

Internationalisation For All: Rethinking University Internationalisation

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Abstract

Concerns about commercialisation, high costs of study, elitism, massification, and the challenge of quantity over quality are some of the common themes across the globe in the discussions on international higher education.

Viewed through the lens of a small public university in the UK, this paper presents the results from a study examining the meaning of internationalisation, its practice, and what it means in the context of an inclusive international higher education strategy.

It argues that in a world where 97% of the world's student population engaged in higher education is not globally mobile for a variety of reasons, internationalisation to be inclusive must adopt a holistic approach and be woven into the fabric of the institution's life. Implemented as a Whole Institution Initiative (WII), this must be accompanied by clear Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure (3 I's), connecting strategy, policy, and day-to-day practices at all levels and functions of the institution.

The framework that has been developed as a result of this study provides insight and practical guidance to Higher Education institutions on how to approach internationalisation holistically. At a strategic level, it will be useful to institutional leaders and national policymakers to understand the issues entailed in formulating international strategies, processes, and programmes in developing an inclusive internationalisation strategy and not merely focusing on international student recruitment and inward mobility. At a course/programme level, it provides valuable practical insight and guidance to academics and programme administrators involved in developing and delivering inclusive internationalisation.

Keywords: Internationalisation of Higher Education; Student Mobility; Equity and Access to Higher Education; Inclusive Internationalisation; Internationalisation Strategy; Global Engagement—Local Relevance; Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL); Internationalising the Curriculum; Internationalisation at Home.

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Introduction

Concerns about commercialisation, high costs of study, elitism, massification and the challenge of quantity over quality are some of the common themes across the globe in the discussions on international higher education. International higher education is often faced with two central paradoxes: *first* — the increasing isolationist and nationalist trends followed by many countries, which results in a disconnect between the global and the local, and *second* — the challenge of equity and access to international higher education to a vast majority of the world's student population. Higher education has expanded in the past few decades and is a driver of globalisation (Albtach et al., 2009; Gürüz, 2011). However, despite the rhetoric about making a positive global contribution, international success for many higher education institutions continues to be measured by traditional metrics such as international student enrolments and global ranking, to name a few. Student mobility has been a dominant element in the discussion on internationalisation of higher education. The number of mobile students globally increased from 2 million in 2000 to 6.4 million in 2020. However, despite this significant increase, over 97% of the world's student population engaged in higher education are not globally mobile for a variety of social, political, and economic reasons (Kommers and Bista, 2020; Migration Data Portal, 2023).

Viewing through the lens of a small public university in the UK, with minimal global student mobility, this paper presents the results from a study that examines: a) the meaning of internationalisation, its practice and b) what this means in the context of inclusive higher education. The central emphasis of the study considers the perceptions, actions, and interplay of the various actors and factors that have an

influence on and impact the institution's internationalisation process.

The paper is structured as follows: it begins by examining the international dimension of higher education over the ages. It then considers the interplay of international higher education with globalisation, the global growth of international higher education provision, and the increase in global student mobility. At this point, it poses the question of what happens to the approximately 97% of students who are engaged in higher education but not globally mobile for a variety of reasons. The methodology adopted for the study, ethical considerations, and findings from the study are presented next. Based on the findings from the study, the paper recommends how higher education institutions should respond to these challenges by providing inclusive internationalisation to all its stakeholders. The study concludes by suggesting that internationalisation must adopt a holistic approach and has to be woven into the fabric of the institution's life. Implemented as a Whole Institution Initiative (WII), this must be accompanied by clear *Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure* (3 I's), connecting strategy, policy, and day-to-day practices at all levels and functions of the institution. A framework for implementing an inclusive internationalisation strategy is presented.

Background

Higher education has always had an international dimension, either in the concept of universal knowledge and related research or in the movement of scholars and students. Evidence of this can be traced back thousands of years to centres and sites of higher learning such as the Confucian Schools in China (6th Century BCE), the Platonic Academy of Athens (5th Century BCE), the Library of Alexandria (4th Century BCE), the Academy of Gunishapur in Persia (3rd Century),

Nalanda in India (5th Century), and Renaissance Italy (14th Century) which attracted scholars from around the world (Gacel-Avila, 2005; Hudzik, 2015; Marginson & Rhodes, 2002). In the 7th Century BCE, Takshacila (spelt nowadays as Taxila), then in India,¹ attracted over 10,500 students from all over the world who studied more than 60 subjects (Tilak, 2010). And in addition to religious pilgrims, pilgrims or travellers (*peregrini*) of another kind were a familiar sight in Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period. Consisting mainly of university professors and students, their pilgrimage (*peregrination*) was not to any religious site or tomb but to a university city in search of learning (de Ridder-Symoens, 1992). The reasons for this movement of scholars and students at the time were not dissimilar to those that drove current mobility amongst scholars and students, namely a wish to broaden experience, earn qualifications, and meet and make new friends. However, the international dimension of higher education has evolved significantly over the last three decades in what we see today, for example, in the form of student and staff mobility, the internationalisation of curricula, the cross-border delivery of programmes, partnership and franchise arrangements, branch campus operations, dual degree awards, virtual mobility, collaborative online learning, etc. (Naidoo, 2006). This global movement of students across borders is commonly referred to as the most visible indicator of the Internationalisation of Higher Education (IoHE). Students are moving across nations in increasing numbers, and this phenomenon is primarily a feature of the growing global inter-connectedness some

commentators refer to as globalisation (Giddens, 2000; Gürüz, 2011; Nye, 2002; Youssef, 2014).²

Internationalisation of Higher Education: Meaning and Interplay with Globalisation

The term globalisation has different meanings in different contexts and academic disciplines. The earliest appearance of the term in the English language can be traced back to the 1930s. However, it was not until the early 1990s that it gained significant prominence (Steger, 2020). Nye (2002) sees globalisation as a state of the world involving networks of interdependence, networks of connections, and multiple relations at multi-continental distances. This view, which has international relations and governance as its main reference, is equally pertinent in the cases of the global knowledge economy, the production of goods and services involving global supply chains, and the functioning of international financial markets. And facilitating all of this requires the language, skills, and capacity to work in intercultural environments. These are the very factors that drive the Internationalisation of Higher Education (IoHE). Rudzki (1995) proposes that IoHE can be understood as a defining feature of all universities, encompassing organisational change, curriculum innovation, staff development, and student mobility for the purpose of achieving excellence in teaching and research. Writing about the multifaceted nature of IoHE, Marginson (2007) argues that IoHE describes academic relations across borders, recruiting staff and students across borders, delivering programmes, and publishing research across international borders. This

¹ Located in the Pothohar region of Punjab, Pakistan in the Taxila Tehsil of Rawalpindi District. It lies approximately 25 kilometres (16 mi) northwest of the Islamabad–Rawalpindi Metropolitan area.

² Globalisation, in the wider sense, remains the subject of considerable academic and political debate, especially

regarding whether it is a noun representing a given phenomenon, an adjective to describe a trend or a verb that portrays a process. This study, however, does not theorise the notion of globalisation but deploys it as a part of the discussion.

definition is very similar to the definitions of internationalisation used in international business theory, which is about the trade of goods and services across national borders.

The most commonly accepted definition of internationalisation in higher education is the “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education”(Knight, 2008, p.12). This definition by Knight views internationalisation as being made up of the following elements: International, emphasising the notion of nation and referring to the relationship between and among nations, cultures, or countries; Intercultural, referring to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions and also used to address the aspects of internationalisation at home; Global, referring to the exchange amongst and across nations, and also used interchangeably with the term cross-border and transnational. The term *process* underscores the continuous and ongoing nature of internationalisation, *integrating* signifies that internationalisation is central and not marginal to higher education in the world today and, finally, *purpose* refers to the overall role and objectives that higher education has for a country or a region where individual institutions have specific mandates and missions. The definition provided by Knight (2008) recognises that IoHE is a response to globalisation and is not to be confused with the globalisation process itself and that it can take place at the international, national, sectoral, and institutional levels (intercultural) either independently or in an integrated manner (Gürüz, 2011). Internationalisation refers to specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments to support student or faculty

exchanges, encourage collaborative research overseas, set up joint teaching programmes in other countries or myriad associated initiatives typified by speeded up interconnectivity and deepening interdependence (Albatch and Knight, 2007; De Wit & Albatch, 2021; Dunning,2009; Klasek, 1992; Marginson, 2007; Martin et al., 2018; Rumbley et al.,2022).

Viewing it from an institutional perspective, Hawawini (2016) argues that the institution's goal should be much more than simply injecting an international dimension into an existing static structure and advocates for a process that should be both inward and outward-looking. Acknowledging that internationalisation is dynamic and requires an institution to continuously develop and adapt to the changing environment, Hudzik (2013) emphasises the need for a comprehensive institution-wide focus and approach to internationalisation. The overarching intention is for the integration of internationalisation into the core institutional ethos, values, and mission of the institution (De Wit and Jones, 2023; Whitsed and Green, 2013).

In the second part of the last Century, the world witnessed a growth in the number of internationally engaged students, which was made possible mainly by developments in information and communication technologies. Educational services can now be provided across national borders and intercontinental distances (for example, e-learning, online provision, and blended learning). The growth of branch campuses and other delivery forms through provisions outside of the home country (Green, 2018; Jacob and Meek, 2013; Lomer et al., 2018; Wilkins, 2021; Wilkins and Rumbley, 2018) is another indicator of this development. As of 2023, it was reported that there were 333 fully functional branch campuses operating worldwide (CBERT,2023). It is

estimated that by 2030, the global enrollment in higher education will have increased to 380 million (Calderon, 2018; Icef, 2018). It is also worth noting that the 6.3 million mobile students globally represent less than 3% of the estimated global enrollment in higher education (Calderon, 2018; Migration Data Portal, 2023; World Bank, 2020). An important question, therefore, is to understand what happens to the other 97% of the global student population who are currently not globally mobile. How can national educational systems and higher education institutions within it respond to these challenges in providing inclusive internationalisation to all its stakeholders?

Methodology

The methodological approach adopted for this study is interpretive, taking an insider research approach focusing on a single case unit (Trowler, 2011,2016).³ The research is underpinned by an idealist ontology, with a belief that the meanings and interpretations created and maintained by social actors constitute social reality (Blaike, 2007). The study is based on purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2010) to generate 'insight and in-depth understanding' (Patton, 2015, p. 266), concentrating on the strategic nature of the data sources rather than viewing the data as a statistical representation of a population. Data collection is principally through published university sources and semi-structured interviews with 40 participants across the case university in academic, academic support, management, leadership positions, chair of the governing council, as well as with representatives of the students' union. All interview data was captured electronically

and transcribed. Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) and Braun et al.'s (2017) six-step framework for thematic analysis adopting a reflexive approach is applied to analyse the data gathered. The final analysis is presented as a thematic map, and the development of an internationalisation strategy is examined through the theoretical lens of the Resource Based View (Barney, 1991, 2001; Barney & Hesterley, 2012; Lynch and Baines, 2014; Maket and Korir, 2017; Rosenberg and Ferlie, 2016; Wernerfelt, 1984).

Ethics and Confidentiality

The research was conducted following the ethical guidelines for research laid down by the case study university. As an insider based in the case study university, internal approval to conduct the research was accorded only after the proposal met the case's requirements as per the university's ethical approval requirements. Interviews commenced only after formal ethical approval was received from the University Research Ethics Committee.

Findings and Analysis

The initial data from the preliminary data inquiry (n=40) were classified under the following 8 clusters.

- Meaning of Internationalisation of Higher Education (IoHE)
- Importance of internationalisation to the case university
- The case university's position/strategy on internationalisation
- Practice of internationalisation at the case university
- Motivators for internationalisation
- Barriers and challenges to internationalisation
- Benefits from internationalisation

³ One of UK's smallest publicly funded universities (student strength approximately 3000) with limited international student mobility. It is this context that makes this study unique in understanding the meaning and practice of internationalisation and in particular the implications for inclusive internationalisation.

- The future – internationalisation at the case university in the next 5–7 years

Several iterations later following the methodology adopted resulted in the final five themes:

- Academic Engagement/Achievement in the Wider World
- Personal Development/Employability
- Global Engagement, Local relevance
- External factors
- Internal factors

These five themes and the sub-themes within them encapsulate the meaning,

interpretation, and practice of internationalisation, as presented in Figure 1.

The second aspect of this study was to identify the implications of the study's findings on developing an inclusive internationalisation approach/strategy at the case university and similar contexts.

An analysis of the study's findings highlights four main dimensions as being integral to internationalisation at the case university. The four dimensions are presented in Figure 2.

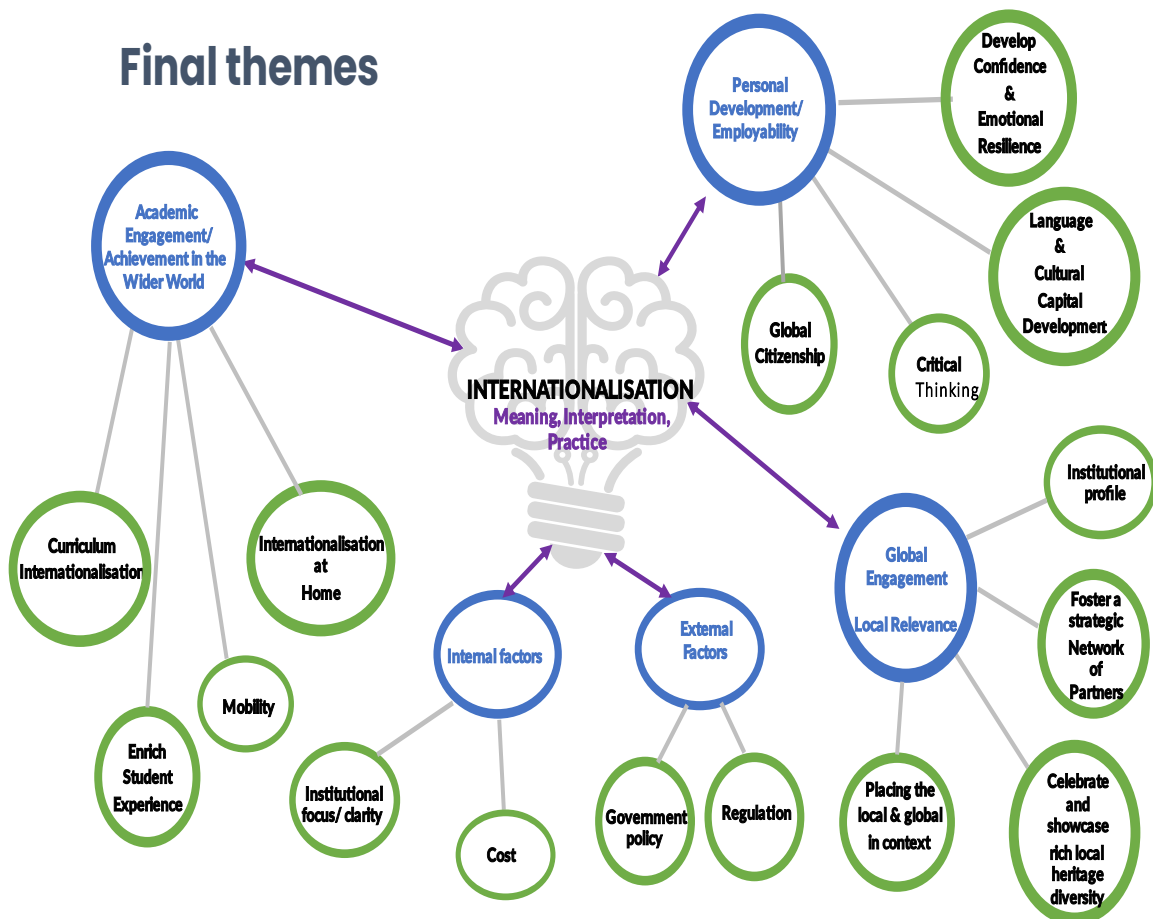
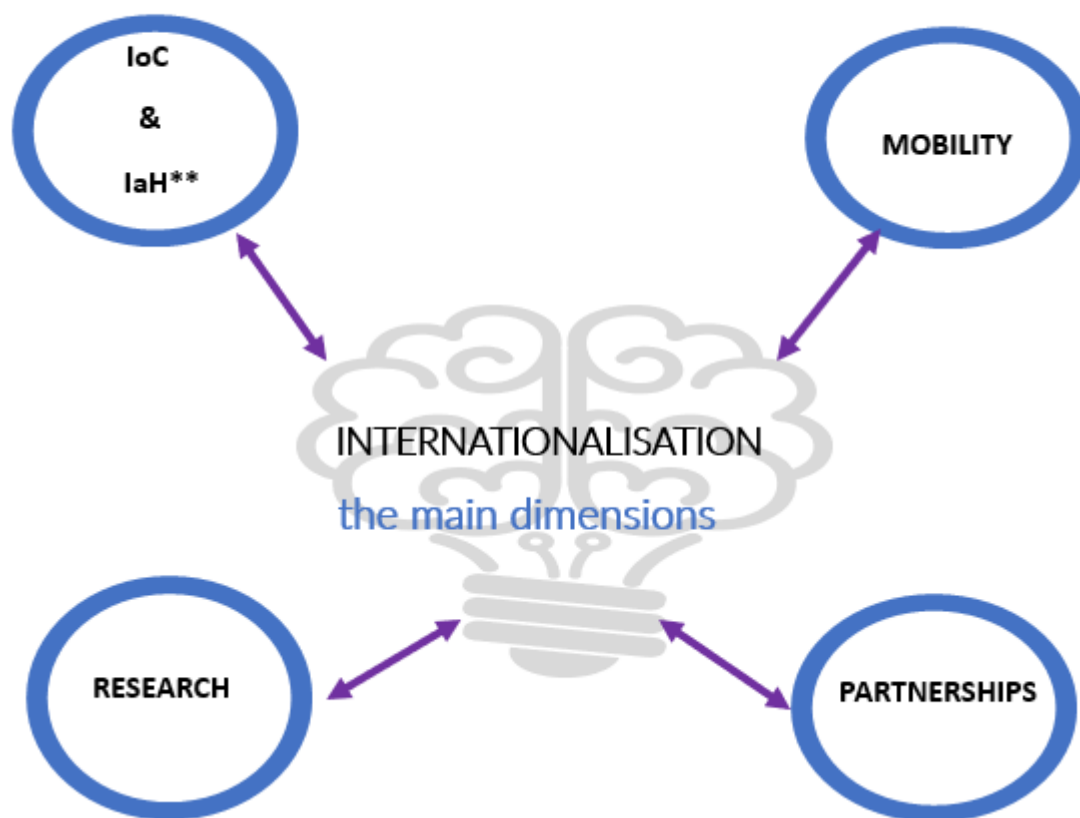


Figure 1: Thematic Map Showing the Five Final Main Themes.
 Source: Prepared by the Author



** IoC= Internationalisation of the curriculum; IaH = Internationalisation at Home

Figure 2: Four Dimensions of Internationalisation at the Case University

Source: Prepared by the Author

Recommendations

Drawing on the four main dimensions highlighted in Figure 2, a framework to inform an inclusive internationalisation strategy and practice is suggested in Figure 3. The conceptualisation of the framework is through the examples of activities across the dimensions. The horizontal and vertical strands represent the intersection of each of these with one another,

highlighting the various component activities. A holistic approach to internationalisation is recommended.

To be meaningful and successful, internationalisation requires organisational and leadership engagement and support. This must be accompanied by institutional Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure (3 Is).

| | IoC, IaH | Mobility | Research | Partnerships |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| IoC IaH | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparing students for outbound mobility. - Curriculum for inbound mobility. - Curriculum flexibility. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programme development. - Visiting scholar programme. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities to develop specialist areas. - Summer Schools. - Curriculum development. - Global engagement. - Trans National Education(TNE) delivery |
| Mobility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exchange arrangements. - Language teaching. - Connecting local with global. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leveraging expertise. - Scheduling. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student exchanges, placement, and -- - volunteering opportunities. - Staff secondment/ exchange. |
| Research | Development of research programmes. | Collaborative arrangements and research exchange. Joint research projects. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leveraging individual and institutional skills and competencies. - Joint conferences. - Systematic approach for sharing practice. |
| Partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative development. - Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic, cultural, and social exchanges. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing complementary skills. - Joint research & publications. | |
| | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ | ↑ |
| Nature of engagement and support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality and approval systems. - Recognition of studying abroad and Credit transfer. - Training & Development in Pedagogical Leadership. - Celebrate local diversity and multi-ethnicity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Logistics and on-campus arrangements. - Risk assessments, safety, and security. - Investments in digital infrastructure. - Timetabling/ scheduling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular forums for knowledge exchange. - Administrative arrangements for collaboration. - Knowledge exchange. - Joint research centre & bids. - Formal agreements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality and approval systems. - Partnership assessment, validation, and administrative systems. - Digital infrastructure. |
| Financial Support, Commitment, Allocation of Resources, Incentives through Staff Recognition, Promotion and Positions of Responsibility | | | | |
| INTENT | ORGANISATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT | | | INFRASTRUCTURE |
| | ↑ | | | ↑ |

Figure 3: Suggested Framework for Inclusive Internationalisation Indicating Examples of Activities across the Four Dimensions of Internationalisation

Source: Prepared by the Author

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has the potential and capability to be accessible to a vast student population globally beyond those who have the financial resources and mobility means to travel. COIL provides unique opportunities to engage students across the globe in meaningful intercultural and global learning experiences. Supported by a robust digital infrastructure that facilitates the connection between learning, teaching, research, scholarship, and collaborative working, COIL provides a highly accessible and equitable method for international engagement and collaboration. If internationalisation is to be successful, it must be woven into the entire gamut of the university’s activities and not seen merely as an add-on function. This must be articulated clearly as a Whole Institution Initiative (WII) with well-defined Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure. In short, this study recommends following an inside-out approach to strategy development (Barney, 2001; Barney & Hesterley, 2019) through assessing organisational capabilities and resources and building on and developing the institution’s internal skills and competencies.

Internationalisation should be seen as a significant long-term organisational project, emphasising organisational development and capability building, along with a visible commitment from the university’s leadership. To have the desired impact, the strategy for internationalisation should be less focussed on the strategy document and more on the actions that demonstrate the commitment to and engagement with internationalisation from institutional leadership (Bartell, 2003; Bennet and Kane, 2011; Fielden, 2008). The leadership must present a clear vision and provide a sense of direction to help develop a set of action plans and coordinated steps, something which Rumelt (2011, 2012) refers to as coherent actions and which, when supported by appropriate systems and structure would help pursue and realise the proposed strategy.

Creating the fora for staff to engage in conversations and discussions, celebrating success, and sharing practices and lessons learnt will further help widen the internationalisation discourse. Internationalisation efforts should not and cannot rest on the enthusiasm of individual faculty members alone (Childress,

2009; Jones, 2008; Leask, 2011; Warwick and Moogan, 2013). Individual efforts, though laudatory, will remain fragmentary and without cohesion (de Haan and Sherry, 2012). An international strategy should be expressed as a realistic statement and not a statement of aspirational intent. It should align with the

institution’s capabilities and be linked with all aspects of institutional activities, being clearly woven into every aspect of the university’s function and life.

This is presented in the organisation map as illustrated in Figure 4.

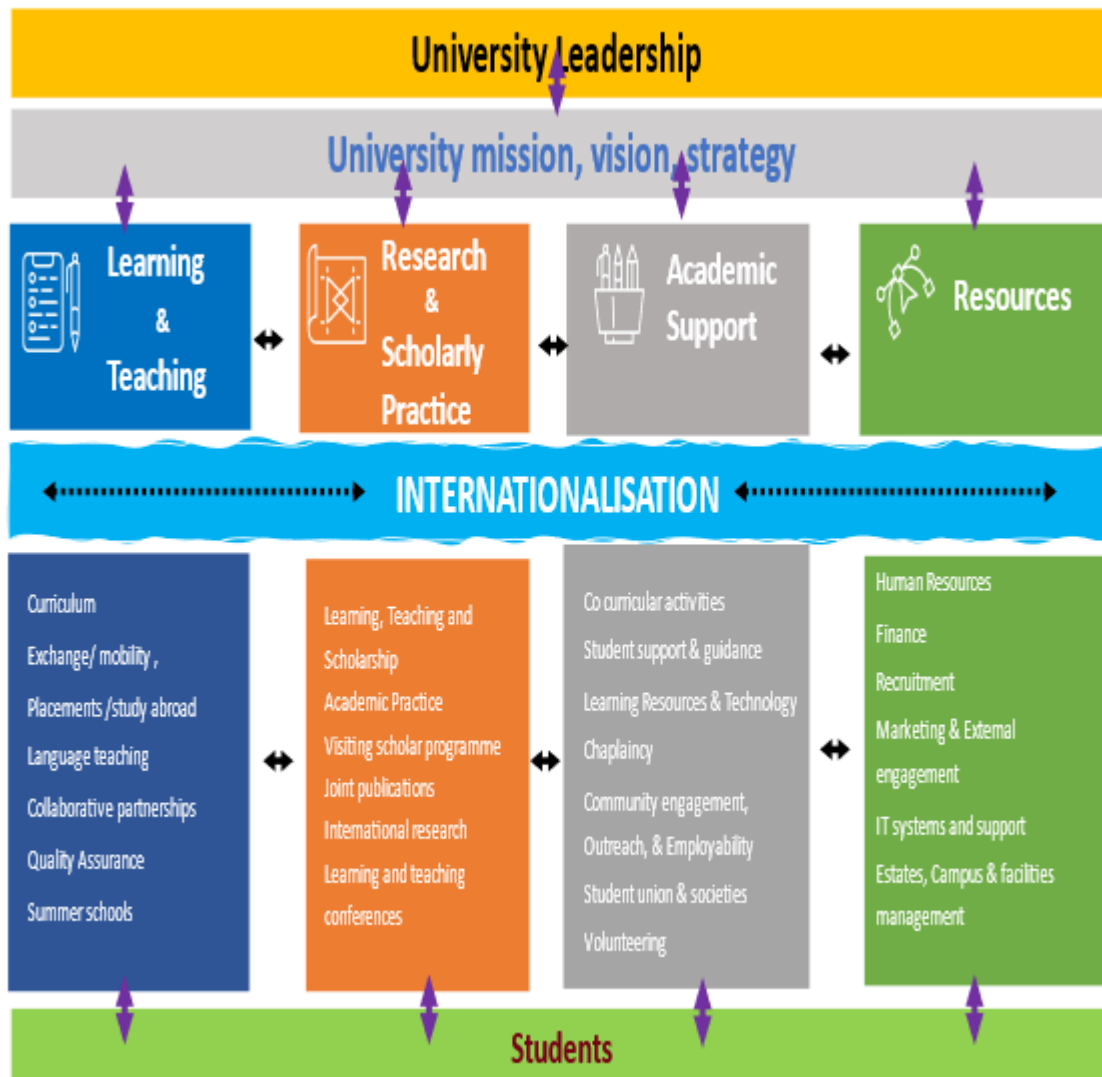


Figure 4: Organisation Map with Internationalisation Woven in
Source: Prepared by the Author

Internationalisation is shown to be horizontally woven across the four main functional areas. It should follow a holistic approach by being woven into every aspect of the institution’s life, its practices, and its processes, thereby connecting strategy, policy, and day-to-day practice at all levels and functions of the institution. Starting with a clearly articulated policy on internationalisation, it must include policies and programmes for curriculum internationalisation

and internationalisation at home, training and development for academic staff, and the provision of strategically focused student services and extracurricular activities which encourage and reward cross-cultural interaction. Implemented as a Whole Institution Initiative (WII), it must be supported by clear Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure (3Is), the principles of which are outlined below.

Intent

The stating of an international strategy or policy in itself is not enough. The strategy must be supported with clear leadership intent and informed by research and practice in the sector and, importantly, from within the institution. Internationalisation must find a seat at the institution's leadership table, and this should guide the importance of staff appointments dedicated to leading the internationalisation strategy, both at the institutional and faculty levels.

The role of academic staff in understanding internationalisation in the context of the university and in interpreting and implementing it at individual discipline and course levels is absolutely critical. The role of staff in academic support and administrative positions is equally crucial in ensuring that a campus culture for internationalisation is woven into all aspects of university life. Decisions made at the institution, faculty, and course levels by academic and non-academic staff will profoundly impact the overall student learning experience. Hence it is vital that the university leadership accords staff development priority and significance.

Attention to detail in terms of the curriculum and pedagogical considerations such as the wording of objectives, the organisation of the learning and teaching arrangements, and the structure of assessments are all very critical and must be directed with clarity.

Whilst the importance and power of policy statements and related objective-setting are significant, it must be recognised that internationalisation ultimately takes place in the learning environment and that unless academics own the internationalisation agenda, it is very unlikely to take off.

Investment

Investing in financial, physical, human, and time resources is critical in shaping and implementing a successful international strategy in practice. A key area for investment is digital infrastructure, which supports mobility and collaborative projects in learning and teaching, as well as in research. Whilst it is recognised that aligning

with internationally recognised outcomes and good teaching is at the heart of an internationalised curriculum (Leask, 2015; Ramsden and Entwistle, 1981; Zadravec and Kockar, 2023), staff development initiatives for internationalisation need to be broader than the focus on purely the mechanics of curriculum design and pedagogy (Beelen and Askerc, 2019; José Sá and Serpa, 2020). This should extend to other members of staff, including administrative and academic support, who are often the first point of contact for students and are critical purveyors of institutional culture and messaging. Investment in support services to help inbound mobility students and outbound students develop language, communication, and cultural awareness skills essential for intercultural engagement must be adequately resourced and funded. Creating a campus-wide culture supporting internationalisation would also require investments in on-campus facilities (for example, catering, multi-faith prayer rooms, cultural societies, display of multi-cultural artefacts, etc.). Whilst some may see such initiatives as seemingly unimportant, the conveying of a message of holistic internationalisation means that all such aspects have to be carefully considered and woven into the very fabric of the institution.

Infrastructure

This is not just about the physical infrastructure usually visible in campus facilities such as learning and teaching spaces, the library, social spaces, sports and recreation facilities, and accommodation facilities, to name a few, but also about the digital infrastructure, which is critical in developing collaboration and partnerships for learning and teaching, developing the curriculum, for COIL, and research projects. There are also intangible aspects of infrastructure that impact the student's everyday life, including experiences in the cafeteria and library, interaction with non-academic support staff on campus, counselling, and personal support. Viewing these as part of the overall internationalisation strategy in practice would mean having policies and procedures in place which connect the various

university departments and service areas, which then, in turn, have a robust interface with the internationalisation strategy. For these connections to be properly understood and practised and for the implications of alternative actions to be evaluated, time, commitment, and resources are required, as well as the appropriate systems and procedures (that is, soft infrastructure) in place. The strategy should also contain a comprehensive plan providing a clear set of action plans and outcomes, devolving power to those levels where the work is undertaken to enable the strategy to be put into action (Fielden, 2008). Fundamental to this approach is to weave internationalisation across the full spectrum of institutional activity.

Conclusion

To be effective, internationalisation must follow an inside-out approach, leveraging internal resources, strengths, and competencies, and not focus on a market-based, competitive-positioning approach restricted only to international student recruitment and inward mobility. Adopting a holistic approach, internationalisation must be woven into the fabric of the institution's life. Implemented as a Whole Institution Initiative (WII), this must be accompanied by clear Intent, Investment, and Infrastructure (3Is), connecting strategy, policy, and day-to-day practices at all levels and functions of the institution, thus, moving it away from being a standalone function to being fully embedded in the institution's structure.

Though the research is focussed on one institution, the final five themes and individual sub-themes identified from the research should be useful to any higher education professional in academic programme management and faculty management when examining their own practice and exploring ways for internationalising their specific areas that include and addresses the needs of all stakeholders. The suggested framework for Internationalisation (Figure 3) and the organisation map (Figure 4) are useful theoretical contributions towards conceptualising inclusive internationalisation in the context of higher education institutions.

These can be useful tools in developing comprehensive internationalisation plans and activities of universities. Understanding what makes for an attractive array of international activities can help those with curriculum delivery, management responsibilities, and policymakers in universities and national education systems mobilise resources, design, and deliver successful programmes that ensure global engagement whilst maintaining local relevance, thus paving the way for inclusive internationalisation.

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Ethical Approval and Conflict of Interest

This is a self-funded project. The manuscript was prepared in accordance with the Helsinki protocol, which the Birmingham Newman University Research Ethics Committee approved. And I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Informed Consent

As already stated, interviews commenced only after formal ethical approval was received from the University's Research Ethics Committee. All participants were fully informed about the research through a Participant Information Sheet, and their signed consent for participation in the interviews was taken before the commencement of the actual interview itself. Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the interview at any stage were made explicit in the Participant Information Sheet. Since the interviews were all audio recorded, participants were explicitly informed about this and given the option of declining to be audio recorded.

Data Availability Statement

Data would be made available upon request

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the support from the participants of the study and the case university for enabling the study.