

Session 5: Workshop 1

Title: The EU and other regional groupings - the International Network of Universities

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The International Network of Universities (INU) comprises a select set of universities which are collaborating to provide a global dimension to their courses and to increase student, and staff, mobility by offering study opportunities at partner institutions. Membership is small, carefully chosen and currently includes: Budapest University of Technology and Economics (Hungary), Flinders University (Australia), Helsinki University of Technology (Finland), Hiroshima University (Japan); Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (Indonesia); La Trobe University (Australia), Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain) and Yunnan University (China). One or two more universities may be asked to join but it is not anticipated that the group will expand further.

The network was set up following an initiative by the two Australian partners to develop a strategy to internationalise their teaching programmes, thereby allowing Australian students the chance to gain valuable experience in an academic environment overseas. In recent years Australia has seen a huge increase in the number of fee-paying foreign students entering its universities, mainly from the Pacific Rim and Indian Ocean regions. These students are competent to follow courses in English. However, this inflow has not been matched by a similar outflow of Australian students, particularly to countries where the languages are difficult to master, and, in a global economy, this is seen to be a disadvantage. Lack of language skills has been identified as the inhibiting factor.

The INU scheme attempts to rectify this imbalance:

- All INU universities teach substantially in English and tend to have multi-cultural campuses that allow students to integrate easily and mix well. Membership is by invitation and recommendation of the governing body, following the vetting of courses at faculty level
- Students are able to take up to 50 per cent of their courses at partner institutions. Degrees are awarded by the university at which the student enrolls; time spent abroad is recorded on the certificate. The wide range of courses taught within the group enhances the opportunities available to the student and complements those offered by the home institution
- The scheme is in its infancy. The target for the first year of operation is for individual members to admit up to 100 students from partner institutions

- Funding is a critical issue and is likely to determine the overall success of the venture. There is no formal government support and bursary schemes are therefore essential; some of the better-off partners offer assistance to students from poorer members. There are no plans to levy additional fees.

INU is a small, focused programme concentrating on international rather than regional movement at undergraduate level. Its value lies in the opportunity it offers English-speaking students to develop their language skills and the encouragement it gives to students to travel and to gain first-hand experience of other cultures, as, for example, the Japanese approach to business; and to develop the practice of building networks which over time will feed into international business practices. In a global economy, students must be able to compete internationally and those who stay at home will be disadvantaged. Electronic delivery, which is an option within INU and which is a feature of other schemes, is no substitute for face to face contact and offers little added value.

Practices within the EU have provided the stimulus for some developments within other regions; for example, University Mobility in the Asia Pacific (UMAP). However, such programmes differ fundamentally from their EU counterparts in that they do not attract state funding and are intended to have a global as opposed to a regional impact. By contrast, there is a political cohesion behind developments within the EU. For economic reasons, current EU policy is placing more stress on electronic delivery and less on movement. This could be said to be the face of a regional grouping that is not working effectively.

Key points emerging from the discussion:

- The importance of equipping English-speaking students with foreign language skills and the confidence to perform in an international arena
- Some governments see internationalisation only as an export industry attracting valuable foreign currency. Most universities (and certainly those that are members of the INU) would disagree and would regard the exposure of their own students to the culture and practices of their future business competitors/partners as a valuable part of their university education
- Partners should be chosen carefully to ensure complementarity. Success will be measured by easily discernable added value
- Networks must be kept small to ensure quality and compatibility of both courses and environments. Avoid commercial linkages/funding; this can lead to a lack of control
- Focus should be on undergraduate mobility; research networks require a different approach.