

Internationalisation for all or all together for internationalisation?



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This SUCTI¹ project experience could be easily transferred to your institution or company. Who are you forgetting in your internationalisation efforts? In an ever more globalised world, are we all thinking internationally already? Try answering the questions in *italics* to see if you are on the right track.

Internationalisation has many definitions, but in higher education many still refer to Jane Knight's definition from 2008, which describes internationalisation as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels" or its updated version by Eva-Egron Polak, Laura Howard, Fiona Hunter and Hans de Wit from 2015, which states that internationalisation is "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." But what is internationalisation for YOU? And how does your institution or company implement it?

It is already widely understood that internationalisation is a means to higher quality, better research and more successful graduates, rather than being a goal

in itself. However, we at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV), like many other higher education institutions worldwide, still have quite a way to go before we can consider it truly embedded in our organisations. This is in contrast to a company that I visited once, where they told me "we take internationalisation, quality and environmental issues so seriously that we do not have an internationalisation, quality or environmental department because everyone at our company is supposed to think internationally, perform with quality and with respect to the environment". Can your institution say the same?

At the URV we are aware that sending students abroad to acquire intercultural competencies is a priority, but not all students have the means nor the desire to go abroad. In fact, only a very small minority are mobile, while the vast majority remain non-mobile. Internationalisation at home was conceived to address this issue by offering non-mobile students various means to develop the same intercultural skills as their fellow mobile colleagues. One of the main tools for doing this is through the internationalisation of the curriculum, both formal and informal. Consequently, many European institutions are already focusing on internationalising their curriculums and thus consider themselves on the right track to becoming truly international institutions.

So we agree that students must have intercultural competencies in an ever more globalised world, that professors must know how to internationalise their curriculums for the benefit of students and that they must lead research that reaches far beyond their borders. But in all of these endeavours, we generally forget that our institutions all have a third group which often slips under the radar, namely our non-academic staff. These staff, who work in support services, are key for the smooth running of a university. Their work makes it possible for the professors to do their research and teaching and for the students to register, participate in activities, pay their fees, get their diplomas, and many other things. And yet we tend to forget that this group of people





at our institutions is also instrumental in internationalisation. Do you consider each and every person in your organisation in your internationalisation efforts? In 2011, having started to become aware of this fact, at the URV we organised an internationalisation course for non-academic staff, with the objective of giving them the basics of internationalisation, letting them know what their institution is doing in this area and why, and asking them to contribute to this process in their own jobs. This first course was an eye-opener. On the first day negative stereotypes and prejudices started to rear their ugly heads; however, by the third day (less than 10 hours later) what we could see was an informed group, convinced of the importance of internationalisation for their own institution and willing to contribute to it in their own capacity. One of the initial conclusions that we reached after seeing these results was that non-academic staff are often left out of the strategic vision of their institution and that feeling included and taken into consideration is a very empowering message that motivates them to be true ambassadors for internationalisation. How do you motivate your staff to contribute to internationalisation?

We know that only a minority of our students will be mobile and that we therefore need to provide all of the remainder with the same opportunities at home so they can acquire the much needed global competencies, and the same applies to our administrative staff, that is, we cannot rely in sending all of our staff abroad so that they can understand the importance of internationalisation and then act accordingly in their jobs. There are several obvious reasons for this: it is too costly, the personal and professional circumstances

of some staff members would not allow them to leave for a week, and many, definitely in Spain but elsewhere too, would lack the English language skills to really be able to immerse themselves in an experience abroad. This without mentioning the measures (or lack thereof) taken by our institutions to welcome and benefit from the learning and experience of the few that do go abroad, not to mention how the experience can backfire if the institution is not willing to accept any new input or considers the mobility experience as a "holiday", and not as proper training. A lot can be said about all of this, but let us focus on what we can do to internationalise our staff at home. What would you do in your context?

The Universitat Rovira i Virgili chose to continue offering its training to non-academic staff after that initial course in 2011. The results of the various courses were always encouraging and, as we do in internationalisation, we started sharing our good practices with partners and networks of universities before we finally decided to apply for European funding via the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership call. The SUCTI project (2016-19) is well underway. We have offered a "Train the Trainers Programme" for staff of partner institutions so that they can deliver internationalisation training to fellow staff members back at their home institutions and currently in-house training courses are taking place at all our partner institutions. The initial feedback is very promising. Additionally, more and more universities have shown interest in implementing this model and we encourage them to do so. We firmly believe that SUCTI is a truly efficient way to transform the institutional mind-set towards internationalisation from within. It is not only about internationalisation for all, but mostly about empowering our staff and bringing everyone together to contribute to internationalisation. So, what do you think: is your focus on internationalisation for all or all together for internationalisation?

For more information, please see: www.suctiproject.com

¹SUCTI stands for "Systemic University Change Towards Internationalisation"

