

# 1. The Context of IntUni

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## 1.1 The Internationalisation of higher education in Europe

IntUni is relevant to the internationalisation of higher education, and the last 25 years have seen a profound change in the European higher education landscape – not least due to the development of the European Higher Education Area and to the introduction of the European Commission’s programmes that support student and staff mobility. However, as internationalisation is characterised by diversity and complexity, it is worth clarifying what we mean by *international* and *internationalisation*, and Knight’s generic definition of internationalisation will serve the purpose of defining the context of this project:

*Internationalization at the national/sector/institutional level is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels. (...) International carries the sense of relationships between and among nations, cultures and countries. However, internationalization is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, institutions, and classrooms, so intercultural seems the best term for addressing aspects of cultural diversity. Finally, global is included to provide the sense of worldwide scope. (Knight, J. 2008:21f)*

Internationalisation may in fact be considered a process that develops continuously and comprises the actors involved as well as the core activities of research and education at a given HEI.

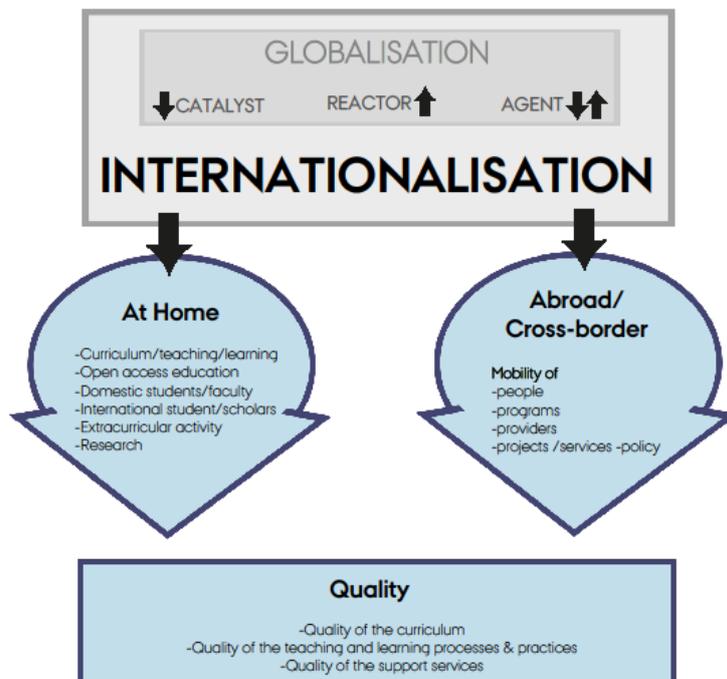


Fig. 1 Internationalisation of higher education. Based on Knight (2012).

As illustrated in fig. 1, the internationalisation of higher education may be seen not only as a result of and a reaction to globalisation in general, but also as an agent that influences the globalisation process. We will take Knight's definition of internationalisation above as our point of departure, focusing on Internationalisation at Home (IaH), which Leask (2009) relates to the internationalisation of the curriculum and defines as

*(T)he incorporation of an intercultural and international dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning processes and support services of a programme of study. An internationalised curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity. It will purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens. (Leask 2009:209).*

While internationalisation may be measured in quantitative terms such as the number of incoming and outgoing exchange students of a given HEI (also referred to as horizontal mobility or credit mobility) or international full degree students (also referred to as vertical mobility or degree mobility), the IntUni project focuses on more qualitative aspects in the curriculum and the teaching and learning processes. There are several reasons for this: First of all, internationalisation of higher education encompasses much more than the mobility of students and staff, cf. the definitions above, one obvious reason being the fact that in Europe only 10-20 per cent of students actually study abroad, and 80-90 per cent of students stay in their home country (cf. European Commission 2013). It is therefore important that there is an international and intercultural dimension in the design and content of curricula and in the teaching and learning processes of all higher education so that all students are able to acquire the international skills required in a globalised world, irrespective of whether or not they themselves are internationally mobile.

The internationalisation of higher education therefore concerns all students and all lecturers and has a set of linguistic and cultural aspects in what we will term the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space. Multilingual because students and lecturers – despite their similarities – have a range of different first languages even though the medium of instruction is one given European language (the local language or – often – English). Multicultural because students and lecturers will have different ethnic cultures that meet in the local culture of the HEI in question; the HEI – in turn – will be characterised by an academic culture at the same time as there will be cultural similarities and differences among the academic disciplines, cf. also sections 1.2 and 1.3 below.

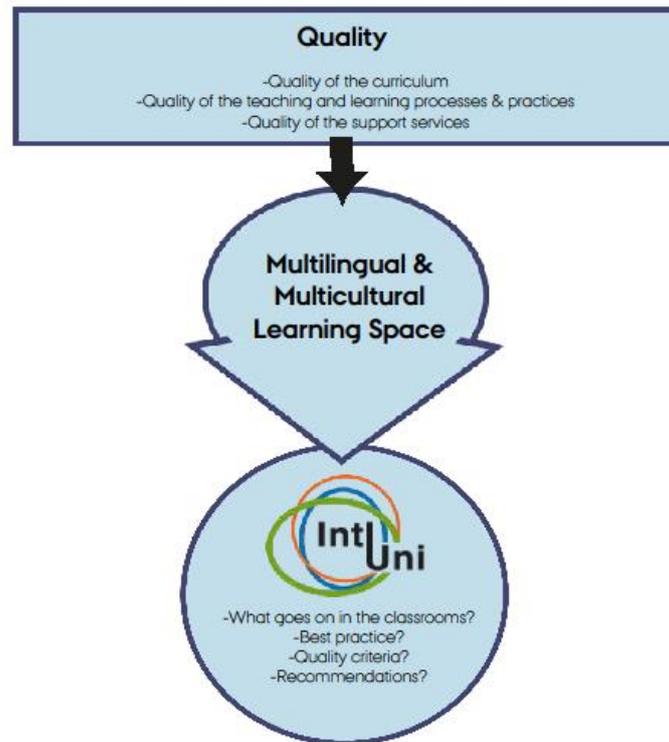


Fig. 2 Based on de Moor & Henderikx 2013.

IntUni work packages deal with the institutional level, first and foremost in relation to the programmes offered to both home and non-home students and to the actors – students and lecturers. Our primary concern is thus one aspect of the Internationalisation at Home, that is, primarily what goes on in the classroom – the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space (MMLS) – when students and lecturers represent diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but have to operate within given academic and disciplinary cultures of the HEI in question and through the means of one shared language (the language of instruction). Our focus of attention is thus all students and all lecturers, not only those who are mobile.

## 1.2 Multilingualism and the language of instruction

The language of instruction is crucial in the MMLS. In the countries of the less widely used and taught languages in Europe, and in addition to the programmes taught in the language(s) of the country or region in question, the language of instruction is very often English (English Medium Instruction or EMI; cf. Wächter & Maiworm 2008). However, in all countries – and not least the countries of the major European languages – the language(s) of instruction in programmes attracting international students, is (are) also the official language(s) of the country or region in question, and while many or most of the lecturers may have these as their own first languages, internationalisation (and, indeed, globalisation) has also resulted in more and more lecturers teaching through a language other than their own first language and in a culture different from their own.

In addition to the language of instruction, whether or not this is the student’s or lecturer’s first language, it is important to consider the importance of individual multilingualism in order for students to be able to

navigate and communicate within the linguistic diversity of our multilingual global society. Though English seems to be ubiquitous, the majority of the world population does not speak English, and students and lecturers alike will need to master the local language to a certain level wherever they may be (cf. European Commission 2013).

The linguistic context and policies of the HEIs are dealt with as part of [IntUni WP2](#).

### 1.3 Internationalisation at home – cultural similarities and differences

As this project concerns what actually goes on in the learning space (or classroom), we focus on aspects that may all be defined within the concept of Internationalisation at Home. We are here referring to campus-based strategies that include amongst others the intercultural and international dimension in the curriculum and in the teaching/learning processes and practices. These challenges do create challenges, however, and in [IntUni WP 3](#), we have identified the linguistic and cultural challenges that need to be overcome as well as the didactic challenges they entail; we have done so in order to be able to define reference points for the quality of the teaching and learning in the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space.

### References

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