



European  
Commission



# GO INTERNATIONAL

A practical guide for the internationalisation  
of schools, VET and adult education providers

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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European Commission

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**A practical guide for the  
internationalisation of schools, VET  
and adult education providers**

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## Introduction

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As outlined by the European Commission, education is essential to the vitality of European society and its economy. It is the foundation of societies that strive for democracy, freedom, diversity, human rights and social justice.<sup>1</sup>

During the last few years, it has become evident how global challenges, such as the COVID pandemic or increased migration flows, have major impacts on education and training systems in Europe. Not only crises but also technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, expose over 100 million Europeans who are part of the education and training community, to new and challenging realities, ways of learning, teaching and communicating.

In response to global challenges, cooperation at European Union level has proven essential to build resilient and future-looking education systems. To this end, the EU has adopted far-reaching initiatives in the field of education and training, such as the European Education Area, the European Skills Agenda and the European Research Area. These initiatives aim to create strong and lasting networks of institutions and organisations that work together to achieve common European objectives, through regular cooperation and exchange of good practice.

The European Commission and the Erasmus+ National Agencies want to support educational providers in the school, vocational and adult education sectors in their efforts to make the most of their international experience, improving the quality of their international activities and the skill sets of teachers, trainers and learners.

To that end, this guide provides practical guidance and advice to educational providers for the strategic planning of their international cooperation. It caters for both small and large institutions and for countries and educational systems at different stages of internationalisation. It builds first and foremost on EU cooperation, but also takes global aspects into account.

This version of the guide is based on a previous version from 2017, prepared in cooperation with the Finnish, Danish, Dutch, Hungarian and German Erasmus+ national agencies and the European Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.

## 1. Aim and purpose of the guide

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The aim of this guide is to assist in the strategic planning of international activities and to help in defining the role internationalisation plays in developing educational systems. This guide is addressed to management teams, teachers, trainers and other staff in the education sector, as well as any other organisations involved in international education/training cooperation.

Many of the educational providers in Europe are aware of the importance and benefits of internationalisation and have developed approaches to incorporate international activities into their curricula and organisations.

However, executing European and international projects is only one step towards fully capitalising on the entire potential of international activities. Having a clear and well anchored strategy on internationalisation will support and give direction to international activities, and ultimately have a benefits for each organisation, its learners, staff, the surrounding communities and the education system as a whole.

*"The impact and benefits of international cooperation in education are clearly higher if you have a strategy for the activities. However, it definitely requires support from the senior management and a sense of ownership within the organisation."* – Danish educational provider

But in practice, developing such a strategy has, for many institutions, still turned out to be a challenge. And to fully embed internationalisation into the institutional policy and practice on all levels is a greater challenge still.

*"We decided to organise a strategy-writing workshop and, as we were advised, we wanted to involve as many people as possible. Our school has had to face a lot of challenges in the past decades, and our colleagues have had to adapt to a great number of changes, but we were still astonished by the huge interest they showed, filling up the whole room.*

*The colleagues fully understood that writing our own institutional strategy is a great opportunity for us in ever-changing circumstances. They came up with a lot of ideas and new approaches, and we were so happy to see how democratic the process turned [out] to be."* – Hungarian vocational education/training provider

In this sense, the purpose of the guide is to create a common approach and language, and to make the work on internationalisation strategies easier within and between educational institutions in different countries throughout the EU.

WITH THE HELP OF THIS GUIDE, YOU WILL:

- achieve an understanding of the **general value of strategic planning**, strategy structures and the issues and processes involved;
- gain knowledge of what **strategic planning and approaches** can bring to the field of internationalisation and learning mobility;
- become aware of how strategic internationalisation benefits the **development of educational institutions**;
- realise what role the strategy process plays in making a strategy a **shared, embedded vision** and bringing it to life in an institution;
- be able to set up the next steps needed in your institution to go on a '**strategy journey**' that works for you and fits your context;
- get acquainted, on a basic level, with the different phases of **strategic planning** and the concepts of **quality assurance and indicators** to measure processes and results.

SOME OF THE KEY PRINCIPLES SUPPORTING THE WORK ON THIS GUIDE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

The internationalisation journey can be for everyone. Previous experience is not needed, but the strategic planning of internationalisation should take this into account: you need to know your starting point and build on that.

Every solid strategy must at the same time be anchored in the past, consider the reality of the present and look to the future: you need to establish a realistic, but also sufficiently ambitious vision for the future.

Strategy and organisational culture need to go hand-in-hand, so when you create new strategies you also need to involve and empower learners, staff and all stakeholders to take part.

The world, the EU and our educational systems are all undergoing constant changes in these dynamic and demanding times. Any strategy must also take into account that the operating conditions can and will most likely change, even within a fairly short amount of time: you need to stay flexible with your strategy and be ready to adapt to changes if you want to achieve your goals in changing environments.



## 2. The EU and the global setting

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Our cultures are becoming more diverse and interconnected, and so is the future of our societies. The mobility of workers and learners is increasing due to the globalisation of businesses and industries and greater European integration.

One of the challenges of this rapidly changing society is the need for skilled workers to ensure Europe's competitiveness, economic resilience and innovation capacity. Students, learners and graduates are nowadays expected to have among their skills at least some international know-how when entering the labour market.

For this reason, more and more qualifications embed language and social skills, or emphasise knowledge of other cultures and societies. Furthermore, most employers today highly value transferable skills and soft skills such as curiosity, innovativeness and resilience. As shown by studies, these skills can be developed by international experience.

Internationalisation is, however, not only a labour market value, but also a value in itself. The whole society benefits when its citizens are used to interacting with people from other countries or cultures, and can learn from these exchanges from an early age. Having international learning and working experiences abroad and at home helps to them discover diversity and other ways of doing things, which drives personal, professional, and institutional development.

The changing demands of labour markets and society pose great challenges for educational institutions and organisations, who have to provide up-to-date educational programmes, qualifications and skills matching the technological and social needs.

At EU level, the **European Education Area (EEA)**<sup>2</sup> initiative helps EU Member States work together to improve the quality of education and training systems by making them more resilient and inclusive.

Access to high quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is a right of all people, as enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>3</sup>. To this end, the EEA provides strategic frameworks and tools for Member States, educational institutions and other actors to share good practice, design and implement quality educational and training programmes, and cooperate towards automatic recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes, among other things.

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<sup>2</sup> Visit the European Education Area to learn more about this EU policy framework: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea>

<sup>3</sup> Visit the Europa website to learn more about the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

To help in this process common European tools are being developed at national and European level, such as Europass Mobility<sup>4</sup>.

Many of the national educational systems set out international objectives in their national policies and qualification frameworks. However, there are significant differences between EU Member States' strategies for internationalising their school, vocational and adult education sectors. In many cases, the aim is to make learners better equipped to work in international environments, both at home and abroad. But in other cases, international skills are also seen as life skills with little or no direct connection to professions.

To make these policy goals a reality, education providers are extending their international and domestic networks and participating in international projects, aiming, for example, to send teachers on job-shadowing to other schools, to design and test new methodologies, or to update their curricula.

When these kinds of international activities are managed, coordinated and implemented strategically and transparently, they will result in more motivated teachers and learners, better knowledge and skills and a higher overall profile for education and training. The results will generate a greater impact: the skills of newly qualified learners will better meet the needs of employers and benefit our society.

### 3. The Erasmus + programme

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The Erasmus+ programme is one of the main instruments that helps build the EEA. It provides opportunities in all fields of education and training, through different project formats and goals. The different opportunities and types of projects available are described in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide<sup>5</sup>, published by the European Commission every year.

**Erasmus+ Key Action 1 (KA1)** helps individuals learn abroad ('learning mobility'). The opportunities available for these mobility projects are similar for all education and training fields.

The Erasmus accreditations in the fields of vocational education and training, school education and adult education are specifically designed for organisations that want to improve the quality of their teaching and learning by engaging in regular cross-border exchanges and mobility activities in a strategic manner.

To become accredited, applicant organisations are asked to develop an Erasmus Plan, a dedicated strategy which defines how they will use mobility activities to improve their organisation in the next 2 to 5 years.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://europass.europa.eu/en/work-europe/mobility>

<sup>5</sup> <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide>

The Erasmus Plan is intended to promote and facilitate the strategic planning of international mobility activities, by requiring organisations to set up long-term organisational objectives, as well as indicators to measure whether they are achieved. Accredited organisations are guaranteed a minimum grant each year to ensure continuity and progress towards their Erasmus Plan objectives.

For organisations that are not particularly looking for continuous participation but want to try the Erasmus+ experience, there is the alternative of applying for a 'KA1 short-term project'.

**Erasmus+ Key Action 2** includes projects aimed at promoting cooperation among organisations and institutions. The projects awarded under this key action are expected to result in the development, transfer and implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels.

**Jean Monnet actions** are also an important part of the Erasmus+ programme. Their objective is to support teachers in primary, secondary, and vocational education, to inform young people and develop critical awareness about the European Union, what it stands for, how it works and what difference it makes to their daily lives.

This guide is a useful tool for potential Erasmus+ applicants and current beneficiaries because the impact and benefits of individual projects are increased by integrating them into a broader, tailor-made internationalisation strategy in an organisation. In addition, having an internationalisation strategy provides a more solid and reliable framework for drafting project proposals and justifying the objectives and needs of the organisation.

Moreover, strategic planning of projects is an important element of the evaluation criteria for project proposals. Having clear objectives, coherent and realistic work plans and an appropriate allocation of tasks between partners are elements that increase the quality of the project's implementation and impact.

However, this guide has been designed with a broader scope, so it can be used beyond Erasmus+ projects. This is why the terminology and the concepts used in it are broader and not specific to the Erasmus+ programme.

For more information about the Erasmus+ actions you should consult the Erasmus+ Programme Guide or visit your national agency website.

## 4. Strategic planning of international activities

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The main aim of all strategic work is to express the meaning and purpose of, and then give direction to, what an organisation does. This applies to the strategic planning of internationalisation as well: the aim is to express the purpose and future developments of an educational institution's international activities.

- Strategic planning of international activities will help staff and students see how international cooperation relates to the core activities and development of their institutions.
- Strategic planning will give direction to international activities and make them more systematic, which will help in managing them and help staff in their practical work.
- Planning will ensure that there are enough resources to carry out the international activities in practice, that international cooperation is in line with the organisation's overall strategies and that all staff members are aware of these international goals and activities.

We call the model presented in this publication a 'complete strategy model', in which the internationalisation goals are included in the organisation's overall strategy, thus ensuring that the internationalisation perspective will be considered at all stages of strategic planning. This means that staff and students should consider and analyse how internationalisation is included, for example, in the organisation's visions for the future or its values, and of course its future development.

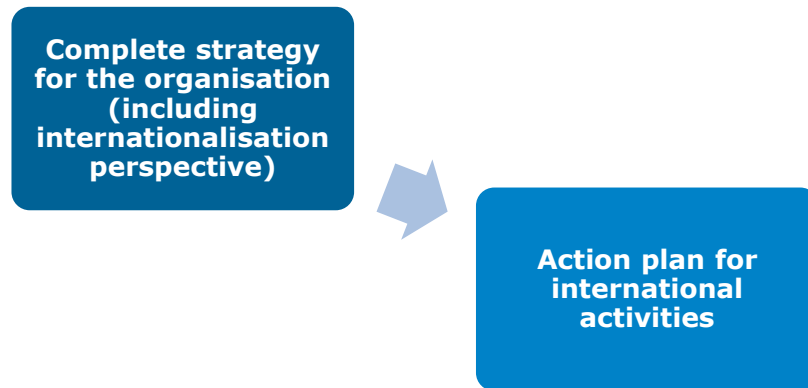
*"Strategic planning of international activities in our school is done through 2 documents: the European plan and the document "Strategic planning of international activities".*

*First, the European plan, a document stating our vision and plan for integrating EU values into our everyday work with specific goals, outcomes, methods and curriculum integration.*

*The second document is the internationalisation strategy, designed to ensure a common vision for guided activities and implementation of the European plan. Both documents have been open to public consultation before the official confirmation and acceptance by the school, pupil board, parent and teacher board as well as the local education authorities.*

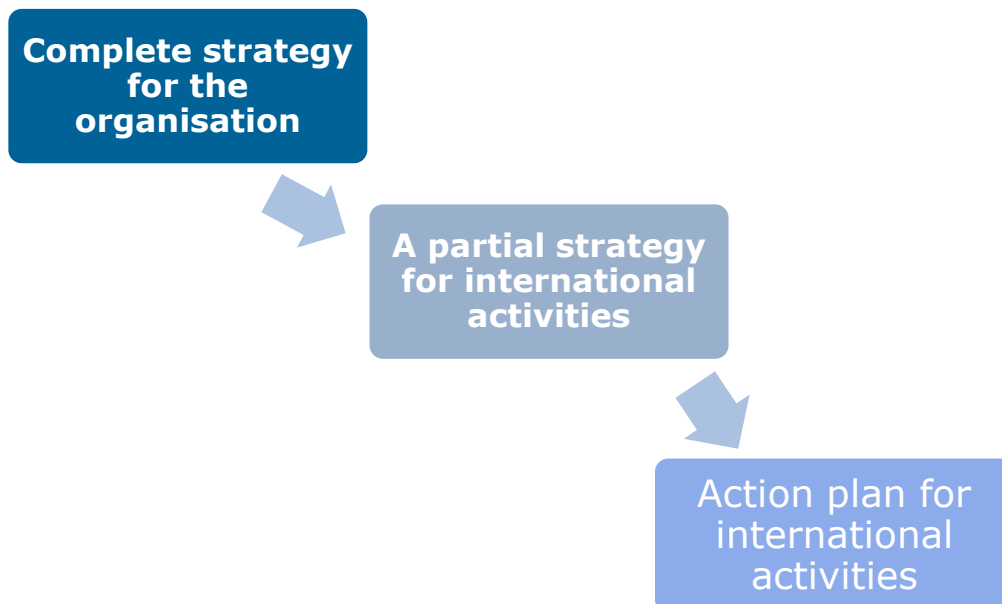
*The connection of internationalisation and international cooperation with the development of our school is made in each and every activity and planning done in our school. Both phenomena are integrated into the yearly and 5-year plans for the development of our school." - Croatian primary school, Erasmus accreditation holder.*

FIGURE 1.1 COMPLETE STRATEGY MODEL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES



The **complete strategy model** helps the organisation commit to the strategic goals and ensure that there are sufficient resources for the work. At organisational level, it also supports the staff and students in seeing how international activities fit into the organisation's overall development and the professional development of staff. It will also support staff when they do their annual planning and include international activities.

FIGURE 1.2 PARTIAL STRATEGY MODEL FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES



In the **partial strategy model scenario**, the international strategy is written after the overall strategy for the organisation, which results in a partial strategy for international activities. In this situation, it is particularly important to make sure that the partial international strategy is clearly based on, and in fact derived from, the overall strategy, so it is in line with the goals of the overall strategy. The existence and content of this separate internationalisation strategy as part of the whole strategy context must also be clearly communicated.

In both scenarios, an action plan is normally written each year (based on the strategic decisions) which details and schedules the responsibilities and action to be taken in order to achieve the strategic goals.

In general, strategies today are made for a period of 2 to 5 years, as developments in the fields of education, business and society are changing rapidly. After this period a strategy normally needs to be revised, but it is also important to consider the need for regular checks so that the strategy stays flexible and dynamic enough to remain up to date with current developments in the operating environment.

*"The strategy helps us take stock of our international work. Every 2 years we reflect and assess whether the goals were met in practice. A strategy is not a fixed road map – sometimes things develop differently than we expected. Reflections provide important learning."* – anonymous education provider.

When applying for an **Erasmus+ accreditation**, it is wise to embed the Erasmus Plan into the strategy and to align the duration of both. At the same time, you should also be open to any developments and changes in the strategy that might be necessary during that period.

## 5. Basic elements of an internationalisation strategy

The purpose of an internationalisation strategy is to develop and improve educational systems through international cooperation.

This is best done if the strategy is known as widely as possible within an organisation and made an everyday part of the activities. It is also recommended that all stakeholders are involved in the strategic planning – preferably including all staff, learners (and potentially their parents), employers, representative worker bodies and other relevant decision-makers.

Figure 2 shows a simplified model of strategic planning with an internationalisation perspective incorporated into the different elements.

**THE GENERAL STRATEGY OF AN ORGANISATION IS USUALLY BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:**

- an analysis of the operating environment and its development trends
- its mission (why it exists)
- its core skills
- its values

**THEN AN ORGANISATION WILL DECIDE ON:**

1. its vision for the future (what difference it wants to make in the world)
2. its strategic goals (i.e. how to fulfil the vision)
3. what practical steps need to be taken to achieve the goals (i.e. action plan):
  - in the long term
  - every year



FIGURE 2: ELEMENTS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

However, it should be noted that, for example, a more radical definition of the vision for the future of the organisation might also have an impact on the organisation's views, its values or core skills and even its mission. Therefore, the relationships between the strategy's elements are not directly causal, but rather circular, as depicted in Figure 2.

In a regular strategy process, each item is re-visited and re-drafted many times before taking its final shape, including the mission statement and values. If, as

time goes by, a change is experienced, for example in the operating environment, the strategy can be revisited during the strategy period.

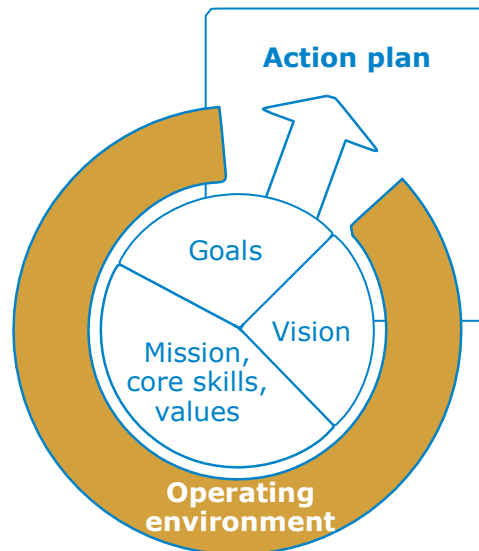
*"It was quite tricky in the beginning, some kind of 'learning by doing' process. Although we had been warned not to overload our strategy, we were enthusiastic, and reluctant to let so many great and relevant ideas just go. We had to learn step-by-step how we can keep our strategy focused and, considering our limited resources, make the implementation more manageable and realistic."* – Hungarian education provider.

In the following section, we will present a step-by-step model for how to include the internationalisation perspective in your strategic planning.

## 5.1 Operating environment

This means everything that affects the operations of an organisation, internally and externally.

The starting point for development work in an organisation is to analyse the operating environment: the constants and the changes influencing it. An operating environment is affected by, for example, education and training policies, demographic changes, migration, the labour market and changes within the organisation, as well as global developments and major trends in our societies.



A major part of analysing the operating environment *vis-à-vis* international activities is also to have a look at what has been done so far in internationalisation. What is the status quo? What projects have been carried out? Which partnerships are in place? What is there to build on?

Strategic planning is particularly important during challenging times and in difficult conditions. It helps give focus to the activities so you are able to do more of what matters most. But it is equally important when conditions are favourable, so that your organisation can keep ahead of trends and not become complacent.



**CONSIDER HOW CHANGES IN THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT WILL AFFECT YOUR INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

- What changes envisaged in the operating environment should you consider?
- How will the international dimension affect jobs and skills requirements in the future?
- What kinds of studies/jobs will new graduates have in the future and where?
- What is the state of internationalisation in different fields of education and training?
- How do you take national and EU objectives for internationalisation into account?

*"We analyse how the EU and global developments are linked with the work we are doing. How can we best prepare our adult learners for the future world of living and work? What skills do teachers and other staff need to be able to support these processes? How can we make international activities in our institution part of our daily work?" – Croatian adult education provider*

**TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FOLLOWING POINTS ON STRATEGIC PLANNING:**

- Key topics of internationalisation are: networking and cooperation with similar institutions abroad and with workplaces; core staff skills; professional development opportunities; strategic project planning and execution; ability to standardise good practices and processes; and ability to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the activities.
- Different sectors need different internationalisation approaches at different stages: virtual activities, small partnerships, periods abroad for staff/learners, etc.
- Professional skills, both for learners and staff, should also include the ability to operate in multicultural environments.
- English is often the internal working language of many multinational organisations, but the need to know other languages is also increasing.
- Transferable skills such as curiosity, adaptability and resilience, which are also linked to intercultural skills, are increasingly needed in working life and society.

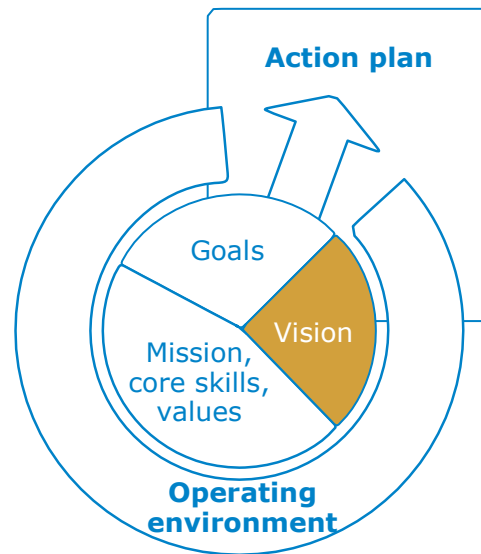
## 5.2 Vision

The **vision** describes where an organisation wants to be in the future, based on its purpose (mission) and values, and contains the 'future power' of a strategy.

A solid vision shows staff and students what the goals of the organisation are in both the shorter but maybe more importantly the longer run, and where their efforts should be directed in future.

A good vision both inspires and guides, but at the same time is rooted in reality and looking well beyond what is currently in existence.

A more radical definition of the vision might impact on the organisation's values, its approach to core skills or even its mission in the long run.



### CONSIDER HOW THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION SHOULD MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE VISION:

- How can the educational institution become more modern and attractive in the future?
- What does this mean for learners and staff in practice?
- What kind of national and international networks should you be able to create to fulfil such a vision?

### TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION IN THE VISION CAN MEAN:

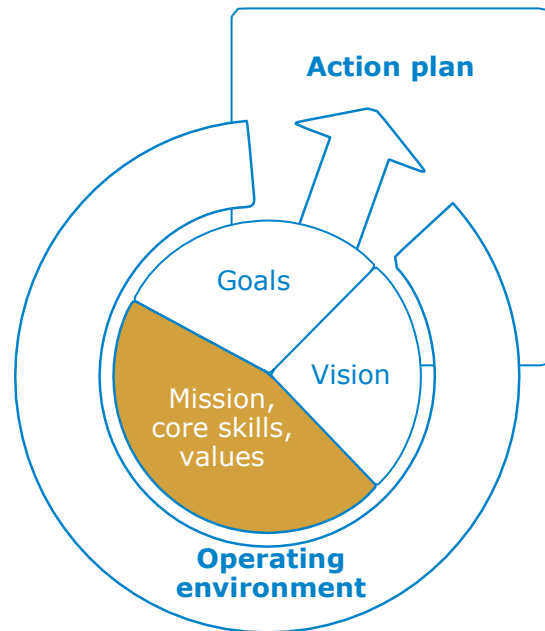
- Identifying strategic geographical priority areas for building global networks for projects.
- Valuing diversity: multiculturalism is an area of development that permeates all operations.
- Establishing strategic partnerships with organisations, or companies, based on certain sectors or qualifications relevant to your activities.
- Giving learners and staff more opportunities: expanding international activities to new regions and innovative areas.
- Providing the intercultural skills of the future: Many learners will go to study abroad or be employed in international organisations or multicultural workplaces.

### 5.3 Mission, core skills and values

The **mission** answers the question: *Why are we here?* It justifies the existence of an organisation and has an important role in guiding its operations.<sup>6</sup>

By core skills we mean the knowledge and skills that distinguish the organisation from others – the true expertise of an organisation.

The **core skills** of an organisation are a unique combination of knowledge, skills, soft skills and technologies that are hard to copy or replace. Core skills help you achieve an advantage over peers, a 'competitive edge', at least locally or regionally, and add special value for learners, staff and other stakeholders.



#### CONSIDER THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION IN YOUR MISSION

- What are the internationally focused core skills of your organisation?

#### THE MISSION CAN INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

- Your organisation is specialising in training staff in certain key topics.
- The sectors you are serving have a need to develop their qualifications in multinational contexts.
- You are working with migrants and refugees or other target groups with fewer opportunities.
- Your staff is multicultural.
- The aim of your educational or training provision is to get your learners to study or work in international institutions, organisations or companies, or other multicultural workplaces, or to offer learners with fewer opportunities the possibility to experience educational exchange and learning abroad.

<sup>6</sup> *Quality Management Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training*, Finnish National Board of Education, 2008.

**Values** express what is important in an organisation and what viewpoints or ethical standpoints its operations are based on. Values steer the way learners, staff and organisations operate as a whole.

Values in the field of education might include, for example, such topics as equality, tolerance, cooperation, openness or a student-oriented approach. There might be concrete values for specific educational fields, such as a focus on employers or entrepreneurship in the vocational education and training field.

**CONSIDER HOW THE VALUES OF YOUR ORGANISATION MANIFEST THEMSELVES:**

- in the processes of international activities in practice.
- in the day-to-day work of staff who work with international affairs, and when you last experienced this.

**TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHAT VALUES MEAN WHEN, FOR EXAMPLE:**

- the requirements of different programmes or departments need to be balanced.
- you listen to students' wishes when you select countries for your international networks (student-oriented approach).
- you involve different stakeholders in the strategy process.
- you give different nationalities the opportunity to express their cultures (tolerance, equality).
- you try to develop forms of international cooperation that are accessible to learners with fewer opportunities, underage students, or students with different cultural backgrounds, etc.

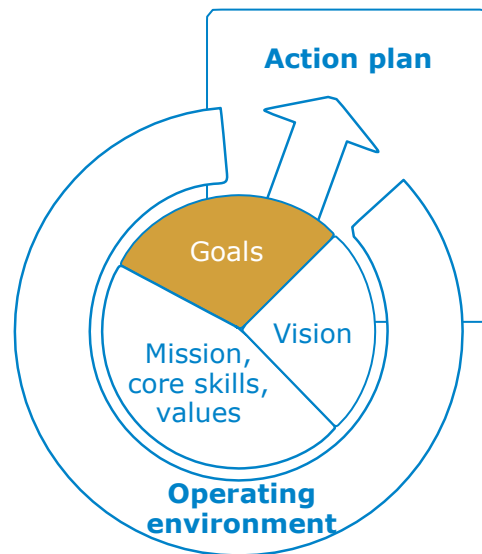
*"By applying for grants and preparing for international projects, we could not avoid the very thorough analyses of our strengths and weaknesses, our needs and dreams. Working on this together with a community, a dedicated team, makes it an even more valuable experience."* Hungarian school

## 5.4 Goals

**Goals** link the mission with the vision of the organisation and are formulated so that the organisation will develop towards the desired future state (vision).

When reflecting and deciding on your goals you should understand the strong institutional impact that participation in and organisation of international activities can bring to the whole institution.

The design and the implementation of high-quality activities promotes organisational excellence as it involves the development of various skills, such as institutional cooperation, joint creation of learning programmes, foreign language skills, etc.



The development of your institution and of the quality of the education and training provision should always be one dimension of your specific goals.

**Goals are the core element of the internationalisation strategy.** They should be based on a realistic picture of the past, present, and future; and at the same time challenge the status quo, so that the organisation is pushed to develop further.

Asking the question '**why**', and no longer getting another goal as an answer can identify a true, strategically focused goal. Here is an example of this method from the VET (vocational education and training) field:

**FIRST GOAL:** Our aim is to internationalise our institution.

### **WHY?**

**ANSWER:** Businesses in our local area need a workforce with skills to work internationally.

**RE-FORMULATED GOAL:** Our aim is to provide every student with international skills, either through learning periods abroad or the regular curricula, so that we can cater for the skills needs in our area.

It is important to know from this example that there are no right or wrong answers, but the answers must be based on the real situation, mission and vision of each organisation. Usually, every goal is also linked to an expected output, outcome or impact that is tracked with a quantitative or qualitative indicator (see chapter 6.5).

An organisation should not establish too many strategic goals for a specific period, as the vision might become blurred. It is advisable to keep your goals to between 5 and 6, and certainly no more than 8.

### **CONSIDER**

- How does the international dimension manifest itself in the general strategy goals of your organisation (even if the topic is perhaps not directly mentioned)?
- What specific goals should be set to fulfil the vision of your organisation in international activities?
- How is the internationalisation strategy going to benefit your organisation and all its staff and learners, whether they take part in international activities or not?
- How do you make sure that goals are both realistic and visionary enough?

### **TAKE INTO ACCOUNT**

- The perspectives of learners, staff and management, including their future learning interest and professional prospects.
- Goals should be related to institutional development: aiming to improve the capacity of your organisation, the quality and efficiency of its internal processes and of its work with partner organisations.
- Extending your current partner network, making more efficient procedures for learning abroad, or better preparations for it, increasing the number and the skills of departments and teachers involved.
- Internationalisation doesn't only cover learning mobility activities. The development of qualifications, curricula, content and methods are central to a well-diversified internationalisation strategy.
- Key issues to be covered: language skills, the ability to operate in multi-cultural learning and working environments, knowledge of different cultures, and of the green and digital transitions.
- But not only key issues: internationalisation is not only about international cooperation, language learning and intercultural skills. It is also about giving students and staff lifelong learning skills, transversal skills and resilience.

In the Erasmus+ accreditation the most important part of the **Erasmus Plan** is its objectives. Having clear, well-defined objectives, written specifically for your organisation and consistent with its experience and ambitions is key to a good Erasmus Plan.

## 5.5 Action plan

The **action plan** is drawn up to outline how an organisation's strategy will be implemented. Its purpose is to turn the strategic goals into operational targets and related actions, and to improve the quality of the work and the outputs.

The action plan usually covers such issues as targets/actions, procedures and resources for the agreed actions, as well as the related indicators.<sup>7</sup>

An action plan is generally drawn up, or at least revised, annually. The procedures describe how an agreed action point is carried out, who is responsible for or 'the owner' of that process, the schedule for when it takes place and for how long, and which financial and human means (resources) are available for the purpose.

An important aspect is also to establish clear indicators or performance targets to determine whether the action has been successful or not. Ideally, the implementation of an action plan is evaluated annually as part of normal quality management (described in more detail in chapter 6.5).



If you have an **Erasmus+ accreditation** every year you can request funding for mobility activities that you plan to organise. This yearly request should be part of your action plan.

You should complement the planned activities with planning for other operational matters, such as task distribution and schedules, to ensure good and efficient management of your accreditation.

<sup>7</sup> *Quality Management Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training*, National Board of Education, 2008.

**CONSIDER WHAT MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR INTERNATIONALISATION GOALS:**

- What measures can already be taken in the coming year?
- What measures need to be covered over several years?
- Are there alternative measures that can be taken to achieve the same goal?
- Which national and international partners are needed to carry out this work?
- Where will the funding and human resources come from for the planned international work?

*"A pitfall in strategy work is to make too soft and rather fluid declarations of intent. As we have become more professional, our strategy and actions plans have become more concrete over the years."* – Danish VET provider

**TAKE INTO ACCOUNT WHAT TYPICAL ACTION POINTS CAN LOOK LIKE:**

- To meet the targets set for language skills development in the next year, we need to arrange language training for 20 teachers and for 20 learner and teacher exchanges with countries where the relevant languages are spoken.
- We will implement a strategic partnership with a higher education institution, to increase cross-sectoral international cooperation.
- We will start working together with Norway next year and will later extend cooperation to all Nordic countries.
- We will reserve specialist expertise in all departments, to implement one new cooperation project in one priority area, such as inclusion.
- We will prepare and submit our Erasmus+ Key Action 1 accreditation application the next time there is a call for project proposals under Erasmus+.
- We will improve the preparation materials and dedicated mentoring for our students going on a learning mobility abroad.
- We will join the Apprenticeship Network.



## 6. Embedding and continuous improvement

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Part of drawing up an internationalisation strategy is considering how to put it into practice. This is not just a matter of making an action plan (as discussed in the previous chapter). It also encompasses other aspects; most importantly how to embed the internationalisation activities and planned actions into the everyday work of your organisation.

If the mission, values, vision and goals of your internationalisation strategy are not clearly linked to the basic activities of your organisation, they easily fall out of focus when central decisions are taken, for example on organisational issues, resources, pedagogical programmes, partnerships and networks, curricula or quality assurance. Linking and embedding strategic goals concerning internationalisation with other strategic decisions taken in other areas is key to overcoming this challenge.

Another very important aspect is 'continuous improvement'. Ideally, the strategy and especially the implementation of the action plan are evaluated annually as part of the quality management, based on agreed indicators. At the same time, future plans are modified accordingly and thus the aim of continuous improvement is achieved.

In this chapter, we discuss the organisation and implementation of international activities, as well as the follow-up, monitoring & quality management of those activities.

### 6.1 Organisational issues

How you organise and structure your international activities is a very important part of the strategic outlook. The question is to what degree you can embed internationalisation into the everyday activities of the organisation, and to what degree you also need a separate coordinating body.

Most internationally active institutions have appointed a person or a small team to be responsible for coordinating and managing the international activities for the whole organisation. Larger educational institutions might even have a separate international office and an international manager.

Such an office often includes staff responsible for international learner services and project administration at a central level. Smaller institutions work more in an integrated fashion, with certain teachers or trainers having these tasks as part of their other duties. In both cases, it is important to maintain open cooperation and a good flow of information between the different international actors, and to and from management.

Since internationalisation is not an isolated item, this person or team is often, at least in larger institutions, supported by a group of international contacts, teachers or other staff involved in the different operational units or on a sector level. They form the extended internationalisation team.

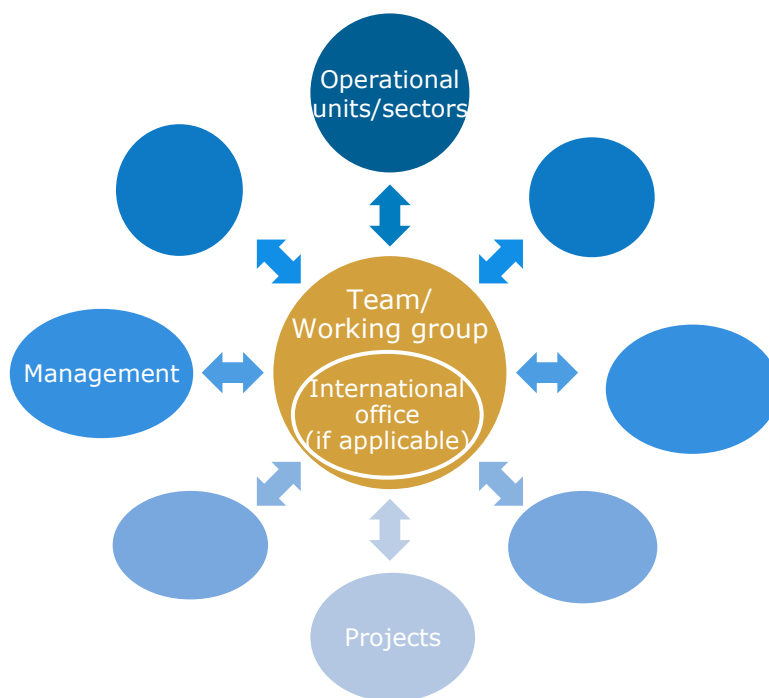
If this is the case, it is important to make sure that all the relevant expertise from each of the international operations is included, such as those responsible for separate international projects, or for relations with other institutions or organisations abroad, those working with international vocational skills competitions, tutors, mentors, people in charge of trainee placements in companies, language teachers, etc.

In smaller institutions, even if there is no international office, it should be clear who is part of the internationalisation team, which might consist of staff in charge of the administrative tasks, teachers mentoring learners going on mobility abroad, or hosting learners from abroad in their classes, as well as the management team of the institution.

Of increasing importance is also internationalisation at home, i.e. the teaching of international content, virtual cooperation across borders with similar institutions or the creation of international cross-sectoral connections with, for example, higher education institutions, research centres, social enterprises or companies working globally.

This also means that the teachers working on these topics need to be involved in the extended internationalisation team. To boost capacity building and increase the institutional impact of internationalisation, the whole team is responsible for sharing the experience, skills and knowledge acquired through participation in international projects with the whole community of the school, VET centre or adult learning organisation.

FIGURE 7: POSSIBLE ORGANISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES



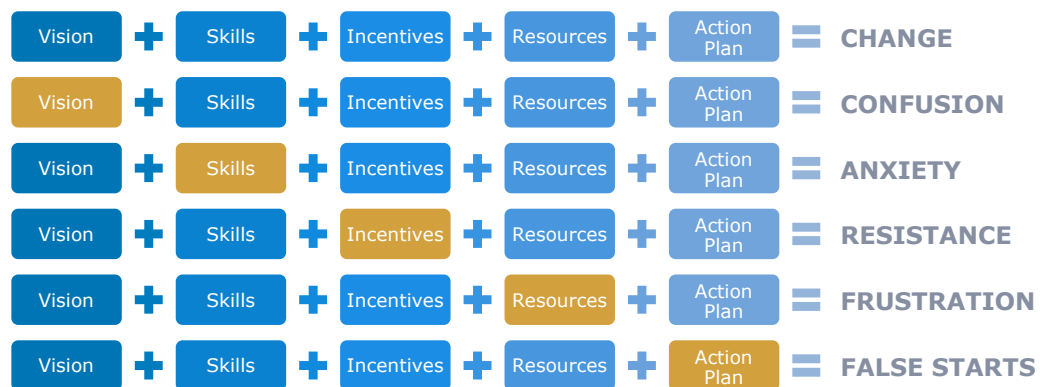
It is particularly important to secure the commitment and support of management. This can be ensured by either including a member of the management group in the international team or by having the international manager attend management meetings. When organising international activities, it is also important to know of any specific guidelines provided by the management in your institution and to ensure that management is committed to the plans.

*"We have been thinking strategically in our school for a long time now. As head of a school, I cannot possibly know everything that happens in our school, and I suppose I do not even need to. When I walk along the corridors, our students and my colleagues never fail to surprise me. And never in an unpleasant way..."*

*"What I need to know is that my colleagues are competent, our organisational values are shared and our strategic goals are well known and respected. It feels very good to experience even in the smallest, unknown detail that we are on the right track, our school is a good place and it's getting better day by day."* – Hungarian VET provider

By putting in place an internationalisation strategy and carrying out the strategic vision, the strategic goals and action points can be compared to managing a process of complex change, which is summarised in the following figure:

FIGURE 8: MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE



As can be seen from Figure 8, it is necessary to have a good mix of vision, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan to be able to make change happen. It is equally important to have structure and regular, clear communication within the team focused on international issues. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the team are also necessary.

It is essential to establish a link between international activities and teaching and guidance, because in this way you can reach the most important target group: the learners.

If the international team consists, for example, only of administrative staff and temporary project personnel, it hinders the long-term institutional

impact of the international activities on the development of curricula, qualifications, pedagogical programmes and teaching practices.

Furthermore, the international team must establish transparent processes and visibility for its activities, to clearly communicate not only within the team but also with the rest of the organisation.

In the case of different organisations that wish to work together to develop internationalisation, it is important that the international team takes this into consideration, working together from the first deliberation and design phase to include all visions and to link action plans as much as possible.

## 6.2 Human resources in international activities

International activities require multiple skills: you need to have quite detailed overall knowledge of the operations of your organisation; at the same time, you need to understand the current state of your operating environment and foresee changes in it, as well as detailed and sometimes very technical knowledge and skills related to networking, project work and, perhaps, EU financing. While it is essential to have all skills covered, they don't need to be covered by a single person.

Staff responsible for international work can include teachers, managers/heads of the institution, managers/coordinators of international affairs, project coordinators, assistants, guidance personnel, etc.

### INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF TASKS:

- Participating in strategic planning for the organisation;
- Writing international project proposals, administration of projects & reporting;
- Participating in planning training needs related to international skills;
- Writing the action plan for international activities;
- Participating in and being responsible for international projects;
- Evaluating results and outcomes of international projects;
- Organising international seminars;
- Preparing learners and staff for international exchanges;
- Welcoming and guiding international learners;
- Organising accommodation and programmes for incoming staff and students;
- Establishing links with organisations abroad;
- Negotiating learner and staff exchanges, learning content and outcomes and agreements with partners;
- Managing/evaluating learning outcomes;
- Negotiations and international meetings;
- Presentations at international events;

- Representing the organisation to visitors from abroad;
- International information events;
- Providing information to learners (and potentially their parents/legal guardians) and staff.

The decision on how many people are needed to carry out these tasks depends on the size of the organisation and its strategy. However, everybody's responsibilities should ideally include an international dimension.

### 6.3 Partnerships, consortia and networks

Cooperation with education and training institutions, workplaces, social enterprises, associations, businesses and other organisations, both at home and abroad, is a key part of international activities.

The unifying factor among partners can be, for example, a sector or subject of study, a regional focus, interest in a certain foreign country or training system, a common language or similar development goals. It is important to recognise that international cooperation is often dependent on two kinds of partnerships, both equally important:

- domestic partnerships or consortia<sup>8</sup>;
- partners or networks of organisations abroad.

The key issue, from the point of view of an internationalisation strategy, is that both domestic cooperation and links to partners abroad are planned and executed in line with the set goals.

Partnerships, consortia or networks should be extended by acquiring new partners from regions or subject areas deemed strategically necessary. To maintain a network efficiently, it is necessary to keep track of the current and historic contact information so they are easily available. Moreover, as objectives and needs evolve and change over time, it is recommended that partnerships are reviewed and updated accordingly.

Sometimes partnerships are formed around common projects and lapse when the project is over. But sometimes more permanent consortia or networks are formed. This is often the case when an educational provider is trying to formulate a more strategic outlook for its internationalisation aspirations.

Such networking, both domestically and abroad, is cost-efficient because the fixed costs of the activities are shared between the partners and different operational years and projects. Long-term cooperation is often also beneficial for quality and efficiency in, for example, learner and staff mobility activities.

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<sup>8</sup> "Mobility consortium" is a concept used in the context of Erasmus+ KA1 learning mobility projects. See the Erasmus+ Programme Guide for an explanation of this concept.

Staff can also learn about application procedures for funding from each other within the networks. Furthermore, new tools to promote internationalisation in education and training institutions are being created and accumulated. It is also possible to promote networks or national accreditation consortia of educational providers within the Erasmus+ programme, which makes longer-term funding and development possible.

*"It was not only our library community that was involved. As we wanted to be accredited as a consortium, we were also interested in the expectations and needs of libraries in our region, and we held several working sessions with municipal library managers and staff. In our own organisation, we discussed our expectations of this project with the heads of departments, administration and staff who had participated in our library's Erasmus+ visits from abroad (they were best placed to tell us how they have benefited from the project)." Adult education provider from Lithuania*

In general, training providers make written agreements for cooperation with their partners for both short-term and long-term cooperation. Long-standing networks can establish effective routines, which provide more security for the organisation in long-term learner exchanges, for example.

## 6.4 Internationalisation and implementation of curricula and qualification requirements

Each educational sector fulfils a different purpose. The school education sector – including early childhood education and care, primary and secondary education – provides children and young people with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become responsible, resilient and engaged individuals and to have a fulfilling life.

It also prepares them and provides the opportunities to continue their personal and professional development through different paths of education and training. The purpose of vocational education and training is to train skilled workers with an ability to also develop themselves and their workplaces for the future. This also applies to an increasingly international labour market.

Furthermore, the purpose of adult education is to boost lifelong learning processes that engage adults in gaining new knowledge, skills, attitudes and values from the educational influences and resources in their own environment and from daily experience. It can be formal, informal or non-formal education.

However, the qualification standards or requirements in these fields of education and training vary greatly from country to country and there are no common standards for how internationalisation should be covered in curricula or qualifications. In many cases these topics are only dealt with indirectly.

Nonetheless, when drawing up international strategies it is important to analyse the qualifications and curricula to see what possibilities and openings there are for including the international element through the qualification requirements.

*"In a 'European class', the students carry out certain parts of their education, both study at school and internship in a company, in another country. The basic idea is simple: different countries can provide different skills and complement the Swedish system. This is a small step in internationalisation, but the institution has included this in the curricula, so there are strategic elements to it.*

*For example, we lack certified teachers in welding in Sweden. But thanks to our cooperation with Finland, our students can go there and be certified. In return, we are good at entrepreneurial learning, so the Finnish students get their entrepreneurial knowledge when coming to Sweden. And the teachers become more aware of what our education needs to improve, and what we have that we can offer to others." – Swedish VET provider*

To be able to bring the international dimension into qualifications and teaching, teachers, trainers and other staff must have international skills themselves. An international and multicultural dimension can be incorporated into teaching regardless of the subject of study or vocational field. It is also a good idea to take advantage of the cultural knowledge and language skills of students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds. This is sometimes referred to as 'internationalisation at home'.

Based on the national curricula or qualification requirements, education providers must decide how they will ensure that international skills are acquired at the learning centre or during work-based learning, and then incorporate this information into their plans or curricula.

To be able to do this in the long run, training providers must make strategic plans and choices:

- How do we meet the challenges of an ever-changing working life and economy, now and in the future?
- What teaching and training arrangements will be needed in the future?
- How can we keep the skilled staff needed for those future situations?
- What sort of cooperation with other educational providers or workplaces could support our goals in this area?
- How will the qualifications or curricula need to develop?

The integration of international skills and experiences in national curricula and qualification requirements is especially important for the relevance of the learning mobility periods abroad.

“From the group of participants in job-shadowing, training courses and Erasmus+ seminars on the use of digital tools, apps and platforms, we formed the initiative group for the development of a digital toolkit. For its use we implemented a training course in the regular programme.” - German Adult Education provider

To ensure the quality of the mobility activities and their recognition in the education system of the sending organisation, the learning programmes and agreements should be based on learning outcomes, and validation mechanisms should be in place for its transfer, assessment and recognition, depending on the different educational fields’ requirements.

Each learning outcome carried out in mobility activity should be designed so that it is:

- **clearly understood** by the people involved – such as learners, teachers and trainers (in the home and host institutions) and institutions with responsibility for validating and recognising learning outcomes achieved during a period of learning abroad;
- **achievable during the stay** – for example, considering the existing knowledge and skills of learners, the duration of the planned stay and the learning opportunities able to be accessed in the host institution and country;
- **assessed abroad** – some learning outcomes may be easier to assess abroad than others; it is also important to consider the language skills of individual learners;
- recognisable when the learner **returns** to the home institution.

Such a learning outcome approach is very useful, especially for periods of learning abroad, since it helps people overcome differences in education systems and qualification structures.

Learning outcomes are defined in the context of knowledge, skills, attitude and autonomy/responsibility, and indicate what the individual knows, understands and is capable of doing.<sup>9</sup> Even if one’s own educational system is not fully based on learning outcomes, they can still be used with success in the context of learning abroad.

Recognising the outcomes of learning periods abroad should be done with as little administrative hassle and as little burden for the learner as possible. The “Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad” (2018/C 444/01) states that “*the outcomes from a learning period of up to one year abroad in another Member State during upper secondary education and training are recognised in any other [Member State], with the*

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<sup>9</sup>European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2008 and renewed version 2017.



*learner not being required to repeat the programme year or achieved learning outcomes in the country of origin, provided that the learning outcomes are broadly in line with the national curricula in the country of origin.”<sup>10</sup>*

A learning agreement, signed by all parties before the learning period takes place, helps to determine that the agreed-upon learning outcomes are broadly in line with the national curricula and that no additional learning is required. If this is agreed on by all parties, and the learning outcomes are achieved as agreed, return of the outcomes to the sending organisation and a recognition of the learning outcomes should be automatic.

Only if the outcomes differ from the agreement or it is clear from the beginning that certain essential learning outcomes cannot be achieved abroad should additional checks be undertaken. It is important to keep in mind that learning abroad will provide an experience that will go much beyond any curriculum, so a check on whether outcomes are broadly in line with the national curriculum should always be done with the best interests of the learner and their learning journey in mind and not by trying to match curriculum subjects in one country to another.

Different European transparency tools exist to help in this regard:

- Europass Mobility provides education providers with a **learning agreement template** based on the learning outcome approach, for use in the Erasmus+ programme and beyond.
- A **mobility certificate** template allows education providers to record and certify mobility experiences and the achieved learning outcomes, and acts as a direct follow-up to the learning agreement.
- The broader Europass platform allows you to create an **online profile** that serves for career guidance, mobility experience, obtaining digitally signed credentials and creating application documents (like CVs) according to an international standard, etc.
- You can also consult the **frameworks and guidelines** established by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), among others.

It is important to remember how important the recognition of learning outcomes is for the achievement of the European Education Area, *“a learning space where high quality and inclusive education and training is not hampered by borders and which aims at removing obstacles for recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and learning periods abroad.”<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad.

<sup>11</sup> Council Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET)

## 6.5 Evaluation & continuous improvement of activities

Like any other activities within an organisation, international activities must also be evaluated on a regular basis to gain information about the achievement of goals, the quality of work and future development needs.

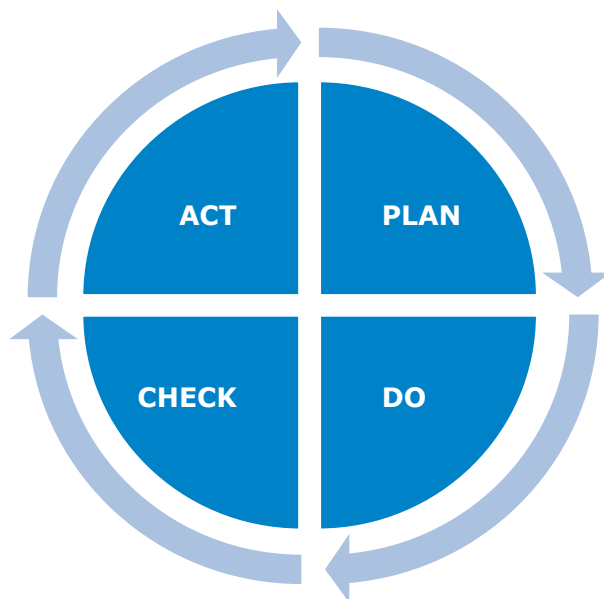
The most central thing is to evaluate how the strategic goals and yearly actions set in place for international work have been achieved, from the perspective both of the individuals and the organisation.

A common way to approach evaluation (or quality assurance, as it can also be called) is through the Deming Quality Circle, which describes 4 basic steps: **Plan – Do – Check – Act**.

The steps for **Plan** (strategy and action plan) and **Do** (carry out the activities) were dealt with in chapter 2. From the point of view of quality assurance, the steps for **Check** (evaluation) and **Act** (corrective actions and plans) are the most crucial.

Quality assurance is never a one-off activity but constantly repeated, for example every 6 months or yearly. Continuous improvement is at the heart of the Deming Quality Circle.

FIGURE 9: DEMING QUALITY CIRCLE



Activities can be assessed in several ways as regards their output, outcomes, or impact. The direct products or results of action (outputs) are one way of seeing what the result of that action is. However, we are often looking for

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for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience.

the effects, benefits or values to the individual or institution (outcomes), or even the fundamental changes (impact).

*"A commission consists of managers and staff responsible for the evaluation of international strategy which regularly monitors the consistency between the results of the mobility activities and our internationalisation strategy. For example, language skills and European citizenship were areas detected for further attention."*

Coordinator of an accredited consortium - Local educational authority in Türkiye.

To be able to follow-up on the activities, it is important to set quantitative and/or qualitative indicators, e.g. mobility statistics, number of projects, number of foreign partners, qualitative reports on projects, feedback from participants and partners, etc. Feedback from students or staff can give information on, for example, their satisfaction with international services, their wish for optional course provisions and which countries they would like to visit in student exchanges. A peer assessment among partner organisations can also be used as a form of external evaluation.

An evaluation of activities should ideally be a part of the overall quality assurance carried out by an organisation. If possible, it would be best to select indicators that would allow data to be collected at the same time as data collected within the framework of the organisation's general quality system or other processes, for example by including questions in student and staff feedback or using information from the Erasmus+ questionnaires and reports. Those responsible for international affairs should ensure that the work is also systematically developed based on information received via the evaluations.

**Qualitative and/or quantitative indicators** should be set for all the different strategy goals of the international activities. It should be noted that areas that may or may not be strategy goals in themselves might still need following up through the quality assurance system due to their importance – such as student and staff satisfaction or the funding of international activities.

*"Having a long-term internationalisation strategy offers a good basis for tackling problems that might occur – constant monitoring and analysis of the achievements of the European activities are of utmost importance for guaranteeing best results for all participants involved. At the same time, this strategy should also include a future vision to enhance [the] motivation and creativity of all members of staff."*

German VET provider

Below you will find a list of the most common processes for international work, with an illustrative example of a quantitative and/or qualitative indicator of success for each.

## LEARNER MOBILITY, OUTGOING AND INCOMING

The stages of this process are agreement, preparation, and arrangements before the mobility period, guidance and support during the mobility and reporting and recognition of learning outcomes after the exchange.

These are perhaps the most central steps for international activities, so it makes sense to describe them in detail to ensure a smooth running of activities, both for the sending and the hosting organisations.

It is also important to remember that it is not only the number of learners going abroad, but also the acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes that are important, i.e. learning outcomes should be an equally valid indicator in this regard.

The volume of people learning abroad, and its growth can be used as the indicator. For example, the number of school pupils who have been abroad for more than 1 month, as a percentage of the total number of pupils enrolled in the institution in the year in question.

\* If the strategic goal for learner mobility is of a more qualitative nature, the indicator could also be related to the number of development projects and actions taken which have improved the mobility arrangements.

## STAFF MOBILITY, OUTGOING AND INCOMING

The mobility of school leaders, pedagogical staff and other staff members also helps achieve strategic internationalisation goals, because their attitudes, language skills and commitment to internationalisation play a crucial role in advancing the organisation's internationalisation. The benefits come not only from outgoing activities, but also when a programme for incoming visitors and groups is managed well – this has a great impact within the organisation.

Here, the indicator could be the number of staff mobility activities of more than 5 days, but it could also be a more qualitative indicator focusing on the increase in priority activities, such as the outcomes of teaching assignments carried out abroad.

Erasmus+ Key Action 1 projects adhere to the **Erasmus Quality Standards**, a set of principles and provisions that should be followed to ensure good management of mobility activities and quality support for participants. They include rules on health, safety, selection, preparation and mentoring of participants, as well as on the definition, evaluation and recognition of learning outcomes.

The Erasmus Quality Standards are a part of the evaluation criteria for completed Erasmus+ projects.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

Cooperation projects carried out in international partnerships aim to, for example, improve the quality and appeal of education and training programmes and practices. Participation in cooperation projects will also improve the international skills of staff and allow organisations to learn from the good practice of others. This also has a positive impact on the attitudes of participants.

The indicator could be the number of new methodologies or activities tested and implemented in a specific educational programme that have been learned or designed through a cooperation project.

## INTERNATIONAL SKILLS OF STAFF

International skills, such as a knowledge of languages and different cultures or networking and projects skills, form a part of staff members' professional skills. Improving them is part of their professional development. One suggestion to streamline efforts would be to group the training needs by theme/subject area and organise training for several people at the same time, possibly together with other training providers.

The indicator could be the number of adult education staff involved in professional development courses or activities with an international component addressing digital skills, as a percentage of the total number of full-time staff members.

## INTERNATIONAL SKILLS COMPETITIONS IN THE VOCATIONAL SECTOR

Participation in international competitions allows training institutions to compare the quality and practice of their training to those of other countries, and to improve the skills and international skills of students and teachers.

Preparation for international skills competitions for each sector takes place in training units composed of several vocational institutions. Vocational teachers also provide expertise in international competitions. They will design the tasks for the competitions and assess the performance of contestants, together with experts from other countries, thus giving them an international insight into training and teaching at the highest level.

Teachers and students can be encouraged to take part in competitions by giving presentations about previous competitions and through exchanges abroad, for example. Young people who have participated in competitions may benefit from their international networks later in the workplace.

The quantitative indicator could be the number of learners who participated in international skills competitions as a percentage of the number of learners graduated. The qualitative indicator could be the number of different sectors or areas covered by the skills competitions attended.

## INTERNATIONALISATION IN THE HOME COUNTRY

Internationalisation in the home country refers to, for example, the provision of training in a foreign language, taking part in learning abroad virtually or cooperating across borders using specific online platforms, such as the European School Education Platform (ESEP).

It can also be boosted by hosting international student, staff and experts as part of mobility projects, or by integrating students with an immigrant background and their culture into the teaching programmes, and/or introducing internationally sourced or focused materials into the teaching in the home country.

The quantitative indicator could be the number of programmes and courses in which there are some forms of internationalisation-at-home activities (teaching in a foreign language, virtual learning abroad, learners coming from abroad, participation in intercultural events, etc.). The qualitative indicator could be the extent to which the priority areas of the strategy have been addressed by the international activities.

## 7. Conclusions about the 'strategy journey'

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Based on the experience of Erasmus+ National Agencies, the European Commission and relevant conducted research<sup>12</sup>, we can clearly see that there are some key areas that are essential for successfully implementing an internationalisation strategy for an education provider:

- **Strategy process:** The kind of strategy process you build very much determines the success and results of that process. A process built around knowing your own mission and operating environment, with a good balance of being realistic and visionary, and involving everyone in co-creation and ownership of the process, seems to produce the best results.
- **Qualifications, curricula, and pedagogics:** These are the key access points to larger impacts and a deeper implementation within educational systems. The qualifications and/or curricula direct a great number of the processes taking place within educational institutions, thus creating a crucial link between them and internationalisation. It also reminds each teacher, educator or staff member of the role that internationalisation plays.
- **Role of management:** for a strategy to be successful, management must lead the strategy process and at the same time involve teachers and staff at large. The international team should also include a representative from management.
- **Practical implementation:** Any strategy comes down to the action plans drawn up and how they are carried out. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is to involve the whole staff in this process if internationalisation is to really become an everyday part of each institution.
- **Cooperation with the world of work, associations or other key partners:** The strategy process and internationalisation at large often lack direct input from stakeholders outside the education system, such as companies. Even if views are considered in other, more indirect ways, it would be beneficial, mostly for VET and adult education institutions, if the views of the world of work, associations and businesses were considered when creating the strategy and taking action.

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<sup>12</sup> *International dimension in the strategies and daily life of vocational schools*, 2016.

## SUMMARY OF ACTION NEEDED TO INTERNATIONALISE – 10 SIMPLE STEPS:

- **Map your existing internationalisation activities**, projects and strategic documents to date.
  - Draw a timeline of the developments achieved so far, together with the major milestones.
- **Analyse the operational environment** and broader strategies.
  - Make a table of institutional, regional, national, sectoral and European strategies and documents guiding your work.
- **Understand the core skills** present in your organisation.
  - Carry out a small survey of your staff and their international experience and skills.
- **Examine the mission and values** in your organisation from the viewpoint of internationalisation.
- **Formulate the vision** for your internationalisation strategy with all actors and stakeholders, considering existing activities, the operational environment, the mission and values and the core skills.
  - Arrange a small workshop with colleagues to discuss where you are right now and where you would like to be in 5 or 10 years by internationalising.
- **Set the strategic goals** in support of your vision for the international activities in such a way that students, staff and the working environment can relate to them.
- **Decide on an action plan** for at least the first year, including deciding on roles, dividing tasks, budgeting and setting indicators for the key strategic goals.
  - Do this in regular meetings with your colleagues. Not all the tasks have to be ready straightaway.
- **Communicate both the strategy process and the strategic decisions to all actors and stakeholders** throughout the process, to ensure maximum commitment.
- **Implementation**: start implementing the activities you have decided on, slowly increasing the international footprint in your education institution. Make sure to have all stakeholders involved along the way.
- **Conduct regular assessment** of the quality of your activities, **evaluate** the progress of your strategy and **update** it if needed.



## 8. Tools for your 'strategy journey'

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There are a multitude of strategy tools and guides available online and in bookstores. Many of them can be useful when working on your own strategies and can be used with success in one or many parts of the process.

For the specific purpose of drawing up strategies on how to internationalise education institutions, the Erasmus+ national agencies have, over the years, created a series of materials and tools that could assist with this work, so you are invited to consult their websites.<sup>13</sup>

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The production team of the original Finnish guidebook from 2010 (Finnish version) included: Head of Unit Mika Saarinen and Programme Manager Katriina Lammi-Rajapuro from CIMO; Manager Ritva Saastamoinen and Project Manager Päivi Riihelä from Helsinki Business College; Senior Advisor Annikki Häkkinä, Senior Advisor Hanna Autere and Senior Education Advisor Tuula Sumkin from the National Board of Education; Head of International Relations Seija Heikkinen from Omnia and Project Manager Leena-Maija Talikka from Skills Finland.

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The aim of this guidebook is to help institutions from the school education, VET and adult education fields in the strategic planning of international activities. The guide offers advice and support to training institutions of different types, sizes and at different stages of internationalisation. It builds first and foremost on EU cooperation and the Erasmus+ programme, but also takes global aspects into account.

The strategic planning of international activities helps training and educational institutions make it clear to students and staff what role internationalisation plays in the core activities and the development of educational institutions, qualifications, and systems.

Strategic planning helps to steer international activities over the long term and make them more systematic. This in turn helps the management of the activities and the day-to-day work of everybody involved in international activities.

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