

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF STUDIES

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The first aim of this article is to define what is understood by the “internationalization of studies”. We then provide a brief analysis of international curricula before addressing the key question of the relationship between the internationalization of studies and institutional internationalization. The final part deals with evaluating internationalization, first internally and then as part of an external evaluation.

WHAT DOES INTERNATIONALIZING STUDIES MEAN?

1. The internationalization of studies must not be perceived as an isolated change. It requires changes in various areas, in particular the following:

a) Changes in the criteria for and the processes of admitting students, including communication with future candidates, guiding them towards courses which are more suitable for them and providing the support they may need at the beginning and throughout their studies (accommodations, visas, grants, choice of elective courses, practical training, theses, stays abroad, etc.)

b) Designing the programme from an international and comparative perspective (using, for example, studies that have been conducted within the framework of the TUNING project to determine the essential content of curricula in each discipline). Internationalizing the process of designing the study programme involves, at the very least, actions that affect the following areas:

- The content of the subject (mainly through the introduction of international aspects of the subject, as well as intercultural and language aspects – at the European level, students generally have to study English and a language other than their mother tongue).
- The structure of the curriculum, with international aspects in both core and elective courses, and by including one (or more) window(s) for international mobility to allow a period of study, practical training or research abroad (whether within the framework of an exchange agreement signed by the University or on the basis of “free movement” and the initiative of the student).
- The development of international aspects in teaching and learning methods, thanks to contributions from professors and the use of international references.
- In addition to the aforementioned aspects, it is also necessary to develop the international dimension of educational support services, such as library services, international relations offices, employment services, etc.

c) The validity of the qualifications awarded to students at the end of their studies must also be ensured. Remember that in their “Message from Salamanca” in 2001, European universities

accepted responsibility for the success of their students and for the acceptance of their qualifications at a national, European and international level; this means that universities are looking for a “quality seal” (for example, in the form of accreditation, or another form of external evaluation) leading to increased international acceptance of their qualifications. In Europe, this also means, as a basic rule, that the university respects the fundamental structural rules of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): a minimum and maximum number of credits for each category of qualification (undergraduate, Master’s, doctoral), the assignment of ECTS credits and the awarding of the Diploma Supplement to graduates.

2. The internationalization of studies is no longer optional. It is now essential to the development of universities within the competitive sphere in which they operate:

- it encompasses all disciplines at all levels of qualification, and all activities and all categories of personnel;
- it corresponds to key skills needed to access the national, European and international labour markets;
- it also corresponds to a need for competition between universities and national systems of higher education for students, professors and researchers;
- it conforms with the fact that much internationalization of studies is developed within the framework of international cooperation agreements or inter-university thematic networks;
- it is also a response to the development of evaluation and accreditation systems (that is, “quality seals” of greater or lesser local and global credibility) and the multiplication of international rankings which extend international competition to more local universities.

THERE IS A GREAT DIVERSITY OF “INTERNATIONAL” CURRICULA IN EUROPE

1. A large number of “international” curricula involve mobility programmes, with no profound change to the curriculum or specific attempt to internationalize studies; this is due to student stays abroad (to do courses, practical training or theses) and the presence of foreign students on university campuses.

This “simple” form of mobility tends to be the first stage of internationalization strategies, which become progressively broader, more systematic and more complex.

2. Of the intrinsically international curricula found at universities, the following stand out:

- The introduction of language courses and other courses taught in the foreign language.
- The development of joint modules via university networks, accessible from the various partner universities of the network. This formula allows each university to offer courses

(in particular elective courses) in their areas of strength, and to bring together groups of students in specialist areas for which a sufficient number of students could not be found in any single university. It is a formula that enriches the range of educational courses on offer by uniting of teams of professors and students from various universities. A variant of the common “modules” are the common summer courses, which do not coincide with the timetables of regular courses and allow students to earn international credits without extending their studies.

- The mutual design of joint undergraduate and master’s-level courses, and of doctoral programmes that include the co-supervision of theses, represents a more complex step in the internationalization of studies. It requires teams of instructors from various universities to work together within the framework of stable education cooperation agreements between partners that, in many cases, already have a long experience of (mobility) exchanges with one another.
- One case of special interest in the internationalization of studies is the development of international “schools” for postgraduate or doctorate studies. A growing number of European universities are establishing these “schools”, which group together various master’s and doctoral programmes across disciplines, and involve close collaboration with companies, research bodies or foreign universities.
- The most successful examples of internationalized studies are found in courses with dual or joint qualifications, which represent a step beyond the design of joint courses.

3. A specific idea of the type of internationalization that can be achieved through said courses can be given in the example of a “European” undergraduate course in business management with a dual qualification for all graduates. It comprises the following elements:

- a single curriculum jointly developed by four higher education institutions from different countries in the EHEA (France, the UK, Germany and Spain);
- the admission of students in each country according to similar criteria;
- the establishment on each campus of a multinational group of students from the four institutions of higher education;
- students study in two countries – three semesters in each country followed by a single semester of practical training;
- after two years students change campus and are re-distributed into four multinational groups (one group on each campus);
- graduates receive two official qualifications (one from each of the countries where they have studied) and a “certificate” common to all graduates;
- all graduates are integrated into a single student association.

This programme began in 1976 (before ERASMUS was established) and marked a new phase in the internationalization of studies. It attracts a large number of candidates from numerous countries (not only the four participating in the network) and is seen as a source of truly “European” graduates in many multinational companies.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF STUDIES AND INSTITUTIONAL INTERNATIONALIZATION

1. Levels/stages of the internationalization process

As has already been mentioned, the process of internationalizing universities in Europe tends to take place in various stages.

a) The first corresponds to developing mobility:

- students sent abroad;
- foreign students on national courses;
- special courses for foreign students.

b) The second stage corresponds to internationalizing curricula:

- the internationalization of content and methods, as well as related services;
- this internationalization involves all students, not only the few who participate in mobility, and this stage therefore is also known as “internationalization without mobility” or “internationalization at home”.

c) The third stage is most complete: that of institutional internationalization. As well as an intensification of mobility and the internationalization of studies, other aspects include:

- the evaluation (or “utilization”) of mobility to turn it into a source of institutional change, taking advantage of the experience of the foreigners present on the campus and students and professors returning from a stay abroad;
- the far-reaching internationalization of the campus and its student and teaching culture.

2. To this end, it is important to highlight that the internationalization of studies is a key aspect in the internationalization of universities, but only one aspect among many others, such as, for example: the international life and atmosphere of the campus, institutional culture and operations, an institutional recruitment policy for professors and managers, the development of the university message through a strong institutional image and international presence.

This also means that there are different ambits of internationalization corresponding to various forms of institutional internationalization in accordance with the global institutional strategy (or “mission”) of each university. The internationalization of studies lends itself to various types and levels of global institutional strategies. In the more successful cases, internationalization

becomes an important factor in institutional differentiation, which makes universities more attractive and competitive.

A good example of an international strategy on a higher institutional level can be found in Lausanne, Switzerland at the EPFL (*Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne*), where three concentric circles have been used to represent the University's strategy in all fields: undergraduate programmes are conceived in accordance with local demands (Switzerland and neighbouring regions); master's programmes are planned according to the European market, with the aim of attracting the best European graduates; and doctoral programmes with the aim of promoting university competitiveness on a worldwide scale.

INTERNATIONALIZATION AND EVALUATION

This involves both the evaluation of internationalization and the internationalization of evaluation, and both internal evaluation at each university and external evaluation by quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies.

1. Internationalization must be included in institutional evaluations.

- The importance of internationalization in the evaluation of the overall quality of universities must match the growing significance of internationalization in institutional strategies in the EHEA. Neither internationalization nor mobility are part of the common criteria defined on a European level (the "European Standards and Guidelines", from 2005), but it is hardly possible to conceive of institutional evaluation (of an "audit" type) without including an analysis of the actions and results in the field of internationalization.
- The criteria and indicators used must not only evaluate the quality of mobility (which is not included in numerous mobility policies), but also all the other aspects of internationalization and internationality, in particular the internationalization of studies. Indicators identified as the most appropriate for measuring these aspects may be used to this end – albeit with care, as they are generic and adapt only reasonably well to certain contexts or strategies.
- As is generally the case with evaluation activities, the evaluation of internationalization produces institutional benefits, above all if the evaluation processes are themselves truly international.

2. Internal evaluation of internationalization.

- The (self-)evaluation of the internationalization of studies only makes sense in relation to an evaluation of a global internationalization strategy.
- Internationalization is becoming increasingly crucial in the competitive capacity of universities, both in-country and internationally (basic or distinctive factor).
- It is essential to internationalize the (self-)evaluation process, with regard to both the criteria used – they must allow for comparisons on a European/international level, not

only on a regional or national level – and the composition of the evaluation team – it must preferably include a majority or a significant number of international experts.

3. External evaluation of internationalization.

The external evaluation of internationalization raises the same questions about the internationality of references and evaluation teams.

- The internationalization of external evaluation is not guaranteed in all the national evaluation/accreditation agencies in Europe. This is a serious weakness in the quality assurance system on a European level, as a high degree of internationality is not required of agencies that wish to become members of European networks such as ENQA or EQAR. Internationalization can be externally evaluated in three different ways:
 - by a regional/national agency (but the international credibility of the “quality seals” it awards depends directly on the internationality of the process and of the evaluation team);
 - by a foreign agency from another country, as requested in a 2006 European Union recommendation (requesting that universities be able to choose from European agencies of renowned quality and normally included in the EQAR “registers” of said agencies);
 - or by a European agency able to include a very strong international dimension in its evaluations. European quality seals already exist in certain disciplines (especially the EQUIS seal from EFMD in business studies, or the “Eurobachelor” and “Euromaster” in chemistry). For international institutional evaluation there is the “Institutional Evaluation Programme” of the European University Association, which comprises a large team of assessors from all over Europe and is therefore able to provide a truly comparative and international perspective.
- It is important to highlight the particular case of evaluating joint programmes run between universities of different countries, which have already been mentioned as cases of exceptional internationalization in the EHEA and pose a particular challenge with regard to their evaluation and accreditation. If they had to be evaluated and accredited by the national agency of each country where they operate, the process would be very unwieldy and costly, with the risk of accreditation being awarded in some countries and not in others, which would demonstrate a lack of cohesion in the European university quality assurance system. One alternative would be for these joint programmes to be evaluated on the basis of co-operation between national agencies, although it is not easy to decide which criteria will be used and how decisions arising from the evaluation process will be taken and applied. In the longer term a special agency that is capable, on a European level, of awarding joint European programmes an equally “European” quality seal might be created.