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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FIRST+ 2018–2019: THE FINNISH-RUSSIAN STUDENT AND TEACHER MOBILITY PROGRAMME

1 GENERAL

1.1 BACKGROUND

Russia is a significant partner for several higher education institutions in Finland and it also holds a prominent place in different national strategies and programmes. Russia is also one of the strategic priorities in the international services' work of the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)¹ and the most significant bilateral focus country in the higher education sector.

The FIRST (Finnish-Russian Student and Teacher Exchange) programme promoted the partnership and collaboration of higher education institutions in Finland and the neighbouring regions in north-west Russia. Higher education institutions in Finland and north-west Russia used the programme to support student and teacher mobility and joint intensive courses. FIRST, since its establishment in 2000, has become the single most important funding instrument of Finnish-Russian student mobility in higher education. It accounted for approximately one third of outbound students and half of incoming students between Finland and Russia in the 2000s.

The FIRST+ programme is run by EDUFI. Scholarships are awarded to networks created by higher education institutions. The programme is fully financed from Finland.

1.2 FIRST+

The new FIRST+ programme is a tool for EDUFI to support educational cooperation and mobility between higher education institutions in Finland and Russia. The programme supports student and teacher mobility, and funding is also available for intensive courses. At the same time, the FIRST+ programme promotes high-quality networking and partnerships.

The new FIRST+ programme will follow the basic principles of the FIRST programme. The activities of the programme will be developed according to the recommendations introduced in the evaluation of CIMO's Russian operations (2016).² The overall emphasis of the new FIRST+ programme will remain to be on long-term student mobility activities. However, the programme introduces some changes in comparison to the FIRST programme: the geographical coverage of the programme will be the whole of Russia – funding will not be earmarked for any specific region of the country. Consequently, the participating institutions have to consider the cooperation in a strategic and well-planned way and choose their partners accordingly.

¹ Before 2017, Centre for International Mobility, CIMO

² http://www.cimo.fi/services/publications/russia_evaluation



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As a novelty there will be possibility for short-term student mobilities from Finland to Russia; as an administrative change, the Russian higher education institutions are asked to provide a FIRST+ statement in connection with their applications.

1.3 FIRST+ NETWORKS

The FIRST+ programme builds on higher education institutions' network collaboration. FIRST+ networks must involve at least one institution from Finland and another from Russia, but bigger networks are welcome. **A Finnish higher education institution** or several institutions together establish partnerships with a Russian higher education institution or several institutions in order to implement mobility activities in cooperation with each other. The coordinating Finnish higher education institution submits a funding application to EDUFI for the whole partner consortium. The co-ordinating institution is also responsible for the use of grants and will report to EDUFI after the agreement period. Grants are awarded to the coordinating institution, which will allocate them further to the students/teachers.

Higher education institutions in both countries will offer waivers for possible tuition fees. The Russian partner institutions are advised to submit a FIRST+ statement where they describe their participation in the programme in connection to the application (see paragraph 10 "FIRST+ Statement" for more information).

2 THE 2017 APPLICATION ROUND

The FIRST+ programme budget for the application round for 2017 will be **circa €1.2m**. Part of the funding will be allocated as conditional, and the final grants for networks will be confirmed during Spring 2018. In November 2018 there will be the possibility for additional funding.

The new FIRST+ programme promotes **both long-term and short-term student mobility at BA, MA and PhD levels**. The programme is open to **all fields of education**. Also, it is possible to apply for funding for teacher mobility as well as intensive courses. See paragraphs 4-6 of "Activities" for more details.

The main criterion of successful FIRST+ projects is **the quality of the application**. See paragraph 7 of "Quality Assessment Criteria" for more details.

2.1 WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

All Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences are eligible to participate in the programme as coordinators. Cooperation is envisaged to be implemented with the higher education institutions in Russia which are relevant partners and have a strategic significance for their Finnish counterparts. In principle, all Russian higher education institutions are able to participate in the FIRST+ programme if they have passed the Russian state licensing and accreditation procedures for higher education and have the right to carry out educational programmes and award degrees.

Higher education institutions on the Russian side may participate in the FIRST+ programme through their Finnish higher education institution partners. For Russian institutions, it is necessary to submit a FIRST+ statement by the application deadline, wherein they describe their institution's participation in FIRST+ and provide a list of all the Finnish partners included. Each Russian institution shall submit only one FIRST+ statement.

Individual students who wish to participate in an exchange should apply for an exchange place through their own institution.



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3 DISTANCE CATEGORIES

The level of an individual mobility grant (all types of mobility) will be determined according to two distance categories.

CATEGORY 1: North-western Russia

CATEGORY 2: All the other parts of Russia

Republic of Karelia
Komi Republic
Arkhangelskaya oblast
Vologodskaya oblast
Kaliningradskaya oblast
Leningradskaya oblast
Murmanskaya oblast
Novgorodskaya oblast
Pskovskaya oblast
Nenetsky autonomous okrug
Saint Petersburg

4 ACTIVITIES: STUDENT MOBILITY

The following principles should be complied with in the implementation of both long-term and short-term student mobility:

RECOGNITION OF STUDIES

Studies completed during the exchange will be recognised as part of a student's degree.

CITIZENSHIP

Students enrolled in a FIRST+ network institution are eligible to participate in the activities irrespective of nationality. However, as a rule, students may not undertake an exchange in their home country.
Mobility from Finland to Russia: Students who have Russian citizenship/background must have conducted their comprehensive school and/or general upper secondary education in Finland.

PRACTICAL TRAINING AND JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMMES

Mobility periods may also include practical training, if it is fully recognised as part of the student's degree. The programme also supports mobility in joint educational programmes (e.g. double degrees).

THE LEVEL AND FIELDS OF STUDY

The FIRST+ programme supports both long-term and short-term student mobility at BA, MA and PhD level. The programme is open to all fields of education, including students majoring in Russian language (e.g. philology or translation studies) with the following condition:

- Mobility from Finland to Russia: Students majoring in Russian language (e.g. philology or translation studies) are not allowed to choose their major subject for their studies in a Russian institution.

4.1 LONG-TERM STUDENT MOBILITY (OUTGOING AND INCOMING)

The FIRST+ programme supports long-term student mobility at BA, MA and PhD level, both from Finland to Russia as well as from Russia to Finland.



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The duration of a long-term mobility period is 2-12 months.

The maximum student grants for long-term mobility are divided to two categories (see paragraph 3 "Distance Categories" for more details):

CATEGORY 1: max grant €560/month

CATEGORY 2: max grant €650/month

The amount is the maximum FIRST+ grant that can be paid to one beneficiary each month. The networks can decide on the individual grant level. The grant payment will be based on an average number of four months of a mobility period, in other words one long-term student mobility grant (CAT1 or CAT2) will consist of the monthly grant multiplied by four (4).

In the final report stage the mobility grant will be calculated according to the realized long-term student mobilities in months.

Only one long-term student exchange grant can be paid for by a student.

A long-term student exchange can be part of joint educational programmes. The exchange period may include practical training if it is fully recognised as part of the student's degree.

Higher education institutions which participate in the north2north (n2n) programme of the University of the Arctic are eligible to apply for FIRST+ student grants for students enrolled in an n2n institution in north-west Russia.

4.2 SHORT-TERM STUDENT MOBILITY (OUTGOING ONLY)

The FIRST+ programme supports short-term student mobility at BA, MA and PhD level from Finland to Russia (NB! The FIRST+ programme does not support short-term mobilities from Russia to Finland).

Support can be applied for short-term mobilities, for example intensive study courses in a certain study field or practical training. However, participation in short-term language courses or cultural excursions is not a subject for support.

The maximum student grant for short-term mobility for CATEGORY 1 is as follows:

- up to the 7th day of activity: €50 per day
- between the 8th and 59th day of activity: €20 per day

The maximum student grant for short-term mobility for CATEGORY 2 is as follows:

- up to the 7th day of activity: €70 per day
- between the 8th and 59th day of activity: €20 per day

The amount is the maximum FIRST+ grant that can be paid to one beneficiary per day. The networks can decide on the individual grant level. The grant payment will be based on an average number of 14 days of a mobility period, in other words one short-term student mobility grant will be calculated as follows:

CATEGORY 1: (7 days x €50) + (7 days x €20) = €490

CATEGORY 2: (7 days x €70) + (7 days x €20) = €630

In the final report stage the final mobility grant will be calculated according to the realised short-term mobilities in days.



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5 ACTIVITIES: TEACHER MOBILITY (OUTGOING AND INCOMING)

The FIRST+ programme supports teacher mobility both from Finland to Russia and from Russia to Finland. The teaching provided during an exchange must be an integral part of the hosting institution's curriculum. Teaching may be given at any degree level.

The minimum duration of a teaching exchange is five teaching hours.
Teacher mobility grants can be used to cover travel and subsistence costs.

The maximum teaching grant in the FIRST+ programme is:

CATEGORY 1: max grant €100/day

CATEGORY 2: max grant €120/day

The amount is the maximum FIRST+ grant that can be paid to one beneficiary per day. The networks can decide on the individual grant level. The grant payment will be based on an average number of three (3) days of a mobility period, in other words one teacher mobility grant (CAT1 or CAT2) will be calculated as follows:

CATEGORY 1: 3 days x €100 = €300

CATEGORY 2: 3 days x €120 = €360

In the final report stage the final mobility grant will be calculated according to the realised teacher mobilities in days.

6 ACTIVITIES: INTENSIVE COURSES

Intensive courses are short study periods which provide students and teachers with an opportunity to work together in a Russian-Finnish group. All intensive courses in the FIRST+ programme take place in Russia as a joint effort of two or more institutions (at least one Finnish and one Russian partner).

The minimum duration is one week (five working days + travel days). There must be an equal number of participating students and teachers from Finland and Russia.

Studies completed on an intensive course must be recognised as part of a student's degree. Intensive courses cannot consist of language studies or research alone.

Funding granted for intensive courses is intended to cover organisational expenses, especially participants' travel and subsistence costs. The support cannot be used for salaries and fees. An estimated budget for the intensive course should be included in the project plan.

There are three categories for an intensive course budget: a) travel costs, b) accommodation and subsistence costs and c) organisational costs. It is recommended that the category c) organisational costs do not exceed 20% of the total intensive course budget.

The level of funding for one intensive course is circa €10,000.

The FIRST+ programme cannot give repeated support to an intensive course which is exactly the same from one year to another. If a network seeks support for more than one intensive course, the courses need to be prioritised in the application.

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7 QUALITY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The main criterion of successful FIRST+ projects is the quality of the application. The following quality criteria are considered in the selection process:

RELEVANCE

- The planned mobility should be relevant for the cooperation plans of the higher education institutions involved (both in Finland and Russia).
- Applicants should demonstrate how mobility fits the internationalisation strategy of these organisations.
- The application should describe the extent to which the current application supports further cooperation of the higher education institutions involved.
- There should be a balanced partnership and reciprocal student and teacher mobility in regards with the number of partners.
- The FIRST+ statement submitted by the Russian partner institution(s) should be coherent and relevant, and in line with the application's objectives. Further, it should demonstrate the commitment of the partner to the network activities.

THE QUALITY OF THE COOPERATION, ACTIVITY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The application should demonstrate the completeness and quality of arrangements for planned practical implementation of the network activities, in particular, regarding the following points:

- The description of the responsibilities, roles and tasks of partners is clear and the planned communication channels are functional.
- The mobility flows applied for are relevant for the participating organisations and the plans for implementing the activities are realistic.
- The added value of the planned cooperation activities compared to already existing cooperation. New openings are encouraged, if the application shows solid and realistic plans for implementation of the activities.
- If applicable, the short-term mobility flows are well justified; the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the applied short-term mobility activities/programme are in place.
- The host institutions provide information, marketing and support to potential outgoing students and staff (prior to the mobility).
- The mechanisms envisaged for the recognition of student learning outcomes (e.g. ECTS or other mechanisms) are in place.
- If applicable, the following criteria will be considered in the selection process of intensive programmes:
 - course theme and contents; the added value for individual participants and higher education institutions;
 - recognition of the studies completed on the course;
 - careful planning and implementation of the course;
 - evaluation of the intensive course and dissemination of the results and experiences;
 - the cost-effectiveness of the proposed activities;
 - in the case of previous experience: changes, development and justification for future funding.

IMPACT

The application should describe the potential impact of the mobility activities and cooperation on participants, beneficiaries and partner organisations at local, regional and national levels during and after the project lifetime.



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8 ACCESSIBILITY GRANT

The FIRST+ programme welcomes applications for accessibility grants for students and teachers participating in the programme. Accessibility grants support the participation in the programme of persons with special needs whose participation – for reasons of physical or mental health – calls for additional financial assistance.

Accessibility grants are applied for on a separate form. There is a rolling deadline for these applications, to be handled by EDUFI on a case-by-case basis. More information is available on EDUFI's web-pages at <http://www.cimo.fi/ohjelmat/firstplus>.

9 APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Eligible applications must have at least one higher education institution from Finland and one from Russia participating. The application form must be filled in using the electronic system by the due date (see below). Please note that there is no need to send hard copies of the applications by post. The application documents can be found on EDUFI's web-pages at <http://www.cimo.fi/ohjelmat/firstplus> (from week 23/2017 onwards).

Applications must be submitted to EDUFI by the coordinating institution on behalf of all the partners. The Russian partner institutions are expected to submit a separate FIRST+ statement letter on behalf of their participation in the network activities (more information in paragraph 10: FIRST+ statement letter). There is no need to provide bilateral letters of mandate from the network's partners as an attachment.

The deadline for submitting the application is 29 September 2017 (the electronic system will close at 16:15). Late applications will not be eligible. The selection result should be made in November 2017 and all the applicants will be informed of the result as soon as possible. The agreement period begins on 1 January 2018 and ends on 31 August 2019.

10 FIRST+ STATEMENT: LETTER OF INTENT FROM THE RUSSIAN PARTNERS

Each Russian higher education institution willing to participate in the FIRST+ programme as a partner is advised to submit a FIRST+ statement to EDUFI in connection to the application round.

In the FIRST+ statement the participating Russian institution will describe their internationalisation strategy in regard to Finland. EDUFI provides a template for the Russian institutions to fill in. The template will be available on EDUFI's web-pages at: <http://www.cimo.fi/ohjelmat/firstplus>.

Each Russian higher education institution will fill in only one FIRST+ statement template on behalf of its all FIRST+ cooperation with Finland, even if the higher education institution takes part in cooperation with several different Finnish institutions or faculties.

The FIRST+ statement should be duly signed by a legal representative of the Russian institution, then scanned and submitted to EDUFI using the address first@oph.fi. **The deadline for submitting the statement is 29 September 2017.**



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11 GRANT AGREEMENT PERIOD AND REPORTING

The funding awarded may be used within the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 August 2019. An interim report must be submitted to EDUFI in Spring 2018 and a final report in Autumn 2019 (October). In Autumn 2018 the networks will have the possibility to apply for additional funding.

The reports consist of a narrative report, a mobility report and a financial report. In connection to the final report the higher education institution must also provide EDUFI with an extract of its accounts, showing the costs allocated to the project.

12 FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about the programme and application guidelines will be updated on EDUFI's website at: <http://www.cimo.fi/ohjelmat/firstplus>

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