

Educating the educators: professional development of academics for internationalisation at home

Purpose, aims and research questions

This project highlights the vital role of academics in ensuring internationalisation at home (IaH)¹ and the importance of professional development (PD)² for academics, which is limited today in Sweden and elsewhere. The project will map the situation in Sweden, critically evaluate the effect of PD for IaH, and provide research-informed recommendations for good practice in this area.

The PD of academic staff for their work with IaH is one of the most overlooked research topics in internationalisation (Gregersen-Hermans & Lauridsen, 2021). Yet academic staff play a central role in the implementation of IaH as it unfolds in practice in the context of the academic disciplines and specific study programs (Clifford & Montgomery, 2015). Many current measures adopted for internationalisation by Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs) – and indeed institutions in other geographical contexts – have proven to be insufficient; a commonly acknowledged problem is that existing initiatives (such as mobility and various extra-curricular activities) benefit small numbers of students and engage relatively few staff (see e.g., de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Hudzik, 2015; Zhang et al, 2020). The greatest potential for institutional change, enabling all students to engage in internationalisation, are inclusive and integrated initiatives included in the formal curriculum (Leask, 2015). In this way, academics (i.e., staff employed at an HEI who have some teaching and/or research responsibilities) and curriculum developers have the potential to enhance campus diversity and inclusivity, and benefit students' international understanding and intercultural competence, which lie at the heart of IaH. However, academics are often not prepared for this task, and the lack of competence development and inadequate institutional support remain significant obstacles to the implementation of IaH (Beelen, 2018; SOU 2018, p. 3).

Adopting a constructivist (rather than a positivist) approach and drawing on a multilevel phased mixed design, the project aims are to:

- map existing PD initiatives and support available for academics related to IaH at Swedish HEIs.
- investigate if these PD initiatives fulfil the perceived needs of the participants and explore the effect of the PD on the implementation of IaH in practice.
- investigate the affordances and challenges of providing a quality international education from a course, program and disciplinary perspective, to better assess the actual need for PD.
- issue research-based recommendations for practice in the area of IaH.

The project is guided by the following research questions:

1. What institutional support and professional development possibilities do Swedish HEIs offer to their academic employees to strengthen their skills for working with IaH?
 - 1.1. What is the aim, content and context of such PD initiatives?
 - 1.2. What is the profile of participants and facilitators?
2. What effects do these PD initiatives have on the implementation of IaH?
 - 2.1 What is the perceived value of these PD initiatives for academics?
 - 2.2 How do academics perceive the utility of existing resources and tools for IaH?

¹ IaH is used to provide a contrast to “Internationalisation abroad” (Knight, 2006) and is defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 76). IaH is here used synonymously with the concept of “Internationalisation of the curriculum” (IoC) (Leask, 2015) in line with Jones (2019).

² PD is described as “a process of improving and increasing capability of staff (...) to upgrade [their] content knowledge and educational skills” (Malik et al., 2015, p. 169).

A third question addresses the stated aims in the context of two case studies, set in Sweden and Belgium respectively, and focuses on intercultural group work in the engineering discipline, one of the most internationalised educational areas:

3. How do teachers and program managers facilitate learning for a culturally mixed student group within engineering education to meet the demands of both home and international students?
 - 3.1 What do teachers/ program managers see as the affordances/ challenges of the student group in terms of prior knowledge and background and how do they plan courses accordingly?
 - 3.2 How do teachers reflect retrospectively on this planning in the light of student reactions to group work as collected in an internationally used student survey?

This project constitutes an innovative and timely contribution on the role of academics in internationalisation, the implementation of IaH, and related professional development. This will lead to more effective training that meets the needs of academics, not just within Swedish higher education (HE) but also elsewhere. In that way, PD can increase engagement from academics, enhance their confidence in teaching in the international classroom and improve their pedagogical capabilities for the benefit of internationalisation more broadly.

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