

Internationally active – Professionally valuable, a case study from Slovenia

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the situation in the Internationalization of Slovenian Higher Education. The particular focus is on motivating academic and non-academic staff for involvement in international activities.

The article is based on the Erasmus + project “Internationally active - professionally valuable.” In the frame of the project, two researchers were conducted among higher education institutions in Slovenia.

The research focused on general aspects of internationalization at higher education institutions. The study involved 42 academic and non-academic staff. Research showed that most HEIs in Slovenia included internationalization in their institutional mission/strategic plans. Furthermore, both non-academic and academics consider an essential part of internationalization international research collaboration (publishing in international journals, etc.), participation in international events (conferences, short study visits, exhibitions, etc.), and outgoing mobility opportunities for faculty/staff. Respondents find that internationalization can firmly benefit their work, especially by Increasing their international networks leading to new scientific contacts, and allowing for the exchange of knowledge and experience. To improve their international activity level, they suggest the availability of more financial resources and reducing their teaching time. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemics influenced the internationalization activities of the respondents a lot and, in particular, the outgoing mobility opportunities for faculty/staff and participation in international events like conferences, short study visits, exhibitions, etc. Less affected activities seem to be International research collaboration (publishing in international

journals etc.), participation in international associations, developing institutional strategic partnerships, and Developing joint and/or double/dual and multiple degree programs with foreign partner institutions.

The second research was implemented in interviews with representatives of higher education institutions from Slovenia. The main aim of the interviews was to get feedback on how their institution motivates employees for involvement in international activities. The most common way of informing employees about possibilities to be involved in international activities is information that employees receive from Erasmus coordinators or the relevant offices. Respondents gave some ideas on how motivation for international activities can be improved. For many employees, the obstacle is that activities need to be co-financed by them; a solution could be to establish financial mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of certain international activities. Awareness of the importance of international activities for the professional development of persons and the institute's reputation can be another crucial motivating factor. Another way of motivation is that the management of institutions is more actively involved in all forms of international activity (promotion, awareness-raising of academic staff, provision of tangible and intangible incentives, setting an example, etc

From research were gathered several good practices in the promotion of international activities. Good practices identified:

- Linking institutional research with international research networks.*
- An individualised approach to mobilities of higher education teachers and researchers in all the phases.*
- Presentation of an ongoing project at international events.*
- Establishing an open-access scientific journal, deepening contacts with authors and their institutions, and establishing an international publishing house.*

Covid 19 has had a significant impact on internationalization, and at this point, a question can be raised “How will internationalization adapt to help shape a new normal?” The quote from Marginson 2020 probably gives a correct answer on it: ‘A successful reboot of HE internationalization in a post-COVID-19 world requires revisions of goals and strategies, innovation in practice, and integration of HE internationalization into core institutional missions’. International educators must plan and work now toward new realities in the interest of local and global common goods.

Keywords: internationalization of HE, internationalization activities of university staff, good practices, Covid 19