

MICHE 2019

Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education

FINAL REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (JČU)
2019



I. INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has become one of the major features of higher education in the last decades. International involvement and activities add value to all dimensions of higher education – teaching, research and innovation, connection to industry and the labour market as well as the social and community roles of institutions of higher education. The globalized and increasingly interconnected world requires graduates with global skills. Graduates need to be flexible, open-minded, tolerant, able to live and work in multicultural environments, and solve global as well local challenges in cooperation with people from other parts of the world. High productivity and quality of research is also not possible without international cooperation, international teams, and connection to the global research scene. It means that internationalization is one of the most important tools to increase the overall quality of higher education.

The process of internationalization of higher education institutions is however not smooth, uniform and even. It always reflects individual features of each institution, the context, either external, as the local or national environment including the legal framework, or internal, such as institutional type, history, focus, mission, structures or leadership. It means that it may be very difficult to measure, assess, and compare the level of internationalization at institutions of higher education in general.

On the other hand, for policy makers it is very important to know what the state and development of internationalization is, what has been already reached and what should be done to enhance and support the process of comprehensive internationalization at institutions as well as within the whole system of higher education. This is the reason why the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports decided to monitor internationalization of Czech higher education institutions and follow the example of previous efforts of other countries' governments.

This monitoring, however, should also serve Czech higher education institutions in the wider sense. It will provide them with the tool for the complex analysis of their internationalization processes and will allow them to reflect on their individual and specific situations. The outcomes will also include recommendations on how to improve their internationalization activities in all areas and ideally also an action plan how to reach their goals in these areas. Taking into consideration that the level of internationalization is usually reflected in various assessments, including international rankings that play a huge role in international competition for students, talent and resources, improving this dimension can strengthen the position of the institution in these evaluations.

Although the monitoring is initiated by the Ministry, it is fully voluntary for higher education institutions. The above-mentioned benefits delivered to higher education institutions by participating in the process should serve as the main motivation factor.

The main objectives of the monitoring

- Provide policy makers with information of the state and development of internationalization of Czech higher education institutions
- Provide Czech higher education institutions with a complex tool to reflect and analyse internationalization on an institutional level
- Provide Czech higher education institutions with recommendations and plans to improve their internationalization on the institutional level
- Increase the quality of internationalization in the Czech higher education system
- Increase the global attractiveness and competitiveness of Czech higher education

Organization of the monitoring

The monitoring is organized and supervised by DZS - Centre for International Cooperation in Education, in close cooperation with the Ministry and external experts.

There are several actors involved in the evaluation process.

Internal evaluation

- Management of the institution responsible for internationalization
- Staff responsible for international activities/internationalization on all levels
- Students, academic and non-academic staff

External evaluation

- 3-member team of external experts (2 international, 1 domestic) approved by the Ministry, one member is appointed by the coordinating agency as a team leader

II. EXPERT TEAM MEMBERS

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III. SUMMARY

The University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (USB) has a number of advantages in advancing its internationalization. These include a well-developed management and internal communications structure, a large and diverse set of faculties and academic programs, high capacity for research and teaching in foreign languages, a recent increase in outgoing mobilities, good progress made in certain target student recruitment markets, and the commitment of resources to international marketing. These are strengths for USB leadership and management to build on, and all should be continued. The increase in outbound mobility in particular is impressive, particularly given trends at other Czech universities.

In addition, there are many innovative and creative solutions that exist at all of the faculties to advance internationalization. Some highlights include: the number of international Doctoral students at Fisheries, the internationalization of the curriculum efforts at Education, opening an English program in Nursing, etc. Overall, there should be more recognition of the extra work that academics and staff at the faculties put into internationalization, and ideally there should be an incentive or compensation scheme to encourage and promote this extra effort.

There are a number of areas where the University has capacity and potential, and can focus its internationalization efforts, and may be considered for inclusion in the new Strategic Plan:

- Utilizing USB's significant research capacity to apply for international research grants and programs with the European and global partners; this will also boost the university's rankings and international reputation
- Create more income-generating study programs, including summer and winter schools, and recruit more fee-paying students abroad from strategically selected markets
- Increasing the university's brand, reputation, and name recognition abroad, in order to attract students and especially academics and researchers. This will help grow partnerships, collaborations on funding, and joint publications.
- Develop marketing efforts within a broad assortment of recruitment channels as a tool for recruitment on a program by program basis

An analysis is necessary to determine strategy for different recruitment channels, including direct recruitment, through recruitment intermediaries such as agencies and joint programmes, and portals. This analysis should be informed by analysis of all marketing and administrative necessities created from initial potential-applicant interest to enrolment to ensure the timeline associated with each and every document, signature, and transmittal is managed as effectively as possible. Only after this can a decision be made on target countries and even strategic partners for joint programs.

The above analysis provides crucial information in determining which study programs should be opened in English and will likely mean that significant changes will be necessary for each Faculty's formal Admission Conditions document.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for actions in the order of priorities and urgency

Immediate

- Develop the new Strategic Plan in 2020 with input from the widest variety of stakeholders concerning internationalization; make sure that internationalization is a top priority and receives sufficient human and financial resources

Short-term (1 year)

- The International Relations Office must establish credibility and the importance of internationalization when the new Rector starts his/her term in March 2020. The new Rector of the University of South Bohemia has been a member of the current management of the University of South Bohemia, he knows the work and importance of the IRO and will support it.
- Ensure that grant and project support through the grant office and the Vice-Rector for Science actively and deliberately contribute to internationalization strategy and efforts of USB.
- It is positive that there are regular meetings among stakeholders: the Welcome Officer and Go Abroad Officer (from the IRO) has a network of their colleagues at all faculties; the IRO officers are in close contact with the foreign departments of the individual faculties; and the Vice-Rector for Foreign Relations meets with Vice-Deans for Foreign Relations regularly. All of these meetings can be used to create a task force comprised of Faculty and central IRO members to systematically address issues, remove constraints and find constructive incentives for students.
- Systematically review and assess the usefulness of all departmental, faculty, and universitywide partnerships; focus on developing a limited number of potential strategic partnerships
- Prioritize institutional support of the digitalisation process focused on issues related to International Relations Office agenda (mainly a reliable evidence system of international mobilities with all related issues).
- Map administration and documentation timeline for international applicants and apply this information to consideration of recruitment channels and intermediaries, target countries, and strategic partnership development in the context of joint programs. Use this information to adjust work responsibilities between central IRO and Faculties

Mid-term (1-3 years)

- Develop a centralized plan for coordinating and tracking research efforts, including international-sourced funding, as a deliberate component to advance internationalization, with information from all faculties including benchmarks of how they are meeting the goals of their strategic research plans

- Increase the number of international summer schools, with a goal of generating discretionary income to be put back into internationalization, and to boost the brand of USB abroad, also creating a potential pipeline of degree-seeking students
- Create an Internationalization at Home strategy
- Continually reassess marketing and administrative efforts following each recruitment cycle to make adjustments to and determine further budget allocation

Long-term (3+ years)

- Join a consortium and apply for the European Universities Initiative

V. DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

The following colour scale emphasizes strengths of the performance in the indicator.

	The institution is particularly strong in this indicator
	The institution is neither particularly strong nor particularly weak in this indicator
	The institution could focus on improvements in this indicator

DIMENSION 1: Institutional framework / Strategy, management, structures

	1.1. Strategic position on internationalization
	1.2. Internationalization management
	1.3. International offices
	1.4. Processes for internationalization
	1.5. Budgets & funding for internationalization
	1.6. International partnerships for internationalization
	1.7. Domestic partnerships for internationalization
	1.8. International marketing & promotion
	1.9. Evaluation

1.1 Strategic Position on Internationalization

Internationalization has been one of the key components of USB in its current strategic plan (2016-20), with a focus on increasing student mobility, attracting international students, creating new foreign language-taught programs, and international marketing and promotion. These are the logical steps at the first stages of internationalization, and have been taken on by all faculties of USB, thus can be considered successful. Importantly, the numeric targets are set annually, then measured and reported on in an annual activity report. This is a best practice, as it is transparent and assigns responsibility.

1.3 International offices

Staffing of the international offices is robust: the central IRO has four employees, and each faculty has its own international officer. There seems to be good cooperation and communication between them. The central IRO has demonstrated strong results and a rather high level of competency. We commend the introduction of courses open to students from every faculty who are interested in going abroad,

Intercultural Understanding and English for Study Abroad. This is rather unique, and does not exist at other Czech universities.

1.4 Processes for Internationalization

There are regularly scheduled meetings between the appropriate staff; this could be improved by more frequent meetings between the Vice-Rector for International and the Vice-Deans for International from the faculties, and increased to meeting once a month.

The new International Advisory Council can be a valuable tool to help USB to determine strategic contacts, priorities, collaborations, and ways to be on board with global trends in higher education; they should be utilized as advisors as much as possible.

1.5. Budgets and Funding

USB has been successful in Erasmus KA103 and 107 grant competitions. An OPVVV grant has enabled hiring important staff in the International Relations Office; their positions must continue after the OPVVV grant comes to a close in two years. A more proactive search for funding internationalization will need to be done in order to keep up staff and make advances for any significant initiatives.

1.6. International partnerships for internationalization

USB takes part in many partnership programs, both within Erasmus structures and with third countries. Priority has been correctly placed on significant markets including Russia, Ukraine, and other former Soviet countries; USA; and China. Cross-border cooperation with Austria and Bavaria is also a strong point. Some faculties have long-term, strategic partnerships. We encourage the university to analyze these strong partnerships and consider expanding them into universitywide strategic partnerships, which can have a broader and deeper impact on mobility, research, publications, and grant applications.

1.8. International marketing and promotion

A new international marketing staff member was hired in spring 2019, and this should increase USB's visibility; we find this to be a very positive step, as not many Czech universities have dedicated staff for this, and it demonstrates a serious commitment to raising the profile of USB abroad. We look forward to seeing a coordinated, universitywide (rather than just individual faculties) international marketing strategy soon. On the negative side, the university website and its content in English needs to be improved as soon as possible, and the amount of social media conducted in English is very low and should be increased significantly.

There was question by many groups as to which tasks, and which strategy development should be managed at the central level, and which at the Faculty level. Development of recruitment(marketing) channels crosses all Faculties, requires frequent and efficient communication, and can utilize the collective strength of the University. These efforts then generate potential candidates for study, which can be evaluated by individual Faculties. The administrative necessities can be organized in a blended manner between the central IRO and Faculties to ensure the very rapid responses necessary to maintain student interest and facilitate visa procurement and therefore eventual enrolment.

We recommend a careful and detailed analysis of how marketing efforts are coordinated within each distinct marketing channel and to assign responsibility and eventual accountability to each activity. To accomplish this a very detailed mapping should be conducted around all administrative necessities, from initial potential applicant interest to enrolment to ensure the timeline associated with each and every document, signature, and transmittal is managed as effectively as possible.

The results of this analysis should be then compared to each potential sending country to determine the real capacity of that location to provide students, which should then inform the marketing process to ensure efficient allocation of resources.

1.9. Evaluation

We find it very positive that USB tracks its internationalization in a quantifiable manner based on the Strategic Plan, and reports on it in the Annual Activity report, and makes adjustments in course as necessary. This process should continue.

DIMENSION 2: Learning / Students

	2.1. Curriculum for internationalization
	2.2. Incoming student mobility
	2.3. Outgoing student mobility
	2.4. Evaluation

2.1. Curriculum for internationalization

The number and variety of foreign language-taught programs is modest for a university of USB's size, and should be increased. Not simply for the sake of increasing the number of programs, but USB can think and plan strategically, and expand based on partnerships, solid market research on potential students, and thus focus on solid growth. The number and quality of double and triple degrees with foreign partners is very good. More efforts can be put into internationalizing the curriculum for the benefit of Czech students and offering them the opportunity to study in foreign languages.

2.2. Incoming student mobility

The number of incoming international students is good, especially at the Bachelor's and Doctoral levels. USB's active recruitment strategy in Russia and Ukraine has worked – we find the opportunity for school visits to USB to be particularly innovative and unique – and this should continue. This can be increased, even, due to USB's institutional accreditation status. Given their popularity around Europe, the number of international Master's students could increase, and marketing efforts should be focused here. Another area of potential increase is summer schools and other short-term programs: for a university of its size, USB should create and offer more summer schools, which also can generate additional discretionary income which can be channelled into internationalization projects.

2.3 Outgoing student mobility

USB staff's efforts at increasing outgoing mobility (Go Abroad officer, faculty coordinators, individual departments, International Student Club/ESN) are good, and have resulted in an impressive increase

in numbers over the past several years. There is a growing demand for short-term mobilities (thus outside of the Erasmus-funded program), and USB must find a strategy – and funding – to meet this.

Increased outgoing mobility was a goal shared by most Faculties. Different constraints to growth were reported, from credit recognition to general student reluctance. It will be necessary to determine reasons and solutions on a department by department basis. But despite this specificity, best practices can be shared across the University. For this reason, as well as to gain overall momentum, we recommend creating a task force comprised of Faculty and central IRO members to systematically address issues, remove constraints and find constructive incentives for students.

DIMENSION 3: Teaching & research / Academic staff

	3.1. Academic staff support
	3.2. Incoming academic mobility
	3.3. Outgoing academic mobility
	3.4. Evaluation

3.1. Academic staff support

The majority of academic staff are comfortable teaching in English. However, they should be given more support and training, not only in English language, but even more so in teaching in an international environment, and teaching to multicultural groups. There is the need to create an international classroom culture at USB, for the benefit and learning of both international and Czech students, and to have USB academics comfortable and fully functional in it.

3.3. Outgoing academic mobility

Incentives need to be created to encourage more academic staff to go abroad.

3.4. Evaluation

There should be a more comprehensive, universitywide system to collect metrics on academic mobility. This can help with making decisions about strategy, direction, and partnerships. Mobility records are kept on USB within two information systems: STAG and VERSO. At present there is an effort to develop the information system STAG to be able to record employee mobility.

DIMENSION 4: Support infrastructure / Non-academic staff

	4.1. Non-academic staff internationalization support
	4.2. Internationalization of support units
	4.3. Internationalization of support infrastructure
	4.4. Extracurricular activities

4.1. Non-academic staff internationalization support

Staff are offered English courses, but how many participate? Frustration was expressed several times about the lack of understanding and therefore support by departments responsible for economic/accounting.

4.2 Internationalization of support units

Efforts should be made to develop foreign language, intercultural communication and cross-cultural understanding skills of staff in support units that international students encounter. These should include dormitory and canteen staff and study departments. There should be developed a general mindset which would automatically put important notices at public university places in both Czech and English. Also the sign navigation system/structure at the university facilities and campus should be revised and made more foreign-friendly, clear and easy to understand.

4.3. Internationalization of support infrastructure

Erasmus+ Digitization is driving this process, so it is good that an IT staff member has been hired to handle this work.

4.4. Extracurricular activities

The International Student Club has been accepted as an Erasmus Student Network (ESN) member, and this is positive. The members we met are enthusiastic; they are planning to produce an arrival guide and a video about how to use the cafeteria (where English is not spoken). They have a buddy system, which we hope will become large and active, as most other Czech universities' ESN clubs have.