

# **BOVA University Network**

## **Strategy**

**2025-2029**

### **BACKGROUND**

The BOVA University Network (The Baltic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network) was established in 1996 with the idea of building up and strengthening academic collaboration, as well as mobility and experience exchange among Baltic universities providing higher education and research in the fields of life sciences. Four member institutions form the BOVA UN: the Estonian University of Life Sciences (EMÜ), Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LBTU), Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy (VMU AA) and the Lithuanian University of Health Sciences - Veterinary Academy (LSMU).

BOVA UN has had, and retains, close collaboration with the NOVA UN (Nordic Forestry, Veterinary and Agricultural University Network). Activities in BOVA UN have been focused mainly on the development of short MSc courses, joint masters education, joint international PhD courses, teacher training and development of academic competences. Collaboration with the NOVA UN has agreed that focuses should be on MSc-level short courses for BOVA and NOVA for PhD short courses. The courses that have been offered through BOVA have provided good value to our students and increased collaboration opportunities for our staff.

BOVA has continued to search for external funding sources, which could support the development of international higher education in the fields of life sciences and strengthening of the international competitiveness of each involved party. Experiences gained from Baltic collaboration through the years in higher education in the fields of agriculture, forestry, veterinary medicine, environmental and other related sciences, have shown that the introduction of a common higher education space is a challenging task which could not be achieved by a single University alone, therefore the BOVA cooperation as a stable platform for facilitating the internationalization and introduction of cross-border higher education has vital importance in the further development of the institutions involved.

This Strategy has been developed in collaboration between partner representatives of all BOVA institutions. It is based on an overview and analysis of BOVA cooperation over the years, and summing up of the new initiatives in order to meet common objectives and bring benefit to all involved parties taking into account their development strategies.

## **VISION**

The BOVA UN is a recognised regional network representing strategic partnership of four Baltic HEI that provides joint international high quality education in agriculture, forestry, veterinary medicine, food, engineering, bioeconomy, rural economics and other related sciences, based on strong international academic collaboration. The BOVA network strives to remain current and relevant to the needs and competences of staff and students.

## **MISSION**

Create and share knowledge and competence of academic staff and students throughout the Baltic region in the field of life sciences; promote international collaboration and share best practices for the benefit of rural life and healthy environment.

## **KEY OBJECTIVES**

### **Studies:**

The main aim of BOVA is to share knowledge through research, teaching and learning among the life sciences universities in the Baltic States. For that BOVA will:

1. Continue with the provision of MSc courses. BOVA intends to ensure that the courses reflect the range of subjects and subject expertise throughout our institutional network's study expertise pool. BOVA aims to offer a minimum number of six courses per year.
2. Consider the provision of online courses, while not losing sight of the benefits accruing from the students actually meeting and socialising with each other and actually seeing the facilities at our partner institutions. Students with a better understanding of the BOVA institutions will be better equipped to contextualise their own study and use the contacts they will have made, and the impressions that they will have had, in their future careers. The use of online courses should not be a primary focus, but complement in-person courses.
3. Consider offering common online courses for master and PhD students, from courses already offered within an institution.
4. Enable Master students to prepare and present their work to the international audience and encourage sharing of expertise among BOVA students. To achieve this, consider providing an online joint conference for master students.

5. Explore additional funding opportunities in the organisation of BOVA courses, such as Nordplus, Erasmus + BIP or other to support the course costs.
6. Support the development of double degree programmes. Consider the initiation, support and development of a BOVA UN European Degree, an award Under discussion by the European Commission (March, 2024).

**Research:**

1. Consider the organisation of a common scientific conference under the umbrella of BOVA. The conference could be organised by the coordinating BOVA university once per coordination period. To facilitate this the Conference could be a parallel session in an appropriate pre-existing conference.
2. Encourage the preparation of common research proposals from within the BOVA Network.
3. Open up the Doctoral summer schools organised at national and institutional level to interested Doctoral students from other BOVA universities. Students' attendance could be part-funded from the BOVA network. Topics could include also research methodologies, statistical data processing, scientific writing, and other general research skills.

**Collaboration:**

1. Consider a regular networking event for Deans and other academic staff once per year with the purpose to increase the collaboration between partners.
2. Strive to increase the visibility of BOVA to staff and students (with regular updates to be added to each of the BOVA institutions websites).
3. Ensure the BOVA website is up to date with news, pictures, videos, course content, student engagement.
4. Encourage academic staff to present themselves on the BOVA website as keen to work with others in their field, for example willing to co-supervise projects and students' postgraduate work.
5. Promote open academic positions in each institution on the BOVA website.
6. Promote staff training activities, integrate existing or new opportunities for staff training at partner institutions and if possible, make them available to staff from other BOVA institutions.

7. Cooperate with the NOVA network, advertise NOVA courses among BOVA students and invite NOVA students to BOVA courses. Invite NOVA teachers to contribute to BOVA courses to keep up the collaboration between academics.

### **Student involvement:**

Encourage student involvement in the activities of the BOVA network. Invite heads of Student Unions of member universities to join BOVA UN meetings to provide student perspectives on the network activities.

### **Funding**

1. The BOVA University Network runs its core activities based on Internal funds: an annual membership fee from each institution and the plan of activities is agreed every year by the BOVA Rectors' Board.
2. External funds will be obtained by project applications to external donors submitted by the BOVA Secretariat or by a single member university. These funds are raised for specific activities.
3. For the realization of all BOVA UN strategic objectives both internal and external funds would be necessary. Annually revise the possibility for the enlargement of the BOVA UN budget based on the annual membership fee and application for available external funds.

### **Responsibility for implementation of the Strategy**

The BOVA Board is responsible for ensuring the execution of the yearly activity plan, with secured internal finances, in order to meet strategy implementation needs. The BOVA Strategy should be integrated into each member institutions' activities, and each member institution should ensure its implementation. Once yearly the BOVA Secretariat informs the BOVA Board about the implementation of the Strategy. After its evaluation the Board can decide on the next year's action plan. The BOVA board may make changes in the BOVA strategic plan, if this is unavoidable due to external and internal circumstances of the network.

*Strategy compiled by the BOVA secretariat at EMÜ (Ülle Jaakma, David Richard Arney, Karoli Kõiv)*

*Consulted with BOVA Coordinating Committee members (Alvidas Šarlauskas(LSMU), Ilze Beitane (LBTU) and Anastasija Novikova (VMU)).*