

# Increasing the quality and effectiveness of the management of internationalisation

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESSES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN FINLAND



NATIONAL BOARD  
OF EDUCATION

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## **Dear reader,**

At the end of 2007, the Finnish National Board of Education and the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) began a research on the internationalisation of vocational education. The research was carried out in cooperation with the Vocational Teacher Education Unit of the Häme University of Applied Sciences. The present abridged report was written on the basis of the full research report published in Finnish.

Previous studies on internationalisation have focussed on the influence of the state support on the internationalisation of vocational basic education. The present research, however, focussed on the strategy work of the educational institutes. The purpose of the research was to find out how international activities manifest themselves in the strategies and practical work of the providers of vocational education and vocational education institutes and how the results of these activities are utilised. The research includes conclusions and recommendations for facilitating and supporting international activities. These are directed at the education providers, educational institutes and public authorities.

Finland faces opportunities but also challenges that must be met by vocational education, both brought on by the environment that is becoming more and more international. It is particularly important to invest in ongoing development of education and skills and knowledge, so that we can strengthen the competitiveness of the Finnish working life and education in an international environment. This has been stated as the aim of internationalisation of vocational education in the Research plan for education and research approved by the Finnish Government. On the level of the European Union, the aims have been defined by the Copenhagen declaration. These aims include the improvement of the quality and appeal of vocational education and the facilitation of the mobility of vocational education students and those with vocational qualifications. Recognising qualifications and their transparency as well as the information transfer related to those are also an important part of this development.

The aims mentioned above manifest themselves in the bases of the curricula for the vocational basic education and the vocational qualifications. When the bases are renewed, skills and knowledge related to internationalisation are included in the key skills of lifelong learning. The idea is to provide the students with even better readiness to work both in the ever-internationalising jobs in their home country as well as to work abroad. The globalisation of the economic life and the extending integration of Europe increase mobility and competition for skilled



workforce. In addition, the educational institutes are becoming more multicultural which demands new skills and knowledge from the teachers. The challenges and requirements concerning the language and communication skills and knowledge about various cultures of those working in professions are ever increasing.

The vocational education institutes have been involved in international cooperation for a long time, but the degrees of internationalisation still vary significantly. In many educational institutes, international activities are a part of the everyday functions, while for others, internationalisation is still in its early stage. We hope that the present report will provide the education providers and the management of educational institutes with some guidance in developing education and international cooperation.

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## Introduction

This publication is based on a research project, which was aimed at finding out how international activities can be seen in the practical everyday work of the secondary level education providers and institutes and what kind of benefits these kinds of activities produce. In addition, the study explored how international activities are led from the point of view of organisational strategies and resources and how the activities show up in curricula and education. This publication also presents various kinds of models of internationalisation and their characteristics. The final chapter of the publication presents recommendations for the support and development of international activities.



The methods used for gathering the data for the present research were qualitative in nature. This approach was chosen because it was known that the international activities of different education providers vary extensively. The transferability and applicability of the results should be considered from a local perspective.

The research was carried out by Häme University of Applied Sciences, Vocational Teacher Education Unit during 1st November 2007 – 31st August 2008. The research was carried out through a questionnaire and interviews, as well as a document analysis of the internationalisation strategies and other documents evincing the strategic planning of internationalisation activities provided by the education providers.

## Concepts of internationalisation

The concepts internationalisation and multiculturalism can have a wide variety of meanings, and are therefore not easy to define.

In the development plan of education and research for 2007–2012 by the Finnish Government, globalisation is seen as an opportunity to advance both the national and international wellbeing. Thus, the educational system ought to not only support the creation of new workplaces in Finland but also to provide the people and the economic life with the readiness to adapt to the changes caused by globalisation. (Ministry of Education 2007, 5–14.)

According to the above-mentioned development plan, the aim of cooperation is to improve the effectiveness and quality of vocational education, increase the appeal of vocational education and vocational skills and knowledge in Europe. The purpose is to increase the comparability of degrees within the EU. Another aim is to increase the mobility of the vocational education students and teaching staff by 30 % per year. Particular attention is paid to teachers' international working life periods. In addition, the intention is to further the cooperation pertaining to vocational education with the countries outside the European Union. During the planning period, the aim is to increase workforce immigration, with the purpose being to partly compensate for the numbers of the elderly retiring from the working life. (Ministry of Education 2007, 10–39.)

Since 1995, internationalisation has been seen as a tool for development in vocational education. This view has been based on the aims pertaining to mobility and development of such projects as Leonardo, Socrates and Nordplus. Both types of projects have always emphasised innovation and how activities further develop the of education in an educational institute locally, nationally and in Europe. (M. Saarinen, personal communication 22.5.2008) (See also e.g. Nyyssölä 2000, 6–7 and Mahlamäki-Kultanen 2003).

However, the present research shows that even when development is partly successful, the challenges of internationalisation for many educational institutes still lie in teacher expert exchange and in integrating internationalism into pedagogy. In educational events connected to internationalisation, this is referred to as so-called new internationalisation where internationalisation should be viewed more extensively as a development tool and a source of innovation for the Finnish education (Mattila 2007). This indicates that even though various projects include expertise,

and pedagogy and even the entire organisation are strongly developed (see Mahlamäki-Kultanen 2003), this kind of development work has not yet taken root in our vocational education.

The manual for internationalisation of schools published by the Finnish National Board of Education and CIMO (2008, 5) states that internationalisation is not a value in itself in education but rather an opportunity for better learning: for improving the language skills and knowledge about various cultures, for flexibility, for problem solving skills and for the growth of self-understanding and self-confidence. This could be taken to mean that while the mobility of students is important, another aim of internationalisation is to strengthen the multicultural cooperation within Finland.

Multicultural skills and knowledge are an essential part of vocational skills. They have been integrated into the practices of every professional field. This means that different fields are seen as part of global economy and that there exist skills and knowledge to work effectively in different kinds of work environments. The multiculturalism resulting from immigration can be seen also as a phenomenon that enriches the prevalent culture and not only as a marginally tolerated phenomenon. This is how integration can take place reciprocally. (Lasonen 2005.) Therefore, interaction between cultures and furthering this interaction can also take place through the means of so-called home internationalisation.

As a renewing factor, multiculturalism questions the usual practices in curricula and administration. This approach to reforming education emphasises the re-evaluation of structures, education policy and strategies, contents and methods by reflecting on the standard practices and their bearing on the social, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. A school with multiple values can work as a development environment for a new kind of citizenship. (Lasonen 2005.)

## Research methods

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The research is divided into three main parts:

- the analysis of the strategy documents
  - questionnaire
  - case study
- 

In order to gather the research data, a request was sent by the research group to 115 vocational education providers and some big individual vocational institutes (for example the vocational institutes of the City of Helsinki). The education providers to be approached were selected so that the gathered data would cover the entire country geographically and so that it would also cover as many types of



education providers as possible. In addition, attention was paid to ensure that the target group included education providers from cities and rural areas and that the education providers included municipalities, regional councils and private parties. The statistics from the beginning of 2008 list a total of 175 education providers, so the study covered the field very well.

About 60 education providers responded to the request of strategy documents and 29 of the delivered documents were actual strategy documents, or closely related to strategy documents. The gathered strategy and internationalisation plan documents were analysed with the help of Nvivo qualitative data analysis program and the strategy map of Norton and Kaplan (2000, 2004) was used as the frame of reference for the analysis. The documents that were left outside the analysis were listings of international projects, descriptions of exchange programs as they lacked the goal-orientation and development focus expected from strategy documents. All the received documents were part of a more generic typification analysis.

A total of 107 organisations were invited to respond to an online Webropol questionnaire. The questionnaire was filled by 81 respondents – 76 % of the target group. In addition, a case study was made on seven organisations who took part in the study. The organisations were picked for the case study mainly on basis of their existing international activities and whose good practices were deemed to be useful for others.

## Results

### Strategy map analysis

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The analysis of the strategy documents from the point of view of Kaplan and Norton's (2000, 2004) strategy map showed that although the map has originally been developed for business life, it is also useful for the analysis of the strategies of education providers. The strategy map has four levels of analysis, or points of view:

- 1) The economical point of view
  - 2) The client point of view
  - 3) The internal point of view
  - 4) Organisation's own learning and the development of skills.
- 

The analysis of the documents aimed to find out how the different aspects of the strategy map were represented on the strategy documents of the education providers as far as it came to their internationalisation activities.

**1) The economical point of view** was taken into account in most strategy documents; after all the people who usually write up strategy documents are often in



leadership positions and responsible for the budget. Price and awareness of the costs were apparent particularly in the way that the strategy documents pointed out the poor size of the school's budget or how it results in limitations in the development of international activities, or in the way that the strategy documents listed the costs caused by international activities. The general source for outside funding was stated to be project funding.

**The improvement of the internationalisation of education is considered important, but the documents do not address the means of how it is going to be achieved.**

**2) The client point of view** was also very evident in all the strategy documents. The main focus was on student clients, not on the working life as a client. The documents emphasised the students' perspective on the availability of international experiences and improving the selection as well as developing the quality of education. The significance that international activities have for the brand of the education provider was easy to detect in the documents. Where comments pertaining to the development of services were made, the most important issue seemed to be the image of the school in international activities, not so much the improvement of the school's activities.

Even though improving the quality of education was often mentioned in the documents, the means for the development were rarely mentioned. As to the availability of the international experiences and extending the selection, it was mainly increasing study periods abroad as well as language and cultural studies that was emphasised. Aims were set high, but the means for reaching these aims received no consideration. In the more practical documents, plans were made, for example, to use virtual learning in international networking, in which case study courses from abroad could be offered to the students. In addition, home internationalisation, that is, taking international and multicultural issues into consideration in teaching in Finland, was taken into account in these more detailed strategy documents.

**The strategies generally lack risk analysis and the means to solve the risks.**

**3) The internal point of view** was divided into four main areas. However, a more detailed analysis showed that within these areas, the documents focussed on only a few issues that were considered important.

*A) The management processes* received more attention than other issues. However, producing services and risk management were given no particular consideration. For example, the strategy documents mentioned no risk factors that might endanger the activities, except for the lack of resources. Thus, possible solutions in case risks were to take place were not analysed.



B) The documents included in the analysis contained only a few comments on *client management processes*, and the content of those few comments was nearly always the aim to increase international activities by increasing student exchange.

C) Fairly many documents paid attention to *innovation processes*. The majority of these comments focussed on planning and development work. These included mentions of international activities other than student exchange, such as teacher exchange, plans for extending the international network and developing teaching material. On the other hand, the recognition of new opportunities and product development thinking were virtually non-existent.

D) The strategies paid little attention to *legal or social processes*. Only one strategy document included the word environmentalism, but no actions were mentioned in relation to this topic. Neither safety nor health was ever mentioned. Employment, however, received some consideration: the education providers mentioned that they are producing good employees for the companies in their area by strengthening their international activities.

It is interesting to note that although the internationalisation of the working life has been a prominent theme in recent discussions, the educational institutes did not emphasise their role in the internationalisation of the working life in their regions. In addition, environmentalism was not considered from, for example, the point of



view of the environmental perspective of mobility or as a professional requisite that could be acquired abroad.

4) Organisation's own learning and the increase of skills and knowledge received commendable attention. The further training of teachers and particularly their language skills as well as their knowledge about other cultures and skills in encountering foreign students were considered important by the education providers. Where management was mentioned, the comments usually dealt with the management and evaluation of the international activities in the organisation and the assessment tools used in evaluation. Where developing the organisational culture was mentioned, the comments usually focussed on how to integrate international activities and thinking in the organisational culture, that is, internationalisation in everyday work.

**Organisational learning is emphasised especially by supporting teachers to take part in further education that supports the internationalisation activities.**

## Typifying the education providers according to their internationalisation

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The internationalisation strategies and plans were also analysed by typification method. On the basis of the received data, the education providers could be typified into four main groups depending on how the strategies, plans and descriptions of activities are used to keep the value-related internationalisation promises. One typical feature was that the internationalisation can be seen as a phenomenon covering an individual educational institute rather than something covering the entire education provider. These main groups were

- 1) educational institutes with home-based internationalisation
  - 2) educational institutes internationalising at the rate of their local working life partners
  - 3) educational institutes strongly involved in international networking process
  - 4) international educational institutes.
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However, it should be pointed out that typification always gives a simplified view on any given matter, and that in the present case, the documents are the only source of information. Even so, a simplified classification can provide us with some food for thought and work as a catalyst for change.

An education organiser or an educational institute may well find features characteristic of itself from more than one main category – defining strict boundaries between the groups is impossible because of the widely varying activities and local nature of the various education providers and educational institutes.

**1) Educational institutes with home-based internationalisation** emphasise knowledge about various cultures and customs in the form of, for example, theme weeks and culinary culture. It is fairly easy for the students to find work in the local companies and services of the public sector. In this case, internationalisation means studies included in the curriculum, such as language studies.

The education providers and the educational institutes in this group have not necessarily made an internationalisation plan or strategy, and they often face a threat of shortage of students. They do not necessarily actively seek support for their international activities.

**Educational institutes internationalising at the rate of their local working life partners develop their international activities as a response to the needs of the local working life.**

**2) The educational institutes that have internationalised at the rate of their local working life partners** increase their international activities as a response to the pressure from the local working life. Therefore, internationalisation is mostly seen as studies included in the curriculum, and the main emphasis is on vocational education. Internationalism is emphasised no more than it is in the working life organisations belonging to the stakeholders. However, home internationalisation and international activities often have a more central role than they do in the home internationalised educational institutes. Some of these educational organisations train many immigrants and foreign employees of the stakeholders.

**3) In the educational institutes strongly involved in international networking processes,** internationalisation is a part of everyday activities, and networking with other education providers is often automatically regarded as something that improves the quality of education. The documents do not show the benefits that a student can derive from the networks of the education provider. These education providers have numerous international development projects that are used to expand the networks with educational institutes, among other things. The activities are often based on an extensive internationalisation plan or strategy. The educational institutes have many students from immigration backgrounds and the atmosphere is international. Support for developing international activities is actively sought from the National Board of Education and various EU programmes.

The education providers differ from each other in the proactiveness or passiveness of their international activities.

**4) The international educational institutes** have long-standing, permanent cooperation relationships with other educational institutes, companies and other stakeholders. The educational institutes actively seek support for international activities from the National Board of Education and various EU programmes. The international activities are based on an internationalisation plan or strategy that has been honed and changed over the years. However, the strategy documents are not necessarily particularly extensive but rather of good quality with content that makes sense.

The four types differ from each other in the nature of their international activities: whether it is proactive or passive. It seems that the internationalisation pressure from the working life in the environment reflects itself in how active the international activities of an education provider are.

## Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire sent to the persons responsible for the international activities and named by the education providers was to seek answers to the question how international activities manifest themselves in practice. In addition, questions were asked about national and international networks and their functionality from the perspective of education providers. An invitation to participate in the research was sent by email. 76 % of the people to whom the questionnaire was sent, responded, which can be considered rather satisfactory.

The questionnaire part of the research yields a much more diverse and extensive picture of international activities than the one provided by the strategy plans. Therefore, the level of activities is of better quality than that of the strategic planning – at least as far as conclusions can be made based on the 29 internationalisation strategies and 60 documents describing strategic planning that could be obtained in the present research. Interesting and in some ways contradictory is the fact that, according to the international coordinators who answered the questionnaire, the internationalisation strategies and plans are the central documents that, in addition to the curricula, direct the international activities.



**The survey research revealed more high-quality international activities than the strategy documents led to expect.**

According to the responses, the Finnish education providers began to actively engage in international activities around the time when Finland joined the European Union. For the most part, the international activities have been formed through project activities, international student and teacher exchange and immigrant students.

Project activities are seen as the basis of international activities. In many educational institutes offering vocational basic training, the emphasis is on organising international on-the-job learning which is considered an established part of international activities. Training directed at the immigrant students and multicultural student groups is also a part of the international activities. For the most part, the educational institutes have engaged in international cooperation with the European countries, but a few respondents also mentioned cooperation with other regions, for example, Russia, Asia, Canada, India, Africa and Latin America.

Among the education providers' activities, internationalisation is prioritised, but it receives too little attention when economic and work resources are considered. International activities are mainly funded by an education provider's own funds, the Leonardo da Vinci programme and internationalisation grants issued by the National Board of Education. The majority of the respondents state that outside funding has secured them versatile project activities and the mobility of students and teachers.

Further outside support for funding would be more than welcome. For the most part, funding will be sought to support the mobility of students and teachers, but also for developing the quality of teaching. The respondents hope that the procedures for applying for funding and reporting would be less bureaucratic, easier and less laborious. Further support is needed for the cooperation with the countries outside the EU. Due to the long distances, the respondents in the northern regions wish for more funding also for the commute expenses.

Approximately one half of the respondents estimated that the international activities will expand, grow and develop. Particular attempts will be made to increase the mobility of students and teachers. One of the guidelines for development that has been mentioned is increasing on-the-job learning positions outside the EU. The support received from outside the education providers, particularly from CIMO and the National Board of Education, is regarded as good. In addition, support for networking is considered important. Networked cooperation is particularly important for small education providers and educational institutes.



## Case analyses

One part of the present research included eight case studies. The data was gathered by using an unstructured thematic interview. Internationalised education providers from various parts of Finland were chosen for the case analyses. The educational institutes chosen as the cases were Helsinki City College of Technology, Vocational Institute of Järvisuoni, Vocational Education Centre Sedu, Vocational Institute of Kouvola, Helsinki Culinary School Perho, Vocational Education Centre of the Sami Regions, Turku Vocational Institute, and the Education Department of the City of Helsinki. The case educational institutes are either educational institutes strongly involved in network process or international education providers and educational institutes.

According to the experiences, the best ways to motivate students to study abroad are other students' experiences and home-based internationalisation activities. For example, integrating foreign students into Finnish classrooms lowers the threshold of speaking a foreign language. In addition, student tutoring activities with international students is a popular form of home-based internationalisation.

All the education providers emphasised a student's social balance when planning an exchange. What matters most

**The best means to inspire students to seek student exchange opportunities are the experiences of other students and home-based internationalisation activities, such as the integration of immigrant students into Finnish groups.**

is that the studies have proceeded as planned. The required language skills depend on the study field. The students and teachers in technology and transport are hardest to motivate for exchange. On the other hand there are possibilities, for it is precisely the students of technology and transport who have been particularly active recently in the (World) Skills competitions. Mobility is expected to increase naturally in all fields when the networks become more established. It seems that the new directions in the educational institutes involved in the case study are Russia and China.

The commitment of the management was considered very important. In addition, the commitment and enthusiasm of the entire personnel has an important role in successful activities. Many educational institutes stated that there were significant differences between the teachers' interest in international contacts. The answers reveal that there are study fields where the students hardly ever participate in exchange because the teachers do not consider it important and their attitudes are transferred to the students.

**The personal interest of teachers towards international activities affects the activity of students to seek more international experiences.**

According to some educational institutes involved in the case study, the mobility of teachers often depends on money, but sometimes the language skills (or rather, the lack of them) of teachers prevent them from engaging in exchange. In addition, the arrangements that must be made to find a substitute might create difficulties for teacher exchange. To facilitate teacher mobility, it is hoped that funding was easier to access.

In addition, international activities that are often engaged in on a voluntary basis ought to deserve some compensation. When teacher mobility is concerned, so-called educational tourism, that is, visits that result in no deeper cooperation, are generally not favoured. The time used on international activities ought to be resourced and included in the budget, and the internationalisation strategy ought to include follow-ups so that the activities can be redirected when necessary.

Networking with the working life is still seeking its form. The most part of that networking still means arranging on-the-job learning positions. For instance, the Helsinki Culinary School Perho works closely with companies. Many restaurant businesses are happy to have foreign students working for them in order to improve the language skills of their personnel. As the work-based immigration has increased, cooperation between educational institutes and companies has been recognised as a trustworthy way of training foreign workforce for Finnish companies. One area of development in international cooperation are the vocational qualifications, the practices of which are expected to be clarified.

## Equality of students

The strategy documents included in the present research show that the organisations are aware of the fact that when it comes to internationalisation, not all students are equal when participation in international exchanges is considered. Going abroad for one's studies or on-the-job learning periods may bring added value to some students, but not always to all those who are willing.

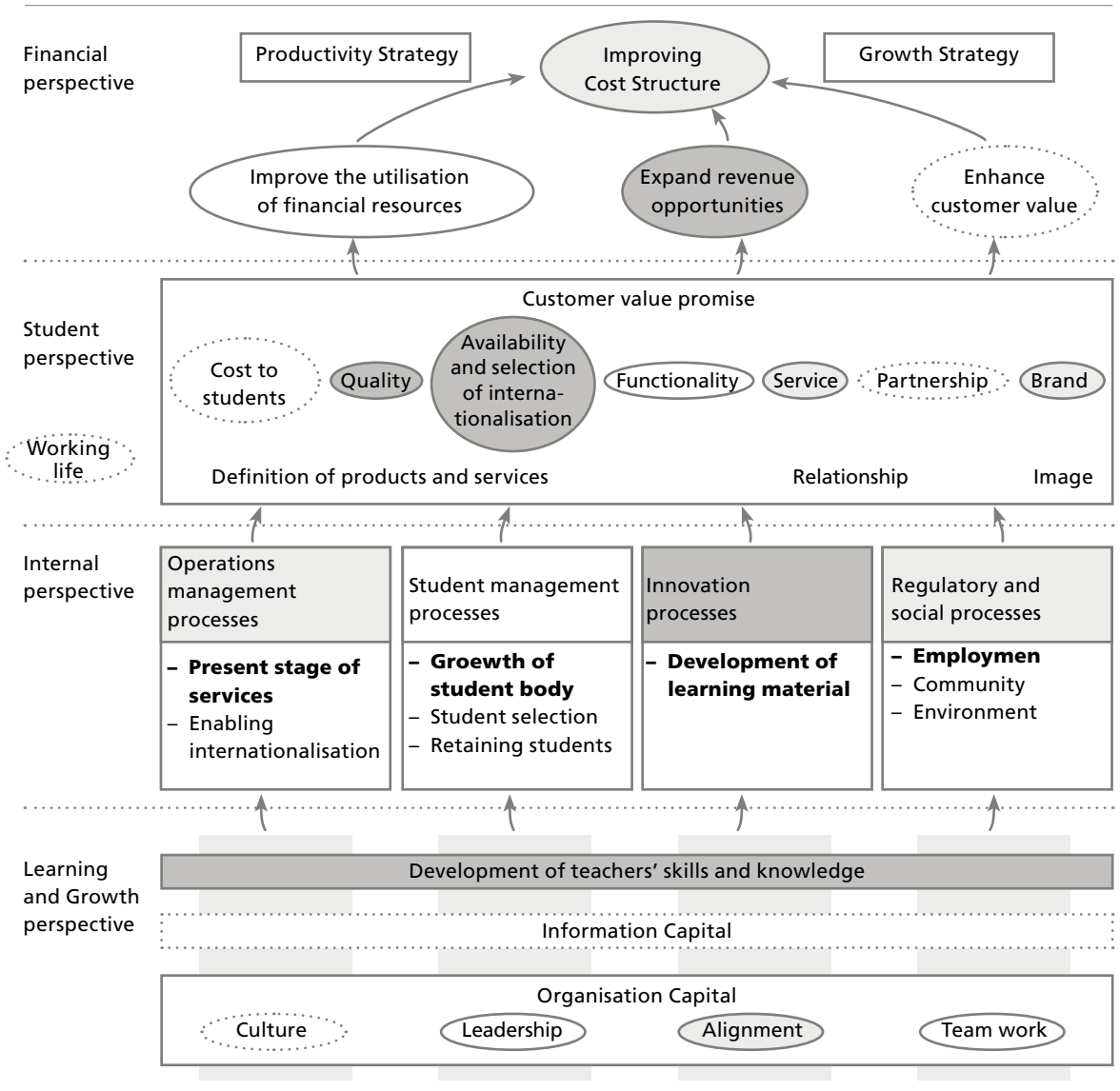
On the basis of the internationalisation strategies, there seem to be no generally agreed, common criteria for choosing participants into international exchange programs. Apparently, the education providers make their decisions on case-by-case basis. The selection criteria often include study success and progress, language skills and the student's own activity. One factor preventing all students from being equal is the financial situation of the students. The funding that the education providers grant for on-the-job learning periods does not normally cover all expenses.

On the basis of the internationalisation strategies, the equality of students does not seem to have improved much since 2004 (cf. Virtanen & Jauhola 2004). Only a few plans describe quantitative aims at least on some level, but these cases often lack the practical description of how these aims can be reached. However, the growth oriented aims clearly show that the organisations are aware of the problem of equality and are striving to improve the situation. The strategy documents must be commended on clearly paying attention also to the possibilities that the home internationalisation creates for increasing the international experiences of the students.



## Conclusions and discussion

The following figure summarises how the various levels of the strategy map by Kaplan and Norton (2004) were emphasised in the documents included in the



The content of the documents included in the NVivo analysis compared to the strategy map by Norton and Kaplan (2000, 2004).



NVivo analysis. The summary is based on the number of documents that, of all 29 documents analysed, dealt with each topic and how thoroughly these topics were discussed. The figure illustrates the topics in the following manner: those topics that were often present in the strategy documents and internationalisation plans (included in over 20 documents) are marked in a darker colour. A lighter grey marks the topics handled in 11–20 documents, and on the white background can be seen the topics that were mentioned in ten or fewer documents. A dotted line marks the topics that were hardly ever mentioned in the documents.

The analysed documents pay fairly equal attention to the various main areas of the strategy map, but inside these main areas, only certain individual topics were focussed on. From the economical point of view, extending financial resources and utilising economical resources received more attention than any other topic, while improving value to the client was all but neglected. The client point of view emphasised the perspective of the students, while the other potential client, the working life, was only considered from the perspective of employment. In the student point of view, the main attention was given to the quality of the international activities and their availability and selection. In addition, creating a brand or an image and the functionality of the services were considered important.

The figure also shows that the main focus in the internal point of view is on the innovation processes and particularly the development of teaching materials. Management of activities as well as the legal and social perspectives are taken into account to some extent. When the student management processes are considered, attention is given mostly only to increasing the numbers of students participating in the international activities.

In the point of view of the organisational learning and growth, the main attention is focussed on the development of teachers' skills and knowledge. The aims and plans described in the strategy documents rarely had any connection to the practical work – or at least no means for reaching the aims were mentioned. The education providers and educational institutes who do not consciously analyse their ways of

internationalisation may not necessarily be able to guarantee equal internationalisation opportunities for their students.

Both the NVivo analysis based on the strategy map by Kaplan and Norton and the typification of the strategy documents and internationalisation plans emphasised the fact that a significant number of education providers and educational institutes lack a real internationalisation strategy. What gives cause for concern is that only 29 strategy documents and plans were received from the organisations to whom a request was sent. In most cases, international activities were included in a short comment in the general strategy of the education provider or the educational institute. On the other hand, the research showed that in reality, international activities are generally more extensive and of a better quality than what the strategic plans lead to expect. In the future, particular attention should be paid to the fact that the education providers and the educational institutes concentrate on strategic planning and its transparency on the operative level so that the plans and their realisation are linked.

**Strategy documents need to be improved so that they authentically link plans with activities – a strategy is not merely a vision or a description of a wish condition.**

Those education providers and educational institutes who have a strong desire to become international, also regard internationalisation as an important competition asset both in Finland and abroad. When internationalisation and intense networking are viewed with no criticism whatsoever, they are often taken to mean the same as a better quality of education and learning. Furthermore, competition for students, for internationalisation funding and for participation in EU programmes is contradictory to what ought to be the basis of internationalisation: balanced cooperation between the educational institutes. Those education providers and educational institutes who are truly international provide all their students with an opportunity to study and work abroad.

According to the questionnaire that was included in the present research, integral parts of the development and sustainment of international activities include utilising steering and management processes, the commitment of the management, and that all teachers participate in one way or another in the activities. In their study, Virtanen and Jauhola (2004, 16) point out that a written strategy is no more than pretty words if sufficient resources are not allotted to the activities. Since the curricula already state the aim of guaranteeing the equal opportunities for all students to participate in international activities, it ought to be the duty of every teacher to

invest in this. An important means to change attitudes is to include international themes into the pedagogic training of teachers.

The quality management and the feedback systems of international activities are still largely based on feedback questionnaires that are usually directed at the students who have participated in exchange. Therefore, the feedback systems are not particularly versatile or sophisticated. It can be concluded that the evaluation of international activities, development of the feedback systems and utilising the feedback are areas that deserve more consideration in the future. According to the answers to the questionnaire of the present research, one important strategic opportunity to internationalise the education is to better utilise the tools of home-based internationalisation.

**Networks can help decrease expenses by the transfer of good practices, shared projects and as a source of good on-the-job learning positions.**



The results of the questionnaire show that networking is used to find and share good practices, to save resources by preparing projects together with others, and to find reliable on-the-job training positions. Therefore, networking is seen as vitally important, particularly for small educational institutes, also in the future. The results also show a desire to network particularly with regions outside Europe, for example, Russia. According to Virtanen and Jauhola (2004, 16), teacher mobility is primarily connected to the on-the-job training positions and familiarisation with education, preparatory visits and participation in students' on-the-job training and education. On the basis of the results of the present research, it seems that the number of teachers' practical work experience exchanges abroad and the expert exchange involving teaching in an educational institute abroad is still too low. Thus, it can be concluded that joint, international development of pedagogy and expertise is still part of the future rather than the present in secondary level vocational education.

**Short-term group trips give an opportunity to provide international experiences to a larger student groups.**

If a student has insufficient readiness for studying or on-the-job training abroad, shorter exchanges with a group of other students offer a good way of gaining more experience. Since a student's personal financial situation can be an obstacle, a support system would enable the educational institutes and education providers to provide all students with an equal opportunity to participate in international exchange. The coordinators also hoped that the teachers would participate in international activities more evenly so that information about the exchange opportunities would be more equally distributed among the students.

According to the persons responsible for the international activities, in general all students had a theoretical chance to apply for exchange. The selection was often made on the basis of study success and language skills. According to Virtanen and Jauhola (2004, 20), the educational institutes favoured students with good language skills and other talents when choosing the students for exchange. When these criteria are considered, the situation seems to have changed: according to the present research, a criterion more important than study success these days seems to be the fact that a student has proceeded in his/her studies according to the schedule. In addition, the level of language skills acquired in comprehensive school, independent of the grade received there, seems to be sufficient when students are selected for exchange.

# Recommendations Towards multicultural vocational education



## Recommendations to the education providers

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This chapter presents various recommendations to vocational institutes and education providers about how they could improve their international activities and planning in the future. The recommendations arise from the findings of the research that the previous chapters have described.

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### Strategy documents and practical work

The research revealed that the descriptions and plans of international activities presented in the strategy documents were often presented in a very generic manner and they did not necessarily conform with the descriptions received from the people working in international affairs. The strategy documents revealed a clear attempt to keep the descriptions intangible and exaggerate the international activities of the organisation, which made the document read well, but decreased the worth of the document in the development and planning of the organisation's practical work. This difference between the strategy documents and practice led to a situation where the documents made some organisations seem internationalised although the real situation was that the organisation was aiming to reach that goal, and vice versa.

**Strategy documents that have little connection with the real situation are a hindrance to the organisational development, because the real areas requiring development may not be seen as they look good on paper.**

Strategy documents describing the internationalisation activities of an organisation should include practical goals and actions, including the development of control and steering/supervision structures and the practical application of the steering structures in the organisation as well as in national and international networks. The strategy documents should include clear descriptions of the resources for practical activities, the roles of the actors (including rectors or management), the principles of how

the international affairs team works, development meetings, and the schedule for the renewal of the goals of the activities. When the strategy documents include commitment to practical field work, it will also commit the personnel to those goals. This way, the internationalisation activities will become an important part of the education and development in the organisation.



A goal could be that internationalisation and multiculturality will show up in the organisation's overall strategy and curricula as well as in the possible separate internationalisation strategy. In addition, separate internationalisation plans could be developed that would be more often revised and show the most concrete level of planning. The sharing of work in international activities can be studied from many perspectives, but it is important to make the principles transparent and make sure that the different education fields and stakeholders commit to the work as well as to ensure that the international work does not become too personified to a single worker or a single team of workers.

Commitment on a strategic level, transparent and documented work models, making visible the tacit knowledge, experiences and networks, sharing skills and knowledge all work together to ensure the continuity of the international activities even through periods of change.



## The focus of the strategy documents

The research revealed that the strategy documents focussed largely on the growth aspect of the internationalisation strategy. This was seen as a natural focus, given that the internationalisation process was in its beginning phases in most organisations and that student mobility, which was the focus of many documents, currently concerns only about 10 % of the yearly student intake. In this pressure and enthusiasm for growth, the strategy documents often lacked in the area of quality assurance and content of the activities, the consideration of which would strengthen the organisation. These areas included, for example, risk analysis, solutions to possible risks, environmental effects of student mobility as well as safety and health.

**In the great pressure of growth of international activities, the content and quality of the activities may receive too little attention.**

The position of the organisation in relation to the operational environment and as the internationalizing agent in the area was often overlooked. Vocational institutes do not only train students who are able to work in international tasks and multicultural teams – they could also take a clearer responsibility of the future of their co-operating companies and the affect of the international activities to them. Similarly the consideration of the region in which the organisation works would be beneficial to the strategy documents. Even those documents that did consider the surrounding area had often copied the text from the city or regional strategies without having done any work to interpret these considerations from their own organisations' point of view.

**Vocational education providers could take a more active responsibility of the future and internationalisation of their working life partners.**

## More effective home-based internationalisation

Too often internationalisation is seen only as teacher and student mobility (i.e. exchanges) from Finland to elsewhere. There are, however, exchange students coming to Finland as well and there are more and more immigrants from other cultures living and studying in Finland and her schools: for example, in some schools in Helsinki, the ratio of immigrant students and learners is in tens of percents. It would be possible to practice more international activities all around Finland – other than, and in addition to, the food culture weeks at school restaurants – and enhance their quality and effectiveness. Some means could include group lectures organised through school twinning or web-based learning activities, introductory lectures and seminars about the cultures and ways of work in other countries and the inclusion of these themes into the learning materials in the classrooms, introduc-



**The goal of the international activities should be multi-cultural Finland – not just a multi-cultural student, vocational institute or education provider.**

tions of the job opportunities on the international market and the inclusion of presentation videos and web pages of international employers.

It is possible that the present research did not detect all the forms of international activities at schools, since the interviews and questionnaires were conducted with the international affairs personnel and not classroom teachers. It is possible that the international affairs personnel are not completely aware of what takes place in the classroom education of different fields so this information was not available to the researchers. In general, the strategy documents should be developed to include all the international activities that an organisation may have, including that which is included in the learning materials that teachers use. International activities should be provided with enough resources to make sure that the international affairs personnel have time to participate in the planning and development of vocational education and that they know what the education consists of.

The goal of all international activities should be multicultural Finland – not just multicultural students, vocational institute or education provider.



## Equality of students in exchanges

The possibilities of international exchanges are not realised equally to all students in different fields and in different schools. Unfortunately, it is often dependent on the personal interest of the teacher how much the students will be told of their possibilities for international exchanges. However, according to the national core curricula, all teachers should inform and support their students for international on-the-job periods independent of how interested the teachers themselves are about it.

On the other hand, it is not possible to offer learning or on-the-job placements for all students and choices have to be made. The criteria used includes, for example, school performance, language skills, internal motivation and general activity. Schools often stress learning outcomes and language skills in their choices, which may not support the equality of students in these situations. Internal motivation and activity are difficult to assess during the application process although it is not possible to make a favourable decision if the student does not profess at least some level of motivation and initiative (by applying in the first place). But the schooling/training should also prepare the students for the competition that waits for them on the job market.

The chances of students to take part in international activities would also be enhanced if there were a more varied choice of activities to participate in. For example, group on-the-job learning, long training and possible short exchanges might give more chances for participation to those students who cannot commit to exchanges that last for several months.

Language skills requirements should be considered according to the demands of the studied field. In some fields it is possible to get along with the language skills acquired in primary education. In addition to the learning outcomes, schools should also probably consider the timeliness of studies and the supportive, motivating effect of the exchange. Some students who have performed less perfectly in their studies may find new motivation in an international exchange. From the point of view of equality, standard selection criteria is good to have, but the final decisions should be made with development and learning needs in mind. Also the life situation, health and preconditions for living in a foreign country should be taken into account. It should be realised that the criteria for this sort of selection process is an effective strategic tool.



## Improvement of the quality and feedback systems

Both the strategy document analysis and the interviews showed that the only feedback channel of international exchanges and activities that the management may see are questionnaires that students respond to, or the reports that they write when they have returned from on-the-job exchange. It also appears that this feedback channel is not working properly, as the opinions and ideas of the students are not related to the management of the organisation. This area is in a clear need of development.

**The feedback channels of students who have participated in international activities should be developed.**

When one reads the students' descriptions of their experiences from international exchanges, one realises that there is not a place in the world where Finnish students have not visited. All of the students have positive experiences and they are willing to share them with others. These experiences cannot be fully reported to the developers of international activities in the form of standardized questionnaires or reports. If the students were somehow involved more deeply in the planning and development of international activities with the international affairs personnel or organisational management, new pathways for development would be opened that might be missed if the students are not heard.

## Resources for international activities

The research pointed out that the resources committed to international activities varies greatly between the vocational institutes and education providers. It is natural that small organisations do not have the same possibilities to invest resources on the development of their international activities as larger organisations do. However, the research shows that the resources targeted to these activities in practice are often smaller than could be interpreted from public speeches. International activities are a great tool in the improvement of the organisation's image, but, in most organisations, there still are not enough resources to hire a full-time worker to take care of the international affairs: 60 % of the respondents were at least half-time workers, while 28.5 per cent were full-time employees. Naturally, this should be viewed in respect of other central areas of development in each organisation.

On the other hand, limiting the international affairs work to the responsibilities of a single person may in itself cause problems to an organisation. In such situations, international activities and related education of international themes will not be seen as a shared responsibility of all teachers, but rather it will be dependent of the personal interest of each teacher. Sometimes the international trips of the international affairs personnel may even cause envy and other problems in the work community.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the researchers that it would be beneficial to the education providers to launch a so-called international affairs team, including representatives from the various fields of education and training so that they could all bring their input into the development of the international activities. When such a team is comprised of both teachers and international affairs personnel, their work will create a comprehensive picture of the international activities of the organisation including both the teachers' work in the classrooms as well as student exchanges. In the best possible situation, internationalisation will become a comprehensive work method in the organisation and, for example, international trips would involve the people with the highest familiarity and expertise in the substance area required in that particular work meeting or trip.

**A good international relations team brings together the international activities from different levels of organisation and they become the core operation method for the whole organisation.**

## Pedagogical development

The research revealed various forms of home internationalisation and some pedagogical solutions. Because the respondents in the questionnaire phase of the research were mainly international affairs coordinators, whose work responsibilities focussed on projects and exchanges, the researchers did not get a full picture of the internationality of classroom vocational education. It seems however, that this area is in need of much development and there is room, for example, for web-based learning solutions.

The international education of students can be supported by, for example, international theme weeks, fairs and events, involvement in the reception of international guests and planning the events organised for them, tutoring exchange students, and the utilisation of the knowledge of the immigrant students. It is important to utilize this kind of experience in a way that allows it to be an official part of the students' studies and that it is pedagogically planned. In addition to the teachers also the possible international affairs coordinators in the organisation should be involved in this planning, because they have a lot of knowledge from the area as well as extensive networks.





## Recognition of internationality and internationalisation skills and knowledge

Also the recognition and record keeping of the students' acquired skills and knowledge of international themes should be developed. Traditionally, clear statistics have been acquired from student exchanges, but it would be important to devise ways in which data could also be accrued of all the other kinds of international experience so that it could be used in the statistical analyses of the functioning of the organisation, but also to allow it to be recorded in the diplomas that the students receive at the end of their studies.

Education providers should develop methods to recognize their students' international experiences. They could take advantage of the work that has already been done in the context of European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and European Credit System for VET (ECVET). When the international experience of the students can be shown in the form of study outcomes, it will also be possible for the organisations to use this data to report the content and extent of their international work.

**The areas of operation that show up in indicators are most actively pursued by organisations. Therefore, comparative statistics should be derived also from the qualitative aspects of international activities.**

## Optimal size of the education provider

The research did not show any direct relationship between the size of the education provider and the success of their internationalisation process. Likewise, there did not seem to be an optimal size for an organisation when it comes to their internationalisation. The researched organisations included both large education providers and small vocational institutes whose internationalisation had been highly developed both strategically and in practice.





An individual vocational institute, especially one working on a small and specialised field, finds it easy to develop their international affairs because the only place where they can find institutes working in the same field may be outside of Finland. In these sorts of situations, it is possible to design the education so that those students seeking further education in the field are directed to higher education institutes in some other country, or the on-the-job learning partners are sought from outside Finland.

Large education providers have usually formed from the combination of smaller actors who have been looking for synergy benefits from closer cooperation with other actors in the same region. In these organisations, it is possible to centralize international affairs to a specialised team or unit. The research pointed out, however, that the large size of the organisation did not provide automatic benefit to the internationalisation work, especially when the quality of the activities and strategic planning were concerned. It may be that the difficulties of the bigger education providers is the slowness of change and the disjointedness of the planning and practical work.

## Recommendations to the support organisations of the internationalisation processes

The previous chapter gave recommendations for the development of internationalisation work for education providers. This chapter will, in turn, present the recommendations of the research team to the organisations that support the education providers and vocational institutes in their international activities. In Finland, these organisations are mainly the National Board of Education and CIMO - Centre for International Mobility.

### Support for international activities and its simplification

The research makes it clear that the education providers and vocational institutes will require support and further training for internationalisation from the National Board of Education and CIMO. This became apparent especially in the responses of those education providers who are in the early phases of development of their international activities.

**The field looks for easier ways to seek project funding and longer funding periods.**

In addition, the responses showed a need for the simplification of the application process of project funding. The education providers feel that the non-continuity of the project type funding leads to uncertainty in the long run and they would be eager to see more long-term solutions for the application process





of the funding, or otherwise simplified application processes. If the application processes cannot be made simpler, it is important to continue providing guidance and training of the international affairs personnel in the filling of the application forms etc. Also, more funding possibilities were hoped for internationalisation activities involving countries outside the EU. The responses also revealed that the funding of the cooperation projects with Russia may be too localised in the eastern Finland.

It is recommended that a general national internationalisation strategy was created for vocational education. At the present, the lack of such a national strategy causes the education providers difficulties on how to design effective strategies that support the internationalisation process of their organisations.

## Consideration of geographical distances in the mobility funding

The research also showed that the long distances in Finland cause inequality when it comes to the funding of international exchanges. Especially the students in northern Finland will use a large part of the support in order to travel to the international airports in southern Finland. Similar, although less drastic, inequality also exists between eastern and western Finland and southern Finland. Thus, the funding of international activities should consider the geographic location of the education providers and vocational institutes.



## Clearer consideration of the responsibility to the society

It was apparent in the strategy documents as well as in the materials of the support organisations of international activities (National Board of Education and CIMO) that the possible downsides of the increasing of international activities were not considered. It is true that, in the recent years, more attention has been paid to the benefits of so-called home internationalisation (inclusion of international and multicultural themes and experiences to the everyday work of vocational institutes). The activities are not without their problems, however, and there exist certain contradictions. Multicultural and globalising world raises important questions about social inequality, work and livelihood, differences in values, the state of the environment and sustainable development. These issues are not discussed in the strategy documents and support for this is needed from the support organisations of international activities.

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