

Mobility RUG-IR

Relevance of the Strategy

Explain why the planned mobility project is relevant to the internationalisation strategy of the higher education institutions involved (both in the Programme and Partner Country).

Justify the proposed type(s) of mobility (studies, traineeship, staff teaching or staff training).

Internationalisation strategy

For the University of Groningen (UG), the internationalisation strategy is an integral part of the university development strategy. Mobility programmes are important for internationalisation, as they support the effort to integrate international practices and models on campus, as well as to increase the diversity in our classrooms. As we do not yet have many students from Iran, this cooperation is especially important for the diversity of the student population. In truly international classrooms international and national students and staff work together. They learn from each other and prepare for careers and lives in a globalised world.

The department of archaeology at the University of Groningen is investing in disclosing their knowledge internationally, for example via their digital plant atlas project (<http://www.plantatlas.eu/>), which includes findings from Iran. Archaeobotany is not a strongly established field of research in Iran. The country is, however, one of the main archaeological areas for this type of research. Mobility between the University of Groningen and the University of Urmia will improve both institution's internationalisation, and contribute to the development of the field of Archaeobotany in Iran.

There is a long history of archaeobotanical studies in Iran by the staff of UG. Available database of those investigations can be used as a reference for further studies. Nevertheless, lack of such database hinders archaeobotanical research in Iran. This kind of cooperation provide an important opportunity for both partners to experience international educational environments with variety of available research methods; accordingly enhances both partners knowledge for further studies and specifically enriches the unique data base and reference collection of Groningen Institute of Archaeobotany. Furthermore a preliminary investigation on a series of collected samples from under-study area of Iran have shown high potential of macro-botanical studies. This fact reduces the probability of failure of getting desired results.

Urmia university is stepping forward toward implementation of higher education reform planned by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which includes an internationalisation strategy. Part of Urmia university international strategy includes transnational education, which is why its postgraduate students are encouraged to do part of their study at an international university through mobility programmes. The educational team of Urmia university believe that scientific cooperation can improve internationalization in both locations, resulting the enrichment of staff knowledge and skills and well-trained postgraduate students of different fields.

Justification of types of mobility

The exchange of staff and students from both side is intended form this application. The framework of the project, which can be operated commonly, provides field and laboratory works. Both field and laboratory works of this project have high potential of archaeobotanical studies that would enhance skills of data and sample collecting from the field and sample analysis in the laboratory for researchers.

Field and laboratory visit of Urmia university can be planned by Dutch partners at any desired time of the year, except winter for the field visit/study due to the steepness of the understudy area. The Iranian partner wish to get an opportunity for staff and students to visit university of Groningen labs and reference collection for implementing archaeobotanical part of their research. A period of 3 month (for a master student), 6 month (for a PhD candidate) and 2 weeks for a staff member can provide this opportunity for implementation of archaeobotanical part of their research. The presence of a researcher from the similar fields from different part of the world in university of Groningen can provide opportunity for staff and students of UG to discuss about various sampling methods, sample analysing and data interpretation of different landscapes as well. The mentioned scientific discussions and job shadowing can be done in the labs or during a master class or a crash-courses for interested students and staffs. This would expose the students of the University of Groningen to international researchers, and their respective specialities in the field of Archaeobotany. For the staff, it would be an introduction to the field of Archaeobotany and the way of teaching and working in the Netherlands. It would also give them more international experience and enhance their international network. They can share their experiences with their colleagues at home.

Quality of the cooperation arrangements

Detail your previous experience of similar projects with higher education institutions in this Partner Country, if any, and explain how, for the planned mobility project, responsibilities, roles and tasks will be defined in the Inter-institutional Agreement.

If applicable, provide information about your previous experience and planned cooperation arrangements with receiving organisations for traineeships in your country and in this Partner Country.

Previous collaboration

All the past studies in Iran can be introduced here or it might be possible to say that our cooperation can be considered as the starting point.

Responsibilities, roles and tasks in the IIA

The Inter institutional agreements (IIA's) between the Urmia university and UG will be signed by the legal representatives of our institutions. Any changes in the mobility figures (subject to the approval of this application) will appear in a revised section B of the IIA and will be added as an annex to the existing IIA.

The Erasmus institutional coordinators act as first contact persons between the Urmia university and UG. The Erasmus contact persons are mentioned in the IIA itself, as are the fields of study and levels of mobility at which the exchange is organised.

An annex (information sheet) is to be provided by both universities, setting out where to find all necessary academic and practical information and contact details of faculties and departments involved, for both student and staff mobility. This info sheet is published on the project website.

At the University of Groningen, tasks are divided between the central office and international offices at faculties. The central office is responsible for the implementation of the mobility project and for communication at institutional level with its international partners. The Mobility & Scholarship Desk (MSD) has built up years of experience in both national and EU projects as e.g. NFP and EMA2. MSD manages the project website and selection procedures. Also, MSD is responsible for the payment of scholarships in national and EU projects. The faculty international officers are responsible for the organisation of the mobility, for support to and providing pre-departure information to mobile students, as well as for the academic contents of the mobility and the Learning Agreement and Transcript of Records. Examination boards are responsible for the recognition of credits. Responsible people and offices, including contact addresses are mentioned in the fact sheet, attached to the IIA.

So far archaeobotany and specifically macro-remain study has not been applied in archaeological studies of Urmia university. For interested students of Urmia university, the only possible field of archaeobotany is palynology. It is desired to develop this field in the faculty of natural resources, department of forestry and specifically as a new method and an essential part for palynological researches. Academic cooperation with other institutions in Urmia university is organized and regulated through the International relationship office of the University. The processes of approval and performance of international relationships are done by this office. So far many of Urmia university students have given the opportunity to visit international universities all over the world by the cooperation between this office and the head of each faculty of Urmia university. The scientific committee of the departments, usually headed by the head of the department, plays a major role in the structuring and undertaking the scientific roles and tasks.

In all cases, the host university is committed to give the home university all the necessary information on application procedures, deadlines, visa and insurance issues, and other practical information that students and staff need to know before departure. In Groningen, student accommodation has been outsourced (to SSH), yet MSD and contact persons at faculties act as intermediary and will provide additional info if requested. Also, they validate housing applications and keep track of who has been registered and obtained housing. All participants are responsible for securing sufficient insurance. Both home and host university provide extensive information on insurance matters. All contact information on visa, housing and insurance matters is mentioned in the IIA or presented in the universities' fact sheet. As for visa regulations, the University of Groningen closely cooperates with the Immigration Services in the Netherlands and offers a quick procedure of visa application to all incoming internationals.

Quality of the project design and implementation

Present the different phases of the mobility project and summarise what partner organisations plan in terms of selection of participants, the support provided to them and the recognition of their mobility period (in particular in the Partner Country). Bear in mind that certain flows may not

be eligible. Please consult the Programme Guide and your National Agency's website to know which limitations apply.

As soon as the requested scholarships have been approved by EACEA, the University of Groningen will inform the Urmia University. We will then proceed to sign the inter-institutional agreement.

Website

Information on the mobility project, on partners involved and on application and selection procedures are provided on the project website that has been designed by UG specifically for the KA107 ICM project: www.groningenexchange.nl

A call for scholarship applications will be open twice a year on the project website designed by UG (www.groningenexchange.nl). One call for the winter term, the other for the summer term, though 3rd cycle and staff mobilities can be implemented irrespective of term start and end dates. New calls will be announced in advance to Urmia university. Students and staff will upload their application file before the deadline mentioned on the website.

Application and nomination

The first mobility in the project will be a visit of Groningen by Iranian student/staff, for training and laboratory works. Potential candidates can attend the archaeobotanical courses and indicate their interest. Since the mobility project itself is small-scale and focused, it is easy to reach all potential candidates personally by teaching of a course or giving a guest lecture.

Selection

The home university selects the students and staff members who can apply for the scholarship. Each call for scholarship applications will be announced on the partner's website. The call will provide details on the mobility opportunities agreed upon in the IIA, the list of required documents, and internal selection procedures. The best qualified students will be selected, yet in the nomination and selection process also the background of students is taken into consideration. In all cases, the sending university makes sure that the participant is academically qualified and is proficient in the language of instruction in accordance with the requirements stipulated by the host institution in the IIA. The activities in this project are mainly research focussed, the language of instruction in class is of minor importance; communication will be English.

Nominated outgoing students and the home university ensure that applications are uploaded in the online system before the given deadline. Proof of nomination is uploaded in the application. Staff must have been in touch with their host prior to the application; they need to upload an activity plan and a pre-acceptance letter from the receiving professor.

The receiving (host) institution will decide on whether a student/staff member can be accepted or not. After the application deadline, the host university therefore evaluates the application files according to the standard criteria (language proficiency, academic merit, proposed LA, motivation) and following internal procedures. As mentioned, the small scale of the project guarantees a quick nomination and selection procedure since candidates will be easily identified and agreed upon by

both home and host university. Results of the host university's selection will be communicated to the implementing office at UG and consequently by mail to all relevant partners and applicants.

Before mobility

UG will send all selected grantees instructions on how to proceed with visa applications (handled by UG), accommodation, insurance and travel arrangements. Further detailed information will be provided by the host faculty and/or department.

Before the start of the mobility, every student grantee must submit a fully signed Learning Agreement (LA, for master students) or Mobility Agreement (MA, for PhD students) and for this will receive help from both home and host university. The LA or MA is the guarantee of later recognition and is confirmed by both home and host university. For one semester the LA should mention a work load of 30 ECTS. Also staff will submit an approved Mobility Agreement. All sending institutions provide pre-departure orientation and technical support.

The Faculty of Natural resources of Urmia university will provide the selected students and staff with information about the study system in the Netherlands.

During mobility

At UG, all students and staff will be assisted with practicalities upon arrival. Immediately upon arrival to Groningen a Grant Agreement will be signed, setting out all rights and obligations of the grantee (outgoing grantees will sign the GA before departure). Students receive guidance in finding their way at the faculty and in the city and can sign up for introductory and student activities. Staff will be acquainted with HR services and are provided office space. They are introduced to other colleagues and are integrated in departmental structures. If required, students can make changes to the LA within 1 month after the start of the study programme, assisted by a study advisor. Monitoring of study/research progress is dealt with by the relevant faculty departments following internal procedures. Reports are submitted to MSD.

At Urmia university, the incoming staff will be assisted upon arrival, including tour of the department, the campus, and the city. Assistant will be provided by the department. International office helps them with residency permit applications and dormitory reservation. Outgoing grantees will get advice from both the department and the international office on filling LA and other forms, the latter will help grantees with visa applications and guidance.

After mobility

All participants fill out the participant report at the end of their mobility.

The host universities provide exchange (Master) students with a Transcript of Records (ToR). At UG the ToR includes the ECTS grading table related to the studies followed. The grading table will facilitate grade conversion and credit recognition at the home university. Urmia university will include the credits obtained at UG by their students. PhD and staff will receive a certificate or proof of teaching/training activity.

At UG the recognition of staff mobility is part of the (annual) “performance and development” talks between employees and their superiors. During these talks, the results of international mobilities engaged in are taken into consideration in the overall performance assessment.

Impact and Dissemination

Explain the desired impact of the mobility project on participants, beneficiaries, partner organisations and at local, regional and national levels. Describe the measures which will be taken to disseminate the results of the mobility project at faculty and institution levels, and beyond where applicable, in both the Programme and Partner Countries.

Impact

The project will have an impact on fostering bilateral cooperation between the partners with the development of new initiatives at institutional, research and academic levels.

The impact of the mobility project at individual (participants’ level):

- Both students and staff will gain experience in the field of Archaeobotany
- Students will gain an international experience and network which will increase their competitiveness and their employability.
- Students will experience new (international) curricula, new teaching methodologies and will learn in an intercultural environment.
- Staff will be able to create new networks and improve their professional profile
- Staff will be encouraged to help develop new teaching and research methods and share their international experience with their students. Staff is instrumental in the sustainability of the mobility project by encouraging their students to study abroad.

At institutional level, all partners will benefit from:

- Transfer and sharing of knowledge and innovations between the education institutions
- Increased visibility at international level
- Increase in experience with and knowledge on the specific field of Archaeobotany

The project will initiate cooperation between the University of Urmia and the University of Groningen and shall promote internationalisation of higher education.

Cooperation and mutual exchange with the University of Groningen will help the University of Urmia in academic development on several aspects, particularly in the field of Archaeobotany, which is needed at the faculty of natural resources, by both the students and the staff. Iran is known for its richness in prehistoric sites, yields a wide range of botanical data that need to be analysed and studied carefully. The skills that can be obtained and learned from University of Groningen’s colleagues will be a great contribution and will help to develop Archaeobotany in a country with a long history of civilization.

At national level the project will work towards:

- Developing and enriching societies through improving the skills and qualifications of students and staff members through mobility.
- Fostering multicultural awareness and a multicultural environment within higher education contributing to what is envisaged to become a long-lasting cooperation between Urmia University and the University of Groningen in the field of Archaeobotany, engaging in knowledge sharing and capacity developing processes.
- Developing the field of Archaeobotany in Iran. The University of Urmia is located in the region where agriculture was first developed, making it an important historical / archaeological area, especially for Archaeobotany. It is of great importance to further develop the research in the field of Archaeobotany in the region itself.

Dissemination

Dissemination of project results will take place in the form of information sessions and make use of other platforms by including the project info in general presentations whenever possible. All participants in the project are ambassadors of the university at which they spent their mobility period. The University of Groningen has a well-developed alumni policy and is active in contacting present and past students from abroad, asking them to promote the University in their home country. Participants will be asked to promote the project; students may share their experience with their peers as well as with their professors at the home university. Staff will share the experience with their students so that also non-mobile students may benefit from the international experience of their teaching staff. Staff will be instrumental in ensuring the sustainability of the mobility project by encouraging their students to be mobile. Moreover, they are vital to the development of courses for international students and for creating e.g. "mobility windows" for exchange.

The dissemination level would be institutional, regional, and national. Dissemination will also take place also by means of websites and online and/or paper newsletters. Dissemination activities will raise awareness about the project outcomes and outputs.

In addition to newsletters and published reports, Urmia university can organize seminars or workshops for the alumni to share their skills and knowledge with as many students and staff of interested departments as possible. Students and staff from other universities could be invited to attend, or the activities could be moved and organized on different locations.

The University of Groningen will also inform both the Iran Embassy in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Embassy in Tehran about the project.

Sustainability

The project intends to strengthen the ties between UG and the University of Urmia and enables support for further cooperation initiatives by providing scholarships.

The cooperation is the first of its kind between the University of Urmia and the University of Groningen. As already mentioned before, there is a long history of archaeobotanical studies in Iran by UG. Both are committed to internationalization in general and to establish further cooperation between Groningen and Urmia university in particular.