



**FORINT**

FORTALECIMIENTO DE LA INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN  
ENTRE LAS UNIVERSIDADES EUROPEAS Y LATINOAMERICANAS



# **Guidelines for Strategic Planning**

# 1. Developing an internationalisation strategy

## Getting Started

### Gaining commitment from Senior Management

It is critical that the process of developing an internationalisation strategy is visibly driven and supported by Senior Management. This is essential because strategic planning is fundamentally a change process. An internationalisation strategy can lead to changes in the academic offerings, the pedagogy, the research focus as well to changes in the organisational structures and practices. Without commitment from Senior Management the strategy can easily run into difficulty, be slowed down or sidelined and the various actions uncoordinated or not completed.

It is good practice for Senior Management to make an official announcement about the importance of internationalisation to the institution, and about the need to develop a strategy to support its realisation. If all the stages suggested in this handbook are followed, it will probably take around 6 to 9 months from the announcement of a new planning cycle to the approval of the internationalisation strategy.

### Setting up a Core Group

Once Senior Management support has been secured, the next step is setting up a Core Group to lead the planning process, coordinate the various interventions and contributions, and produce the final document for approval. The Group is normally composed of a small number of key staff members with experience of internationalisation or in the areas where the strategy is to focus (i.e. curriculum development, research etc) as well as some of the “champions” who have been involved in and are enthusiastic about internationalisation. It is also good practice to include the student voice.



## 2. Carrying out an analysis of the internal and external context (SWOT)

It is always good practice to start the planning process with a SWOT exercise, and to involve as many stakeholders as possible. This means reaching out to academic and administrative staff, to students, but also to external stakeholders to gather as broad a range of perspectives as possible, not only about the current state of internationalisation but about the institution itself and the realities of its environment. The SWOT exercise is also a way to foster interest in internationalisation and encourage active engagement in the various activities that will be developed.

The SWOT exercise should identify the strengths and weaknesses that are internal to the institution, as well as the opportunities and threats in its external environment. The information gathered needs to be analysed and systematised into categories, which will inform the selection of priorities, since not everything that is mentioned in the SWOT will necessarily be included in the strategy.

### Building ownership

The SWOT exercise offers an opportunity to the institution's internal and external stakeholders to give their appraisal, but it is important to continue to involve them throughout the process. This can be done by holding meetings with key individuals or groups to understand what their priorities and concerns during the SWOT exercise, but also are by circulating drafts of the plan for wider discussion and feedback.

It is essential to develop the strategy through an authentic process of consultation and participation with as many different stakeholder groups as possible. This will build ownership and improve the chances of success once the plan is implemented. The plan should not be seen as belonging only to Senior Management or isolated in the International Office. The vision for internationalisation should be understood and shared by all and communication on the plan's progress should continue on a regular basis.



## 3. Selecting a model

### Identifying good practice

Before writing the plan, it can be a good idea to look at how others have developed their plan for internationalisation. Many universities and institutions now post their internationalisation strategies on their website and so the list of examples is endless. However, it is important to identify examples of internationalisation strategies that are in line with the institution's international ambitions, stage of development, location and size.

As said before, there is no “*one size fits all*” approach when it comes to designing a strategic plan for internationalisation. Strategies that have been developed in some national and institutional contexts may be inappropriate, or even detrimental in others. Therefore, strategic plans for internationalisation should be developed by primarily taking into account the institutional mission and profile and considering in what way internationalisation can add value, rather than by simply imitating others.

The whole process should be driven by asking the question “Why do we want to internationalise?” The answer to this key question can then inform “what” to internationalise and “how” to do it.

### One model of a strategic plan for internationalisation

That said, these guidelines will offer one model for the development of a strategic plan for internationalisation. It can be used as a starting point and adapted to specific institutional needs. It offers a process but does not propose content as this will vary considerably based on the particular circumstances in each of the institutions.

This model takes a holistic view to the strategic planning process and considers four sections for the plan:

- 1) Context, vision and mission;
- 2) Academic activities;
- 3) Support services;
- 4) Resource management.



This means that:

- In *Section 1*, the plan shows how the vision for internationalisation is underpinned by the institution’s **vision and mission** are derived from an assessment of **context** in which institution operates – its history, location, ethos, and an evaluation of the factors, both internal and external that currently affect it (SWOT).
- In *Section 2*, the plan describes internationalisation of the **academic activities** and demonstrates how these will seek to deliver the vision for internationalisation and drive forward the institution’s vision and mission.
- In *Section 3*, the plan outlines how **support services** will be internationalised to ensure that they can adequately support the academic activities.
- In *Section 4*, the plan presents how the necessary **resources** will be identified, managed and developed to enable the academic and support activities for internationalisation to operate effectively.

The information contained in Sections 2-4 is expressed principally as **objectives** and **actions** to realise the vision for internationalisation. An objective is a broader principle that guides decision-making over the lifetime of plan, while an action is a concrete means to contribute to an objective. There can be several actions supporting a single objective and they make up the annual action plans. Actions generally have indicators to enable monitoring and measurement of their progress. These indicators are often defined as SMART in that they are:

- **Specific** (relating to a particular activity and with a clear rationale);
- **Measurable** (often numerical such as: from x today to y in 4 years; increase by x%; decrease by x%; take a certain action by x date);
- **Attainable** (realistic but stretching the institution beyond its current capacity);
- **Relevant** (appropriate for the objective/action);
- **Time-bound** (have a clear timescale).

**Content**, as previous indicated, depends on the institution’s strategic choices for internationalisation. It is however recommended to keep it clear, simple and concise. The plan itself should be a relatively short document. Action plans will be developed from the strategic plan in the implementation stage.

Appropriate **timing** for a plan is generally considered to be five years, since this is long enough for the objectives to be delivered, but also not too far-reaching as to lose sight of the current situation. Change of course happens, and the plan will be subject to continuous monitoring, with the objectives being reviewed, refined and redefined in line with the emerging imperatives of the institution’s internal and external environment.

The choice of **language** should also be clear and positive. Since strategic plans are future-focused, the easiest format is to use “we will” or “the institution will”. The verbs should be verbs of action such as: *improve, implement, develop, enhance, review, introduce* etc. and not verbs of reflection such as: *consider, explore, think about*. Consideration is what is done in the



initial stages of preparation, but the plan is about action. The message should be energetic and purposeful.

The **length** of the plan will vary but in general it should be possible to present each section in around 3 to 4 pages, which means the whole plan will be around 12 to 16 pages long.



## 4. Writing the plan

In order to write the plan, the Core Group should develop a calendar for the production of the different sections and assign the responsibility to a smaller group of individuals with the appropriate level of knowledge and expertise. As each section is completed, it can be shared with the rest of the Core Group for feedback, and then distributed to a wider audience for their input. Who to consult may vary in the different sections of the plan, according to knowledge and expertise. Each section builds on the previous one, so it is important to reach consensus on a section before proceeding to the next one. This process can take between 4 and 6 months to complete.

Once the plan is completed, the Core Group should ensure that the internationalisation strategy:

- has direct articulation with the institution’s mission and vision;
- has set clear objectives to deliver strategy;
- has actions that are designed to deliver the objectives;
- has appropriate units and policies – in place or planned – to deliver actions;
- has resources – financial and human – in place or planned – to enable the units to deliver the actions.

In other words it is important to assess whether the institution has the capacity and the commitment to deliver the strategy for internationalisation. It is important to avoid developing proposals that will not or cannot be implemented. Once the Core Group is satisfied with the plan, it is then ready for ratification.



## 5. Implementing the plan

Once the internationalisation strategy has been formally ratified by the institution, the process of implementation can begin. This implies developing an annual **action plan**, to transform the strategy into a detailed action programme and coordinate the various actions in terms of content and timing, to enable the change to happen. The actions for the first year are already embedded in the strategy, but now more details around roles and responsibilities will need to be included.

An action plan indicates 5 key elements:

- what actions will be carried out (prioritisation)
- who will carry them out (named individuals)
- by when they will be carried out (calendar)
- with which resources (human and financial)
- who needs to know what (communication).

A good action plan ensures that all those involved know who will be doing what and by when. It sets up a realistic timetable with short and long term actions. It designates lines of responsibility and accountability for reach of the actions. It creates expectations of performance. It leads to the realisation of the actions and gives **credibility** to those who carry it out. It organises time, resources and energy, and leads to greater **efficiency**. It motivates people to do what needs to be done and creates **accountability**. However, change can only be shaped so far and it is important to be ready for unexpected developments that will require adjustments to the plan.

Once completed, the action plan forms the basis of institutional action for internationalisation during the first year of the plan and it will require a meeting calendar. It is common for institutions to develop an overly dense action plan and so some rescheduling might be necessary. What is important, is to identify which actions represent building blocks for future years of the plan and to ensure these are accomplished, or at least initiated, in the first year. A key factor of success is the extent to which staff accept responsibility for actions, are appropriately resourced, and held accountable. Taking part in internationalisation should be an enjoyable experience and so it is also important to communicate and celebrate successes!



## 6. Monitoring and review

Once the action plan has been designed, it is important to agree on the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing its implementation. This means identifying how it will be done, by whom and when. A monitoring team can have a number of different tasks such as:

- Identifying monitoring dates for internationalisation objectives and actions;
- Ensuring accurate information on the various indicators is being gathered;
- Planning periodic review of goals, timetables, benchmarks, performance indicators (progress made vs progress expected);
- Setting up regular consultations with the institution community on progress, concerns to resolve issues;
- Planning longer-term periodic reassessment of the institutional environment to ensure the strategy is still appropriate.

Whatever the monitoring team is doing, it is basically seeking to answer three key questions:

- 1) Are we doing what we planned to do?
- 2) Are we doing it well?
- 3) Is it in line with our mission?

The answers to these questions will inevitably lead to adjustments, refinements and revisions when certain actions are no longer feasible or desirable, or new opportunities and challenges emerge that require attention. Commitment to ongoing review, evaluation and adjustment on a regular basis as well as the ability to be flexible in the course of implementation are essential elements of the implementation process. It is important to think of strategic planning as an **instrument of facilitation**, not of control. Unpredicted and unintended events will occur and the institution will need to rethink its strategy in response to these.

If a monitoring and review approach is not currently part of the institution culture, it is important to communicate that it is not a control process, but rather one that enables adaptation and responsiveness. It is not a “box-ticking” approach to say that a task has been completed, but a way to reflect on achievements think to the future about continuous improvement and renewal.



## 7. Some final thoughts

Developing an internationalisation strategy is a relatively straightforward process but ensuring successful implementation requires considerable time, commitment, energy and resources. As strategic internationalisation becomes integral to the mission of the institution, it will also become increasingly embedded in its academic activities, its support services and its resource management. It is a demanding journey but one that is also highly rewarding, as its staff and students become active participants in a global higher education community.





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