



1 EU Insight – Internationalisation of Higher Education in Europe

“The internationalisation of higher education has been influenced by the globalisation of our economies and societies and the increased importance of knowledge...it is driven by a dynamic and constantly evolving combination of political, economic socio-cultural and academic rationales.” This statement succinctly captures the tone of a recently published (end of July 2015) report by the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education entitled *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, which comments on factors currently influencing higher education globally, but in particular within Europe.

The report

Internationalisation of Higher Education is the end product of a large-scale study focused on not only understanding, but more so, scrutinising internationalisation strategies utilised within higher education systems around the world. The study, commissioned by the European Parliament and conducted by a consortium of Europe-based researchers,¹ carried the specific aim of addressing the different forms internationalisation strategies take on and, more importantly, *what* such strategies *should aim to achieve* as a way of helping different regions, nations and institutions within Europe meet new education and societal demands. A secondary aim of the study primarily focused on informing future EU policy.

Using a mixed-methodology of two quantitative surveys and a Delphi panel (a qualitative forecasting method where experts are interviewed for their opinions on future outcomes related to a specific subject/set of questions), the study sought out to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) How can 'internationalisation' be understood in the context of higher education, and what strategies are being pursued globally in this regard?**
- 2) How far and by which means is the European Union and its Member States responding to the challenges of internationalisation?**
- 3) What are the perspectives of future development, and which recommendations can be made both for policy makers and higher education institutions?**

¹ The consortium was comprised of researchers from the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation (CHEI, Milan), Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan), International Association of Universities (IAU) and the European Association for International Education (EIAE).



4) Should national governments and/or the European Union play a more active role in the development, supervision and coordination of national/European internationalization policies?²

To further address these questions, researchers also examined 17 different national reports—10 from within Europe and 7 from without, to gain a sense of the various approaches and rationales guiding global higher education internationalisation strategies. Countries examined within Europe included Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK. Such a focus intentionally looked beyond the “big three” of England, Germany, and France, which so often dominate internationalisation studies and discussions. Non-European countries examined by the study included Australia, Canada, Colombia, Japan, Malaysia, South Africa and the USA, with the intentional of introducing regional diversity into the assessment.

What is internationalisation in the context of higher education, anyway?

Upon reading the report one learns that the internationalisation of higher education, while a relatively new phenomenon in-and-of-itself, is “both broad and varied”, meaning that it lacks any sort of unified global form. And yet while broadly different, commonalities do exist across national approaches, primarily in the form of features like: visibility and reputation (combined with increased competitiveness); competition for talented students and scholars; a divide in strategy between short-term economic gains or long-term economic development and soft power, or a mixture of short and long-term objectives; increased strategic partnership development; more attention to employability and/or social engagement.³

Within Europe, the internationalisation of higher education is not new. The process stretches back at least 30 years, beginning with the ERASMUS programme and followed by the Marie Curie Fellowships. Yet, like many internationalisation strategies, these efforts have a heavy focus on short or long-term and many of the other features mentioned above. But what does this all actually mean in terms of next steps?

According to *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, a key next step for policy decision makers is to recognise that the end goal for post-secondary education in Europe cannot simply be internationalisation. Rather, emphasis must be shifted towards quality (in this case curriculum and learning outcomes for students and staff), and not be based on economic rationales. While still of value, mobility as a motor of internationalisation must also be rethought, in order to shift the nature of mobility opportunities from being only open to a selected elite, to being a component common to all higher educational experiences. As such, a new definition of internationalisation delivered by the

² De Wit Hans, Fiona Hunter, Laura Howard, Eva Egron-Polak. *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. European Parliament. (2015).

³ Ibid.



report is to recognise it as “the *intentional* process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, *in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.*”⁴

For more information regarding the report’s findings, discover more on how the questions behind the study were answered, and to learn about additional policy recommendations, please click [here](#).



⁴ O’Malley, Brendan. “Internationalisation should be for all—Landmark Study”. *University World News* (Global Edition), 377. 14 August 2015.
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150814220104557>