

## JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – UNIVERSITY OF JEWISH STUDIES, HUNGARY

### ERASMUS POLICY STATEMENT (EPS)

Your Erasmus Policy Statement should reflect how you intended to implement Erasmus after the award of the ECHE. Should you wish to add additional activities in the future, you will need to amend your Erasmus Policy Statement and inform your Erasmus National Agency.

What would you like to achieve by participating in the Erasmus Programme? How does your participation in the Erasmus Programme fit into your institutional internationalisation and modernisation strategy?

(Please reflect on the objectives of your participation. Please explain how you expect the participation in Erasmus to contribute towards modernising your institution, as well as on the goal of building a European Education Area and explain the policy objectives you intend to pursue).

The **Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies** (OR-ZSE) is a university with a broad profile, including rabbinical and cantor training programmes, Jewish studies, social work, community building, a doctoral school, and is planning to re-launch its teacher training programme. OR-ZSE is committed to playing an active role in the international scholarly network in harmony with its long-standing traditions.

Its predecessor, the **Jewish Theological Seminary** (*Landesrabbinerschule*) of Budapest was opened in 1877. An “offspring” of the Breslau seminary, it joined a network of European rabbinical schools emerging in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Visiting students and professors, exchanging ideas and research cooperation: these all were evident in those days. A modern institution then, it has significantly reconstituted its **modernisation** plans recently.

**Internationalisation** is a strong component in OR-ZSE’s twenty-first century renewal strategy. The **mission** of the university is to serve as the scientific and intellectual centre of Hungarian and Hungarian-speaking Jewry; particularly *neologist* (positive-historical) Judaism, which is concurrently devoted to the values of Jewish tradition and modernity. It provides high-quality education to a new generation of professionals functioning in Jewish and non-Jewish communities alike, and to future scholars of any background in Jewish studies and theology.

Within this mission, **internationalisation aims** at (A) becoming an international player in the scholarly disciplines covered by the institution’s profile, as well as (B) training a future generation of professionals and researchers with all skills necessary to navigate a globalised world. Given the profile of OR-ZSE, most cooperation is anticipated with institutions in member states and associated states of the European Research Area.

Given the history and the mission of the institution, the internationalisation strategy follows a threefold structure:

- (1) *Playing an active role in the network of rabbinical seminaries in Europe and overseas.*
- (2) *Participating in the scholarly network of Jewish studies at European and global level.*
- (3) *Training future professionals equipped with all twenty-first century skills.*

These **three goals**, which may frequently converge, are elaborated upon in the following three paragraphs.

Rabbinical seminaries were established in the nineteenth century in and outside Europe to provide a new, academic form of education, and to serve at the same time as research centres of Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*). Implementing KA1 and KA2 actions in the **Erasmus Programme will enable OR-ZSE to partner with its sister institutions, and to renew their cooperation**. Jewish institutions in this network at times share their ideological foundations, and at times represent different streams of Judaism. Therefore, the significance of these contacts extends beyond the academic benefits; in fact, this network of rabbinical seminaries represents the backbone of inter-denominational contacts within the Jewish world today.

The academic study of Jewish history, culture and religion, to a large extent, takes place nowadays at secular universities and research institutes. Christian theological faculties are also eminent centres of Biblical and Hebrew studies. Research must be embedded into this larger scholarly framework of Jewish and Biblical studies, which in turn is part and parcel of the humanities and social sciences community in the European Research Area and beyond. Student and staff Erasmus mobility to and from HEIs in these fields **will benefit both research and education** at OR-ZSE.

Not only future scholars, but also professionals leaving the academia must be prepared for a globalised twenty-first century, capable of life-long learning and prospering as European citizens. Of vital importance are **twenty-first century skills**, including among others foreign language proficiency, cross-cultural communication, digital skills, as well as tools for navigating an unfamiliar context, solving problems and acquiring new knowledge therein. **Outgoing Erasmus student mobility** is a prime instrument to developing these skills. Moreover, internationalisation widens the students’ perspective and improves their employability. **Incoming Erasmus student and staff mobility** contributes to developing twenty-first century skills by **creating an international ‘campus atmosphere’ in the institution**.

Hereby, OR-ZSE proudly joins the **European Education Area**. A small and cosy institution with a rich history, representing a singular aspect of our shared European cultural heritage, it can contribute to this common European enterprise in numerous ways. Its richly diverse student body, its professors specialized in rabbinical studies, cantorial arts, Judaism, Hungarian Jewry and social sciences, their expertise in pastoral care, social work, community building, as well as the institution’s unique Judaica library collection will all be an asset to the European Education Area.

Please reflect on the Erasmus actions you would like to take part in and explain how they will be implemented in practice at your institution. Please explain how your institution's participation in these actions will contribute to achieving the objectives of your institutional strategy.

The three goals of the strategy just described differ in terms of implementation. All of them involve KA1 actions, whereas KA2 actions are primarily envisaged in the context of objective (1), at least in the short term.

(1) Playing an active role in the network of rabbinical seminaries in Europe and overseas. Memorandums of understanding have been signed or will be signed with rabbinical seminaries in and outside Europe, preparing not only student and staff mobility (KA1 actions), but also various forms of partnerships (KA2 actions). Joint courses and mobility – exchange of students and lecturers – benefit primarily students in the rabbinical and cantor training programmes, together with their professors. Partnerships include informal and formal exchange of good practices, cooperation in the field of innovative curriculum development, joint research projects, publications and conferences, as well as joint policy development and protection of interests, hereby benefiting the entire institution. Societal fringe benefits may also comprise cooperation between specific local Jewish congregations.

(2) Participating in the scholarly network of Jewish studies at European and global level. Besides rabbinical seminaries, a broader range of institutions, such as public universities with a humanities and social sciences profile, research institutes and theologies are also targeted. Student mobility (study) and staff mobility (teaching and training) shall pave the way to joint courses and research projects (and eventually joint degree programs in the very long term). A list of institutions teaching Jewish studies, Hebrew studies or Biblical studies is compiled, before approaching them to work on a mobility agreement (KA1 actions intended in the short term).

(3) Training professionals equipped with all twenty-first century skills. This goal – including the internationalization of the 'campus atmosphere', with student, faculty and staff mobility incoming and outgoing – is less specific in terms of possible cooperations: the most colourful the international experience thus created, the greatest the benefit for the institution and all participants. Both students and teachers improve their language skills, problem solving abilities and cross-cultural competences. Blended mobility also enhances digital skills. When seeking partners for student mobility (KA1) along this strategic line, preferences will be given to institutions with a high potential of bi-directional mobility (accessible even for underprivileged students, possibility for blended mobility, etc.). Besides rabbinical seminaries and universities with Jewish studies, special emphasis will be given to HEIs training social and community workers.

Regarding the implementation of the Erasmus actions, these goals set a series of **objectives** for the forthcoming years. Working towards many of these objectives will also *contribute to achieving additional goals* in the **modernisation strategy** of the institution, in general. Here are listed some examples relating, primarily, to student mobility (KA1):

- While a not insignificant proportion of the instructors have, many of them have never taught in an international context. Therefore, a prime objective is to equip them to cater for a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous population of students. Part of this process is a reflection on the higher education culture in Hungary, and the instructors' own *teaching philosophy and methods*. During workshops on teaching in higher education, they can be presented with alternative approaches, under the pretext of preparing them for the arrival of foreign students.
- By discussing, and later by encountering *cross-cultural differences* among international students, staff will also grow more attentive to the *diversity* among Hungarian students. While the process has already begun, thanks to the heterogeneity of the current student body, internationalisation will give a further push to the teaching and administrative staff to operate professionally in a multicultural and otherwise diverse context, in general.
- Another objective is to actively seek resources for supporting the mobility of underprivileged students. In fact, supporting the ambitions of talented students with limited opportunities has long featured in the institution's mission, motivated by ethical values in Judaism. Their inclusion in the Erasmus programme is not viewed as a challenge, but as a new opportunity to improve the world (*tikkun olam*) and work toward the ideal of *social justice*.
- A major task in all HEIs is to monitor trends and identify eventual problems in credit recognition. While Erasmus mobility amplifies eventual problems with credit recognition, the solution requires a general major switch in *teaching philosophy* that is imperative in the twenty-first century.
- A deliberate policy must help disseminate the skills and experiences gained by outgoing students and staff upon their return. A side effect is an *institutional culture* that is more open to innovation and change.
- To make most of incoming mobility, OR-ZSE must stimulate the interactions between incoming exchange students and local students, within and beyond the classroom, overcoming language barriers. The procedure of developing such techniques shall benefit the cooperation between the university administration and the student council.

Finally, a key to the implementation of the Erasmus actions in practice is pre-existing personal contacts. Joining the Erasmus Charter will open the door to transforming individual researchers' private scholarly networks into organised inter-institutional cooperation (KA1 or KA2), benefitting other colleagues and students, and the university at large.

What is the envisaged impact of your participation in the Erasmus+ Programme on your institution?

Please reflect on targets, as well as qualitative and quantitative indicators in monitoring this impact (such as mobility targets for student/staff mobility, quality of the implementation, support for participants on mobility, increased involvement in cooperation projects (under the KA2 action), sustainability/long-term impact of projects etc.) You are encouraged to offer an indicative timeline for achieving the targets related to the Erasmus+ actions.

The first Erasmus+ **inter-institutional agreements** are planned to be signed in 2021 and 2022. Past, existing and planned cooperation with institutions in Germany, Israel and the neighbouring countries forms the bases of these first intended agreements. The possibility of signing further agreements will be simultaneously considered.

The envisaged **target for student mobility** is that by 2027 at least 12-15% of the students will have spent at least one semester abroad before graduating. The EU target (at least 20%) is not realistic presently, because the current student population of OR-ZSE includes an unusually high proportion of students who are older and have families; or who come from lower socio-economic background; or who come with learning disabilities influencing their foreign language skills. In order to reach 12-15% by 2027 (and the EU target on the long term), tackling these challenges will include several elements: the promotion of blended mobility; individual help provided by the Erasmus coordinator highlighting the special opportunities offered by the Erasmus program itself and the National Agency; seeking additional support for underprivileged students; as well as a focus on the institution's language policy. Since the traditional Jewish principle of **social justice** appears high among its values, and in accordance with the EU priority of inclusive education, OR-ZSE is committed to providing the best training – comprising the benefits of international mobility – to all students, independently of their background.

Given the size of the institution, a realistic target number for **incoming Erasmus students** is 8-12 students per year, to be reached gradually by 2027, and increased further subsequently. The institution shall monitor what courses they take, and how they perform in those courses, in order to provide fitting and high-quality education for them. Given the small numbers, this will be done by a qualitative, rather than a quantitative analysis. At the same time, the number and type of extracurricular activities (e.g., social introduction opportunities, cultural immersion programmes, religious occasions, sightseeing tours, international parties, language learning opportunities) offered to them must be also surveyed, jointly with the students' council. An efficient (qualitative) way to monitor the internationalisation of the 'campus atmosphere' is by analysing the spontaneous linguistic landscape: are there posters and notice board notes increasingly in English and other languages? Surveys among the Hungarian students can also measure the extent to which they feel in an international environment upon entering the university premises.

Regarding **faculty (research and teaching staff) mobility**, the envisaged target is that by 2027, at least 30% of the full-time teaching and research personnel will have participated in mobility, gaining either teaching or research experience (ideally both) abroad. (Part-time faculty will also be encouraged to do so, but no target figure is set, for their mobility may be restricted by various factors.) Moreover, by the same time, 40% of those obtaining a PhD will have gained some international experience (training, research or teaching) during their doctoral studies.

The expected number of **incoming academic staff** is at least 1 or 2 lecturers per year offering (intensive) courses, as well as at least 1 or 2 further scholars arriving for carrying out research. Ideally, their research will be related to a joint project with local colleagues (for instance, making use of the institution's unique library collection and other research facilities in Jewish studies in Budapest). These incoming scholars – doctoral students, junior or senior researchers – will also be asked to give an invited talk, and otherwise participate in the local scientific life. Hence, indicators include the number of inbound staff mobility, the numbers of courses and talks given, besides the scientometrics of the scholarly output.

In general, cooperation in terms of research will be especially championed, while special emphasis will be put on supporting doctoral students' networking experience. The numbers of joint publications, joint research project proposals submitted, and jointly organised events are among the quantitative indicators in monitoring the impact of staff mobility and of **partnerships for cooperation and innovation**.

At least a few **administrative staff** members will also be urged to visit partner institutions comparable to OR-ZSE to gain international experience. Upon their return, they shall implement good practices they will have observed, but also more easily cater for incoming students. The latter effect can be monitored by student satisfaction surveys. The exchange of experience can be continued subsequently, by inviting the supporting personnel of the partner institutions, especially those involved in KA2 actions (**exchanges of good practices**). The significant, although hardly measurable, impact thereof will be a changing institutional culture in the long term.

To summarise, OR-ZSE is just joining the Erasmus program. In the period between 2020 and 2027, the general goal is the launch the first KA1 and KA2 actions of the institution, aiming at a reasonable and sustainable level of internationalisation. By 2027, inbound and outbound student and staff mobility, joint projects and exchanging ideas, partnerships for innovative research and education – within the European Educational Area and beyond – will have become (again) evident at the Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies.