vocational Master program, in line with EU curricula, to meet individual and local market needs. Another development deriving from a previous JEP, is a project for Virtual Reality (VR) technology to improve physical education in Egypt and the participating Egyptian universities as well as sports professionals registered in different Egyptian sports federations.

The university is also implementing a project with the Russian Federation in another strategic field of transnational cooperation: the use of ICT as a means of inclusion for disadvantaged students and the training of trainees for the adoption of the new technological tools. The university’s internal group of teachers and staff has a high expertise in the field of inclusion and educational tools for students with special needs, related not only to sport sciences but covering broader field of interest. They have developed exchange and research programs with many universities in Brazil, both at second and third cycle level. The partnership has the purpose to implement joint masters and/or PhD programs, mainly based on long distance teaching methods, while the internships will be developed through mobility paths, according to different participants' needs.

the expected impact of your participation in the Programme on the modernisation of your institution (for each of the 5 priorities of the Modernisation Agenda*) in terms of the policy objectives you intend
1) Attracting new students and avoiding drop out are two critical issues. Both are addressed through orientation policies considering students expectations already at High school level: awareness of students’ choice and quality of teaching prevent drop outs. Another valuable instrument is to design training paths that will enable graduates and researchers to be more competitive on the internal and the international labour market.

2) The focus on improving teaching quality through the monitoring and evaluation of study programs is a strategic issue for the internationalization policy. Evaluation reports on teaching contents and the services offered to students are the fundamental starting grid to better respond to their needs. The tremendous changes occurring on the labour market and the demand or loss of workplaces are always considered in every decision concerning the didactic offering of the institution.

Consultation with companies, particularly those more specifically linked to the physical activity sector and the sport federations, is a fundamental tool to provide students with an up-to-date education responding to market needs. The feedback on employment rates of graduates is monitored by annual surveys, in order to set up curricular developments more coherent with market needs. The use of ICT for theoretical lessons facilitates the access to study programs to a broader range of population: workers, disadvantaged people, off premise students. E-learning platforms will be implemented to give opportunities for a continuing education for different groups. A specific project will be established to avoid the drop out of students who also compete as high-level athletes; customized programs will be delivered in collaboration with national and international institutions to enhance dual career paths.

3) The added value of mobility experiences in terms of prospective employment is an agreed issue. One of the priorities of the institution is to implement the exchanges with international partners, and deeply link the transnational practices to all study programs. The level of recognition of mobility periods has been implemented since 2007 and will be guaranteed also for extra EU experiences.

4) The strategic plan of the university is focused on strengthening the link between higher education at all levels of qualification and regional firms. In particular, the purpose of the collaboration is to drive funds to finance scholarships and post-doc grants for applied research, the output of research in turn improving regional development, in terms of new workplaces and exploitations of results at national level.

5) The objective of the university is to develop a regional marketing strategy in the sport sector to improve its positioning, in order to increase private and public financing for the development of research projects for the innovation of the sector. The institution is also establishing a university foundation, as a flexible tool to attract funds.