

How the Covid-19 pandemic affected academic mobility at Polytechnic University

The year 2020 was a real test for the development of international cooperation in academic mobility. If in 2019 more than 550 students and teachers of Polytechnic University went to study or intern abroad, in 2020 only a few were able to go to partner universities: the coronavirus pandemic has made serious adjustments to the established processes. Despite the fact that the number of participants in academic mobility programs has decreased significantly, project coordinators only have more responsibilities: the work schedule includes regular negotiations with foreign consulates and embassies, addressing issues related to the return home of students who went to study before the pandemic, and daily meetings with partners from foreign universities and companies, which, like Polytechnic University, had to adapt work processes to the new conditions.



“No matter what, we stay in touch with our colleagues in academic mobility, and we regularly participate in international events online. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Polytechnic University has become a participant in more than 20 exhibitions, seminars, and conferences, a significant portion of which we have held independently. While the borders are closed, it is extremely important to stay in

contact and promptly resolve issues that arise. In summer, about 10 students of Polytechnic University went to study at partner universities. About 10 foreign students continue their studies at SPbPU. One of our key tasks is to ensure the safety of the educational process and preserve a favorable psychological atmosphere,” commented Elizaveta SUKHOVA, Deputy Head of the International Educational Programs and Academic Mobility Department.

Numerous business meetings dedicated to addressing academic mobility issues have moved online. Thus, Polytechnic University participated in negotiations with the National School of Engineers Saint-Etienne and INSA Lyon (both in France), Fontys University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands) and Zhejiang University (China), and established several new partnerships: with the International University of La Rioja (Spain), the University of Liepaja (Latvia), and the Polytechnic Institute of Beja (Portugal).

Among the largest international academic mobility events since the pandemic began were the EURIE (Eurasia Higher Education Summit) educational exhibition in Turkey, the closing ceremony of the [Russian-German Year of Scientific and Educational Partnerships](#) 2018-2020, webinar of Tomsk State University on the “New models of educational process organization, new teaching practices and internationalization in post-coveted reality,” information session of the Erasmus+ regional office named “Bologna process as a factor of internationalization and international mobility,” as well as the [Erasmus+ Teatime](#) meeting organized by Erasmus+ office of SPbPU for program coordinators from partner universities.

At the end of last week, one of SPbPU’s key partners in the PRC, Shanghai Jiaotong University, held a large-scale three-day international exhibition. During the first two days the participants made presentations of their universities, and the third day was devoted to information sessions in which representatives of the universities discussed the difficulties of attracting international students during a pandemic and ways to overcome those, new models of international student contingent management during a pandemic, and shared their accumulated experience in online learning. The presentation made by Polytechnic University was related to the opportunities for students to participate in academic mobility programs in different areas; it aroused great interest among the foreign audience and inspired a lively discussion.

In the near future, SPbPU plans to hold a competition for SPbPU undergraduate and graduate students to receive Erasmus+ scholarships to study at a partner university in the fall of 2021. Due to travel restrictions, many of the scholarship spots were not implemented this academic year. In this connection, a large number of scholarship places will be available with leading SPbPU partner universities: Polytechnic University of Turin (Italy), Technical University of Munich (Germany), Brandenburg Technical University (Germany), and others.

“We very much hope that by the beginning of the next academic year the situation will stabilize and academic mobility will once again become one of the most active branches of university life and will acquire its usual dynamic rhythm,” commented Anna KOLOTAYEVA, leading specialist of the Department of

International Educational Programs and Academic Mobility.

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