



## **STRATEGY**

**for the development of  
Electronic and Distance Learning  
at the European Polytechnic University  
for the period 2021 - 2025**

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## **I. Introduction, mission and vision of the EPU**

Distance learning (DF) is a form in which trainees, teachers and administrators are divided by location. If the division is also in time, it is asynchronous. In both the synchronous and the asynchronous distance form, the spatial distance is compensated by technologies, methods and means of e-learning. Learning and administrative activities are modeled as information processes and are carried out through information and communication technologies (ICT).

The term "distance learning" used here is a concept within the meaning of the Ordinance on state requirements for organizing distance learning in higher education and is distinguished from e-learning in traditional e-learning activities.

The strategy, the subject of this document, presents the vision and measures for the development of electronic distance learning (EDFO) at the European Polytechnic University (EPU).

The strategy is based on a detailed study of standards, documents, regulations and good practices for the development of higher education and is in line with generally accepted European and national principles in the field of ETF. It also reflects the main points of reference of the *Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria 2021 - 2030* (SG No. 2 of 8 January 2021).

The Strategy is harmonized with the *EPO Development Strategy 2021-2025* and is presented as an accompanying document, which develops in more detail the principles, guidelines and measures for the introduction of ETF. The preparation and presentation of the EPU readiness for EDF used the regulatory framework, experience, surveys and research, as well as the distance learning platform of Pegaso University (Naples), owner of EPU, where more than 40,000 students are trained in the SFD.

The *EPU Development Strategy 2021-2025* defines the mission and vision of the university as follows:

Mission:

*The European Polytechnic University is a **multinational center for higher education, modern education in all established forms** and, research and innovation, international academic*



and business cooperation. The university personalizes its relations with its students and doctoral students, takes into account their individual capabilities and desires and prepares them for *personal, social* and professional realization in the market environment of the changing world.

*Vision:*

*Through full integration into the Multiversity family of universities, the European Polytechnic University should become a successful working model of private engineering education in Southeast Europe, reach the level of good European universities in its academic profile and be a desirable partner with competitive advantages.*

The European Polytechnic University will achieve this vision through modern university methods and tools, including distance learning and research through innovative electronic products and services offered through ICT.

## **II. Context**

The *EPO Development Strategy 2021-2025* analyzes the context from which the need for changes in the currently offered higher education arises. The development of information technologies and the open labor market cause changes in the role and functions of higher education. The changes - both in content and form - must take into account the specific features of modern generations of students, the need for new competencies in the new time and the new possibilities of technology.

Another is the external educational environment. The relationship between learning, work and professional practice has changed. The importance of lifelong learning is growing, which has become a factor in a successful career. In order to survive in the conditions of strong competition and demographic crisis, the higher schools must orient not only to the graduates of the secondary schools, but also to the non-traditional learners through the development of non-formal education, opportunities for combining study and work and / or family commitments, etc. . The need for urgent digitalisation of all education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic only illustrates how urgent and important these changes are. The need to combine written and auditory information with visual information in proportions consistent with generational differences has also been proven.

The traditional model of higher education, based on classroom classes, faces serious challenges and competition from mass open online courses, as well as educational programs and practice-oriented courses offered by various platforms and organizations. The university can develop successfully in the conditions of the dynamic educational market only through high quality education at lower prices, with greater accessibility and flexibility. And this means different forms

of training, various methods for providing educational content and administrative services. In a competitive international education market with high fees, students will increasingly focus on training and support activities that best meet their specific requirements and personal preferences.

This Strategy aims to introduce in educational practice appropriate measures to take into account the new realities and vision for the future by facilitating and increasing access to quality higher education in a rapidly changing world, the rapid development of ICT and the factors and needs of business. On this basis, the goals and priority guidelines for the introduction and development of distance learning in the EPU for the period 2021 - 2025 are formulated.

In order to be competitive and attractive to students and teachers, the EPO needs to complete its own modern information and communication infrastructure, offer innovative curricula and competitive learning resources, provide digital services, develop partnerships and collaborations with foreign universities and promote mobility. , laid in the foundations of its construction.

### **III. Principles**

The strategy for the development of distance learning in EPU is based on the following principles:

#### **■ Quality of training**

The quality of the educational activity is of key importance both for strengthening the authority of the EPU and for attracting more students to study in the field of technical sciences.

#### **■ Extensive use of electronic resources and ICT**

The widespread use of ICT and e-resources aims to provide flexible and effective access to learning content and opportunities to use a variety of tools and new educational technologies to improve the productivity of teaching and learning.

#### **■ Accessibility of training**

EDFO must provide students with educational services and platforms for access to high-quality teaching materials at any time, in different formats and in any place.

#### **■ Expanding participation and equality**

EDFO must allow the participation of students and learners with different backgrounds and digital cultures and from different generations.

■ **Training based on qualifications / competencies**

EDFO training should ensure the change from existing training based on modules in time frames to training based on qualifications / competencies. This change will allow learners to independently choose learning paths relevant to their personal qualities, which provide adaptive upgrading of knowledge and development of personal skills.

■ **Professional competence of the academic and administrative staff in teaching and learning**

Conducting quality e-learning is impossible without the presence of highly qualified teaching and technical staff to develop and offer electronic educational resources, to organize and conduct relevant EDF. The professional competence for modern innovative teaching and learning should be the basis for the stimulation and development of the academic staff.

As a result of adhering to these principles, the process of developing and disseminating e-learning materials will be modernized, and e-learning systems will be updated and automate teaching.

**IV. Strategic goals**

The main objectives of the EPO related to e-learning and distance learning in the next four years are:

**Objective 1:** Strengthening the authority of EPU as an educational institution in which PITs are organically integrated into the educational process and an established factor for improving its quality.

**Objective 2:** Creating the necessary conditions and prerequisites for successful implementation of electronic and distance learning.

**Objective 3:** Establishment of the DFO as a form of education, equal to full-time and part-time education and as an alternative to lifelong learning, adequate to the educational market.

**V. Priorities**

The priorities for achieving the set strategic goals in connection with the development of distance learning in the EPO during the period of validity of the Strategy are:

**Priority 1. Educational activity**

1. Through the widespread use of ICT, providing quality educational services in all programs in different languages, university courses and modules in both educational and qualification degrees

with orientation to foreign students (main contingent of EPU) and Bulgarian citizens without leaving work.

2. Regulation and support of modern EDF, stimulation of the acquisition and application of good practices for distance learning, development and use of innovative educational services.
3. Approval of criteria and standards for development and adoption of curricula and resources (learning objects, web-based learning activities, electronic forms of communication and consultation, etc.) for conducting MFIs.
4. Development and approval of educational documentation for distance learning, which is periodically analyzed, updated and controlled.
5. Establishment of a system for control and transparency of the procedures for verification and assessment of the knowledge of the students, trained in DFO. Use of means of identification and regulated procedures to prevent and punish attempts at plagiarism and / or impersonation.
6. Stimulating the development, sharing and purchase of e-learning services and materials, incl. in foreign languages.
7. Creating a system for monitoring and periodic evaluation of the quality of the used electronic learning resources, software environments and tools for electronic and distance learning.

**Priority 2. Teaching staff with the necessary profile and qualification for conducting EDF**

1. Providing conditions and opportunities for raising the qualification and for career development of the teaching, administrative and technical staff in the field of EDFO.
2. Creating an organization and procedures to support the development of electronic resources and learning content. Providing constant technical and logistical support for teachers.
3. Providing support to the academic, administrative and technical staff conducting and providing e-learning and distance learning, participation in research and educational projects, seminars and conferences in EDFO.
4. Periodic organization and holding of events for dissemination and assimilation of good practices in the field of e-learning and distance learning.

### **Priority 3. Information infrastructure and material and technical base**

1. Development and maintenance of an integrated information infrastructure for access to educational and administrative services.
2. Providing, developing and maintaining a suitable for distance learning information infrastructure and material and technical base, specialized for EDFO in the professional fields of EPU. Regulating the use and maintenance of the information infrastructure and the material and technical base through adequate regulations.
3. Ensuring the activities for planning, organization and implementation of the SFD by the CDO.
4. Providing the use of a virtual environment with integrated means for e-learning content in various formats with the possibility of access by authorized users at any time and from any place.
5. Development of digital repositories for storage and sharing of e-learning resources and services and regulation of their use in compliance with copyright.

### **Priority 4. Competitiveness of training**

1. Establishment of an organization for monitoring the realization of the graduates and for periodic survey of the opinion of the employers on the quality of the educational services. Conducting comparative analyzes of the achievements of students trained in DFO and of students trained through traditional forms.
2. Support for innovations in teaching, learning and quality assessment applied in e-learning and distance learning.
3. Regular activities for getting to know the competitive environment for conducting DFO and for establishing various forms of cooperation and sharing experience and good practices with other Bulgarian and foreign universities
4. Development of policies and regulations for compliance with copyright in the creation and dissemination of e-learning materials and resources for the MFI.

### **Priority 5. Ensuring the quality of training**

1. Development and implementation of mechanisms for improving the quality of educational services, including the provision of project funding, motivation and financial incentives for

teaching staff, to support students and to improve teaching skills in the field of e-learning and distance learning, to use innovative training methods, learning good practices and others.

2. Establishment of an internal system for monitoring, evaluation, maintenance and improvement of the quality of e-learning and distance learning, including organizational structures and normative documents for the functioning of the system.
3. Periodic evaluation and announcement of the results of the functioning of the system for monitoring, evaluation, maintenance and improvement of the quality, including internal and external audits, and undertaking actions for its improvement.

## **VI. Guidelines for achieving the strategic goals**

### **Guideline 1. Educational activity**

1. Providing support, motivation and stimulation of the use of innovative elements for PIT, including teaching methodology, range of innovative tools and approaches for student assessment related to the use and dissemination of good practices.
2. Providing accessible EDF opportunities for students at all levels of education and in all programs, courses and modules, through which to develop skills necessary for professional development in a knowledge-based economy, and with which to increase their competitiveness in the market of labor.
3. Providing tools to support and maintain the design, development and implementation of distance learning curricula and programs.
4. Providing support for students in the development of their competence and confidence in learning in an electronic environment; development of information literacy; providing skills according to student needs; development of integrated services to support the learner in e-learning; on-the-job training; technology-supported training; innovative forms of distance learning; engaging students in the use of technology to improve the learning process.
5. Maintaining and implementing individual and collaborative approaches by maintaining professional communities to disseminate and share good practices.

6. Carrying out analyzes and assessments of the possibilities of the university environment for distance learning of students with special educational needs, as well as for increasing the level of support.

### **Guideline 2. Teaching staff with the required profile and qualification**

1. Providing support to the academic and administrative staff included in the ETF:
  - professional and career development for application of innovative training and teaching at the respective scientific level;
  - engagement with educational business models.
  - use of an appropriate digital environment;
  - supports the development of e-learning communities;
  - promoting the development of information and digital literacy;
  - gaining experience in e-learning and distance learning, including online teaching;
  - support for professional communication and development groups.
2. Applying approaches for the development of the academic staff for training, teaching and support of students that correspond to the changing educational environment in addition to the institutional and personal requirements: integration and coordination of activities and approaches for the development of the academic staff; development of digital literacy, understanding the role and impact of technology on teaching and learning through the qualification of the academic staff; providing flexible and context-sensitive development activities; encouraging and supporting the sharing and dissemination of good practices at the university.
3. Support for research projects and communities aimed at studying the state and development of e-learning, as well as the capacity of academic and administrative staff to provide quality forms of e-learning and distance learning.

### **Guideline 3. Information infrastructure and material and technical base**

1. Ensuring access of students and faculty to complex electronic services and educational resources through the integration of internal university systems and the use of technologies that facilitate external interactions.

2. Providing a homogeneous and compatible educational environment based on an integrated innovative architecture that supports and supports teaching and learning.
3. Regular review of training and teaching systems and processes to achieve a high level of educational activities: review of systems to provide an appropriate digital environment; simplify procedures and provide flexibility.
4. Development of systems that support teaching and learning.
5. Analysis of data on the quality and effectiveness of training systems, teaching and learning, including the development of the analytical capacity of the virtual learning environment.
6. Using a coordinated institutionalized approach to the development, management and use of open media for teaching and learning.
7. Creating digital repositories suitable for storage and distribution of various types of educational resources.

#### **Guideline 4. Competitiveness of training**

1. Establishment of mechanisms for institutional support of innovations in teaching, learning and quality assessment, applied in e-learning and distance learning: provision of financial resources for information and technical support for assimilation and use of innovations; support of the academic staff for raising the qualification in the field of e-learning and distance learning through material and intangible incentives; periodic monitoring of the achievements of distance learning students and comparison with those of students in traditional forms of education; establishing and implementing copyright policies in the creation and dissemination of e-learning and distance learning materials. Introduction of plagiarism detection software.

2. Knowledge of the competitive environment for conducting e-learning and distance learning: establishing official forms of cooperation and sharing experience and good practices with other educational institutions for conducting quality DO; establishment of an organization for monitoring the realization of the graduates; periodic surveys of employers' opinions on the quality of educational services.

### **Guideline 5. Ensuring the quality of training**

1. Support the development of an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning (the necessary data are easily accessible and in an appropriate format, the key decisions for teaching and learning are taken on the basis of evidence).

2. Quality assurance is combined with: continuous monitoring of the definition of the quality of teaching and learning and coordination with the learning experience; improvement and improvement of the processes for ensuring the quality and compliance with the goals and the efficiency of the expenses in terms of: technology-assisted training; transformation to curricula, teaching and learning based on qualification / competence; accessibility.

3. Implementation of a continuous and in-depth process of verification, monitoring and support of the offered educational services in order to ensure high quality of e-learning and distance learning.

4. Develop clear mechanisms to promote the application and dissemination of good practices in the field of e-learning and distance learning. Organizing events to acquaint the academic community (including at national and international level) with the achievements and good practices of the university in the field of e-learning and distance learning.

5. Maintaining and updating a systematic approach to improving the quality of e-learning and distance learning at the university, including ensuring cooperation.

### **V. Specific tasks for the implementation of the strategy**

The main tasks to be performed in the next four-year period to achieve the set strategic goals are the following:

**Task 1.** Preparation, accreditation and introduction of MFI as an innovative opportunity for effective and flexible training.

**Task 2.** Development and implementation of a policy for motivating teachers to develop e-learning content and to conduct distance learning.

**Task 3.** Implementation of a complex set of tools and new ICT solutions for the development of e-learning resources.

**Task 4.** Development and maintenance of information infrastructure and material and technical base for ensuring reliable and secure access to e-learning resources and educational services.

**Task 5.** Ensuring and maintaining the quality of e-learning and distance learning and competitiveness of the provided educational services.

### **Related documents**

1. Ordinance on the state requirements for organizing distance learning in higher education, adopted by Council of Ministers N2 292 of 2.11.2004.

2. Guidelines and criteria for assessment of distance learning in an accredited professional field of the National Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (NEAA).

3. Rules for the structure and activity of the European Polytechnic University.

4. Strategy for effective application of information and communication technologies in education and science of the Republic of Bulgaria (2014-2020).

5. Rules for the structure and activity of the EPU Distance Learning Center.

The strategy for the development of ETF in the EPO is based on the priorities, objectives and standards set out in the following documents:

1. European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, adopted in 2008 by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe;
2. National Strategy for Lifelong Learning, adopted in 2008 by the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria;
3. Europe 2020 Strategy, adopted by the European Council in 2010;
4. European Higher Education in the World, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 2013;
5. The Ordinance on the state requirements for organizing distance learning in higher education from 2004;
6. EPU Development Strategy (2021 - 2025);
7. Guidelines and criteria for assessment of distance learning in the professional field of NEAA;



8. National Strategy for Accelerated Implementation of ICT in the Education System of the Republic of Bulgaria (2014 - 2020);