What is Internationalisation?

Internationalisation is not just about recruiting overseas students to come to the UK. Rather, most approaches to internationalisation now stress the importance of integrating internationalisation into all areas of institution life, including:

- International students coming to the UK
- UK students studying overseas
- Programmes taught overseas but provided by UK institutions (either in partnership with other institutions or through distance learning and e-learning)
- Campuses of UK institutions being established overseas
- Collaborative research and project activities
- The recruitment of international academic staff to the UK
- The integration of internationalisation into the curriculum

Why are many universities and colleges internationalising in this way? Partly, of course, through self-interest, but also because of the less tangible benefits of internationalisation, including:

- Enhancing institutional reputation through international activities
- The creation of strategic partnerships with peer institutions globally
- Preparing students for employment as ‘global citizens’ and for employment in an international environment

Developing an International Strategy

Just as with many other aspects of institutional activity, governing bodies are increasingly seeing the importance of developing a strategy for internationalisation (and not just for student recruitment). Indeed if substantial investment is planned then a clear strategy with associated risk analysis is essential. As with other institutional strategies, this will generally be drafted by the executive for discussion and approval by the governing body, but it is likely to have been preceded by a substantial discussion (perhaps at an ‘away-day’) of the international aspirations of the institution, without which it would be difficult to write a strategy.

Although there are several sources available to guide institutions and governors in this area, perhaps the most useful is a report for the Higher Education Academy by Robin Middlehurst and Steve Woodfield (Responding to the internationalisation agenda - implications for institutional strategy). They describe developments in the way that institutions and their governing bodies have developed their international strategies. Amongst other things they note a move from internationalisation being a set of disparate and unconnected activities to a number of integrated activities, coordinated to achieve better leverage and value for money.

The Management of Internationalisation

Governing bodies should expect the same kind of information and guidance from the executive on internationalisation as on any other aspect of their work. However, internationalisation poses particular challenges, because of its complexity and rapidly changing nature. To cope with this, specialist international offices have grown in the past few years, and many no longer just deal with student recruitment but provide a wide range of services. In addition, specialists may also be used to deal with activities in specific countries.

Many institutions now have a pro vice-chancellor to lead their international work. In small institutions, however, providing such services is a real challenge, and they will often depend on national information sources.
There are some useful sources of information about how institutions and their governing bodies are developing their management structures to deliver internationalisation:

- A report by the UK HE International Unit on The Practice of Internationalisation - Managing International Activities in UK Universities, which summaries development across the whole UK HE sector
- A report by the Higher Education Academy on The Global University - The role of senior managers which looks particularly at the leadership required to achieve a culture which takes internationalisation seriously within an institution
- A Leadership Foundation research report by John Fielden on the 'Management and Leadership of International Partnerships’

A QAA Report on the management of overseas collaborative work at the University of Wales, which found weaknesses in validation processes and the overall management of international work, demonstrates the risks if international initiatives are not properly managed and overseen.

**International Student Recruitment**

International recruitment is a core part of student admissions for many universities and colleges, and there were 280,760 international students (excluding those from the EU) enrolled in the UK in 2009-10, an increase of some 60% in five years. There were a further 125,000 EU students.. International students make up 11% of all higher education students in the UK, and for those undertaking advanced research programmes, the figure is 40%. The OECD averages are 6% and 16%, respectively. Students from China make up almost one-quarter of all international students in the UK.

Although governors will wish to receive regular information on international student recruitment and the extent to which target figures are being met, because of the financial implications of not meeting targets, it is also important that they receive regular information on a range of issues associated with the satisfaction and performance of international students. There are numerous factors associated with the support of international students that governing bodies need to look out for, including: the provision of effective language and study skills support; the cultural integration of international students both on campus and within local communities; and so on. Advice should be available from the international office, and there are also national sources such as the UK Council for International Student Affairs.

An issue of great potential significance for higher education institutions is the extent to which the Coalition Government’s policy of reducing immigration will impact on international student recruitment and relationships with overseas universities. Private colleges, which are often used by international students as a 'stepping stone' to universities could also be affected by the changes. Some institutions have had their licenses to sponsor international students suspended and it was reported in August 2012 that London Metropolitan University’s licence had been revoked by the UK Border Agency, a decision that could have a very significant impact on the University.

**International Partnerships**

Many universities and colleges are forming international partnerships of various kinds to support the delivery of teaching and/or research, but how do institutions know which partnerships to choose? These will often be operational decisions, and a governing body is only likely to get involved in such decisions when substantial financial investment is required; when substantial risks are being undertaken; when approving the international strategy (for example, by concentrating on particular countries); or when determining policy on what kinds of potential partners are suitable. Most obviously this latter criterion
includes matters such as a potential partner's record on human rights, intellectual and academic freedom, as well as standards and status and due diligence criteria.

A review in the Times Higher Education examines some of the difficulties that have occurred for the University of Wales, in particular because of unsuitable overseas validation relationships.

In dealing with such issues it is important for governing bodies to be proactive and - in discussion with the executive - to make it clear in policy terms what the parameters should be on selecting major international partners. In this way, the executive can proceed with a clear brief and in the knowledge that the governing body will support them if any subsequent controversy occurs. Without such a brief, a governing body runs the risk of not being able to confirm major partnerships proposals that have already been agreed in outline by the executive.

'International Partnerships: a Legal Guide for UK Universities' has been prepared by Eversheds LLP at the request of the UK Higher Education International Unit. This substantial guide is not openly available in electronic form; there are copies in universities, and governors who are interested should consult their international office or clerk.

A Guide to Offshore Staffing Strategies for UK Universities will be of interest to universities involved in international ventures and collaborations. Issue 82 of International Focus contains a number of articles about consortia, networks and international alliances. An article in the Times Higher Education reviews the involvement of UK institutions in offshore education and contains some interesting data. Many overseas universities now have London campuses, a trend being followed by a number of British institutions.

International Competition

There is strong and still growing competition from a range of countries in recruiting international students. Although the UK remains a destination of choice there are numerous factors which may make recruitment more difficult in the future, including:

- The relatively high cost of UK higher education in comparison to some other providers (higher education for international students is free in much of mainland Europe, though some countries do now charge fees)
- Increases in English language provision in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands.
- The growth of countries such as China and Malaysia as importers of students
- The competitive attraction of other high-cost destinations such as the USA and Australia (such as in the provision of scholarships)
- The increase in domestic higher education provision in countries such as China
- The effects of the economic downturn which may restrict borrowing to fund international higher education
- The impact of UK terrorism legislation which has had the effect of making visa availability more complex
- The Coalition Government’s new arrangements for reducing immigration, which are significantly affecting the availability of visas, in higher education and a range of ‘feeder’ institutions

Within the UK there is also competition between the four devolved jurisdictions, and both Scotland and Wales have established national bodies to support international activities. In Scotland this is the Global Engagement Group and in Wales it is the Wales International Consortium.

One pressure that is likely to be of increasing importance is competition from transnational private providers, delivering global electronic programmes in popular subjects. Some institutions have already formed partnerships with such providers, and these may give rise to substantial business partnerships which need to be treated as any commercial and enterprise activity. The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education is
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a valuable source on such developments, and many UK institutions are members. (Note: OBHE publications are password protected so governors may need to ask their clerk/governing body secretary or international office to obtain them).

There are now signs that universities in Europe, in particular in Sweden and the Netherlands, are considering mergers to enhance their status, prestige and competitiveness.

The IAU has published a paper ‘Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action’ which argues that competition among universities is affecting their true academic values.

Further information on international competition is available from the UK HE International Unit.

Measuring Institutional International Performance

The role of the governing body in measuring institutional performance can be found in the section on Strategy and Measuring Performance, but in the area of internationalisation governing bodies will need to be clear about which of numerous possible measures (or KPIs) are most appropriate for measuring progress. These could include:

- **Reputational measures**: for example, the extent to which the institution is known within relevant international communities. This is likely to be qualitative (and therefore difficult to assess) although for some institutions a position in an international league table may act as one indicator
- **Quantitative indicators of strategy implementation**: for example, meeting student number targets; growth in international research collaborations; numbers of UK students spending time overseas
- **The use of existing quality indicators**: for example, reports from the Quality Assurance Agency; the National Student Survey; and other similar sources

One important issue is the need for governing bodies to receive information on international provision in an integrated way, rather - as is usually the case - in a series of different documents. This could take the form of an annual international report, which would also provide a governing body with the opportunity of receiving a presentation from the head of the international office.

There is continuing interest in international rankings and league tables to assist in measuring performance. A report from the European Universities Association ‘Global University Rankings and their Impact’ discusses their value and effect.

International Quality Assurance

Some UK institutions offer programmes in many different countries through links with other organisations. These are reviewed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to ensure that the quality and standards offered to students on programmes available overseas are equal to those in the UK. More details about QAA’s international role in quality assurance is available in their international section.

Quality assurance problems can impact on institutional reputation. A review in the Times Higher examines some of the difficulties that have arisen for the University of Wales, in particular, because of unsuitable international validation arrangements.

Find more information and resources on this topic on our website at: [www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/governance/ba/internationalisation](http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/governance/ba/internationalisation)