

European Students' Union (ESU)
Fighting for students' rights since 1982

Mundo-Madou.

Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210 Bruxelles

secretariat@esu-online.org

+32 2 893 25 45



Statement on Internationalisation at Home

Foreword

International mobility gives students a transformative learning experience whilst being immersed in the country's cultures of their mobility. It has the advantage of helping many students to understand and cope with an internationalising world and generally contributing to enhancing one's learning experience.¹

Thus mobility should be nurtured and preserved in the higher education system. While virtual learning activities have an important place in internationalisation at home, they should be seen as a compliment and not a replacement for mobility.

Introduction

The internationalisation of education (hereinafter internationalisation) is a broad subject encompassing multiple aspects that need to be seen as separate, but equally important. Internationalisation can be seen as any internationally related policies from exchange programmes and language courses to activities to integrate international and mobile students with the local students and cultures.

¹ <https://www.cairn.info/revue-journal-of-international-mobility-2017-1-page-177.htm>

The most visible and obvious activity of internationalisation is the international physical mobility of students, researchers, and staff, such as that provided by the Erasmus+ Programme. ESU defines international learning mobility as any activity where learners or educators physically go to another country for the purpose of learning, teaching, or research activities.

The rest of the international activities fall under internationalisation at home. Internationalisation at home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum within domestic learning environments, as well as any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound mobility.^{2 3}

By definition, parts of mobility and internationalisation at home overlap within the context of inbound mobility. Thus, the two cannot be entirely separated and need to be seen under the larger umbrella of internationalisation.

Virtual mobility is not mobility

Virtual learning activities can be an excellent tool in increasing internationalisation at home, but it is imperative to not confuse them with mobility. The concept of “virtual mobility” is to be seen as separate from physical mobility.

International virtual learning activities cannot be used as a discount substitute to reach mobility quotas and seen as providing a similar benefit for the participants. The international experience gained by mobile students can only be truly experienced in person.

Virtual learning is to be seen as an add-on to physical mobility, complementing it instead of replacing it. They should be used to provide a further variety of opportunities to enhance the curricula offered by higher education institutions with those of their partner institutions.

² (Crowther, Joris, Otten, Nilsson, Teekens, and Wächter, 2001, p.8)

³ (Beelen & Jones, 2015)

Virtual learning activities should be used, especially in those cases where the following online classes cover only a part of the ECTS earned during the study period sub-unit or when they are chosen from different partner institutions. When the courses are provided by the same partner institution and cover the ECTS to be taken during the study period, then outbound mobility must be the preferred option.

As such, students participating in virtual education activities should not be considered as a part of international mobility, but a separate group. These activities should be offered and should be available but budgeted separately. However, their budget must in no way limit or lower the budget for physical mobility.

Blended mobility combines physical mobility and virtual learning activities. Only the truly mobile parts of blended mobility should be seen as part of mobility. It should be used as an option for students who would otherwise be unable to participate in mobility due to personal reasons. Blended mobility should not be used to cover for lack of funding for mobility.

Internationalisation at home cannot replace the transformative experience of being mobile but it does add value in its own right by making the daily life on campus more diverse and putting the education activities into an international context. By enriching the curricula with international and intercultural perspectives, internationalisation at home can also broaden students' competencies.

Implementing internationalisation at home

As the Bologna With Student Eyes 2020 report indicates, a clear majority of all respondents indicated that financial difficulties are the number one barrier for students who would like to undergo a learning mobility period but ultimately decide against it.⁴

Internationalisation at home needs to be seen as a unifying theme cutting through every aspect of education. International competencies are a necessity in today's world, but not every student is able to go abroad. While this means that providing funds for physical mobility is imperative to allow all those that want to go abroad to be able to do it, this makes it also essential to implement internationalisation throughout the curriculum. The policies and activities linked to internationalisation at home can be divided between those pertaining to formal education and those under informal education.

⁴ https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BWSE2020-Publication_WEB2.pdf

Formal education

All those policies aimed at providing an international and intercultural perspective for the curricula fall under the formal education aspects of internationalisation at home.

Linking higher education institutions internationally allows for powerful cooperation, which can happen virtually. Through virtual projects, the cultures of the participating institutions blend and those working on the projects gain invaluable experience. To better address student needs, students should be involved, democratically and transparently, in the design of these partnerships.

Institutions should consciously create controlled situations that lead to intercultural collaboration and the utilisation of international students' specific knowledge, helping the institutions to make optimal use of the international classroom's added value.⁵

Language courses need to be offered to both international and domestic students free of charge. Not only do language skills help bridge barriers, but they also provide an invaluable window into another culture.

All students, independent if they're pursuing virtual international activities or mobile studies, must have the same rights and must be given access to information, counselling and support from the host institutions.

Special attention must be given to ensuring that students participating in virtual learning activities are given equal opportunities for participation.

Plans for integrating international students into the curriculum and policies should have the input of said students.

⁵ <https://www.nuffic.nl/sites/default/files/2020-08/management-summary-internationalising-students-in-the-home-country.pdf>

Furthermore, international curricula should be designed by integrating an intercultural approach. Modules, courses and degrees taught in a foreign language can help develop fluency and knowledge of professional use of that particular language, but this is not enough. Those courses should have high-quality teaching, explore the scientific literature developed in that language and integrate the different cultural and personal perspectives of students present in the course, including the perspectives of countries using that language.

Furthermore, teaching staff should have obtained or obtain formal competencies in teaching and learning in a foreign language, as well as demonstrate their ability to participate in the international learning environment. They should also regularly receive formal training on the use of digital tools and available technologies to facilitate the learning process of students partaking in the process of virtual learning.

Not only should internationalisation at home be looked at from the perspective of the student, but also the staff and teachers. While staff needs to be provided with support for improving their own international competencies, international guests can also be used for lectures, seminars, workshops etc.

Short term mobility of teachers should be encouraged, and the creation of the infrastructure to host short term mobile guests should be promoted by the higher education institutions by providing guest housing as an example.

Informal education

All those policies that enable the development of intercultural competencies and the integration between international and mobile students, and local students within the daily life of higher education, fall under the informal education aspects of internationalisation at home.

Policies falling under these aspects of internationalisation at home differ among the higher education institutions.

Some examples of this can be language exchange partners or buddy systems. Specific funds for projects with these goals should be devoted by the institutions and aimed at student associations. The higher education institutions should also actively work on supporting and enhancing the informal and non-formal education for its students.

Conclusions

In conclusion, ESU demands that physical mobility budgets should not be cut or used to fund other aspects of internationalisation. Only truly mobile students should be taken into consideration in mobility quotas and budgeting.

We also demand that internationalisation at home is funded and supported. Internationalisation at home needs to be seen as the larger umbrella under which all internationalisation falls, with the exception of outbound mobility.

All students should have the opportunity to acquire international and intercultural competencies that are adequately and timely recognised by their higher education system. By developing and adding resources separately into both mobility and internationalisation at home we can better guarantee international and intercultural competencies for all higher education students within EHEA. Therefore internationalisation at home should be seen as a possibility to develop the accessibility of gaining these competencies.