



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO STIMULATE DATA-INFORMED POLICY MAKING ON INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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This set of policy recommendations is produced by the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education, the European University Foundation and Ghent University in the context of the Erasmus+ co-funded project on [Assessing quality of partnerships amongst HEIs](#). It reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

1. Conclusions on international institutional partnership policies

The eQuATIC report “[Research: The Use of Data for Internationalisation in Higher Education](#)” has led to the following conclusions with regard to the policies of higher education institutions for inter-institutional partnerships:

- Most institutions do not have a policy for setting up, adapting or ending international partnerships.
- Inactive international partnerships are rarely actively ended; mostly the partnership agreements are allowed to stay in the files indefinitely or they expire without further notice.
- Although institutions typically gather many data on mobility, these data are in most cases not used in a systematic manner to inform institutions’ policies and decision-making on international partnerships.
- Whilst in general institutions perceive the quality of international partnerships as a priority for internationalisation, most institutions do not pursue a quality assurance policy on the formation, monitoring and withdrawal from inter-institutional agreements.

On the European and national level, the following main conclusions were drawn:

- In the EU policy on internationalisation in higher education references to the importance of international institutional partnerships are made, and the inclusion in national higher education strategies is recommended, but without further guidance or follow-up.
- International institutional partnerships rarely feature in national policies on internationalisation in higher education, and if they do the focus is almost entirely on measures to increase mobility.
- Quantitative aims of the national policies on internationalisation usually are not complemented by any qualitative objectives or intentions.



- Very few national accreditation or QA frameworks pay attention to international institutional partnerships. In these exceptional cases the framework typically includes specific quantitative criteria for mobility.
- International institutional partnerships may feature in some specific quality assurance procedures, e.g. as part of the theme “internationalisation” in institutional audit trails or in voluntary assessments such as the ECA Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation (CeQInt).

As we can see from the conclusions above, policies for international institutional partnerships are generally underdeveloped on all levels, and institutional decisions on starting, prolonging or ending inter-institutional partnerships are mostly not evidence-based. Therefore, in the following sections recommendations for the European, national and institutional levels are proposed to stimulate data-informed policy making on international institutional partnerships. Moreover, to increase the effectiveness of these partnerships it is essential that the quality of the partnerships is continuously monitored and the partnership policy itself is embedded in the internationalisation policy at large. The recommendations addressed to the different stakeholders will be placed under the headings “data-informed policy making” and “quality assured internationalisation” to reflect the necessity of covering both the data and quality dimensions of inter-institutional partnership policies.

2. Recommendations for the European Commission

Data-informed policy making

- a) The importance of setting-up data-informed policies with regard to international partnerships should be emphasised by the European Commission in its policy papers on internationalisation in higher education. Member States should be encouraged to support institutions in building international partnership policies.
- b) The calls for EU Grants under the Erasmus+ programme should stimulate the development and application of data-informed policies for institutional decision-making on inter-institutional partnerships, as well as encourage building data-capabilities of staff members across all departments of Higher Education institutions but in particular in international relations.
- c) The many data that are collected by the European Commission should be fed back in an appropriate format to the national and institutional level so that it can be used on these levels to inform policy making on international partnerships. Digitalising the administration of the Erasmus+ mobility management should include the visualisation and easy availability of relevant data, thus encouraging institutions to take advantage of their progress beyond getting rid of paperwork. Creating stronger internationalisation policies based on data should be a core argument for digitisation.

- d) The new Erasmus Charter of Higher Education (ECHE) should include provisions on data-informed international partnership policies. For instance, in section 2.1 “Before mobility” of the ECHE Guidelines it could be added that the “Inter-Institutional Agreements should be based on a comprehensive understanding of the partner HEI” *and comparative data on institutional profiles*. Similarly when stipulating that “The agreement should identify shared quality requirements specific to the planned exchanges” it could be added that the quality requirements should include specific indicators and data sources. In section 2.3 “After mobility” some additional sentences pointing to the importance of evaluating the quality requirements and the inter-institutional agreement overall with available data would be useful for triggering data-informed partnership policies.
- e) It should be considered to expand the current number of six indicators of “international orientation” in U-Multirank so that institutions have more possibilities to find a suitable institutional match or to evaluate existing partnership agreements with the aid of the U-Multirank tool.
- f) The European Universities Initiative should encourage the application of data-informed policies on the formation and monitoring of the alliances. These policies may include both quantitative data and qualitative indicators that provide evidence for the complementarity of the institutional partner profiles, as well as the results and impact of the inter-institutional cooperation in the alliance.

Quality assured internationalisation

- g) The ECHE Monitoring Guide and the self-assessment tool for institutions to check ECHE compliance should be enhanced to include the quality requirements as stipulated in the Inter-Institutional Agreements. These tools should be redesigned to enable a continuous monitoring of the quality of the Inter-Institutional Agreements on the basis of the indicators in the quality requirements.
- h) The European Commission should consider opening up funding possibilities for (a) institutions to apply for a voluntary quality assessment of internationalisation in which international institutional partnerships are part and parcel of the institutional internationalisation policy and (b) to build staff competences in the field of data capabilities across Higher Education Institutions.

3. Recommendations for governments and quality assurance agencies

Data-informed policy making

- a) National and regional governments should explicitly include international institutional partnerships in their national internationalisation policies. In particular, these policies should indicate desired qualitative impact of the partnerships on the higher education institutions' activities (i.e. research, education, third mission, etc.).
- b) National and regional governments are called upon to make greater efforts for connecting and combining different data sources (gathered on institutional/national/European levels) on mobility and international partnerships and making these readily available to their institutions.
- c) Quality assurance agencies should raise awareness of the increasing importance of international institutional partnerships and the necessity of data-informed institutional policy making to impact the quality of mobility and internationalisation more horizontally.

Quality assured internationalisation

- d) Governmental internationalisation policies should focus less on quantitative mobility requirements and more on the question on how international institutional partnerships can contribute to the quality of internationalisation and the quality of higher education overall.
- e) National and regional governments should consider the inclusion of voluntary assessments of internationalisation, including inter-institutional partnerships, in their internationalisation strategy for higher education (e.g. as in Sweden).
- f) Quality assurance agencies should not include mobility targets in their quality assurance frameworks (as setting such targets belongs to the autonomy of higher education institutions) but could consider how institutions evaluate the quality of international partnerships when carrying out institutional or internationalisation assessments. The quality assurance agencies should consider including stronger emphasis on evaluation of the institutional international partnerships' impact on quality of education (i.e. for programme assessments or accreditation)

4. Recommendations for higher education institutions

Data-informed policy making

- a) Higher education institutions should accept the necessity of developing an institutional policy for their international partnerships. This policy should address the formation, monitoring and cancellation of partnership agreements based on the available data and according to agreed indicators. These indicators may require both quantitative and qualitative information. Better international partnerships as a result of such a policy will also facilitate the (automatic) recognition of credit mobility (EUF, "[Automatic recognition and credit mobility](#)", Policy Paper, October 2019).
- b) The principle of data-informed policy making should become part of the institutional culture in order to widen the support for these policies and the decision-making on international partnerships.
- c) Data-informed policies will require not only investment in information tools but also in (internationalisation) staff members who need to use these tools. Professional development and training for staff members to improve digital skills and to work on data (statistics, data processing) may be essential to raise data capability and dealing with data-informed policies across the board.

Quality assured internationalisation

- d) Higher education institutions should perceive the international partnerships as a mean for quality improvement. Therefore, institutional policies and strategies should emphasise their desired impact on the quality of education, research, third mission, etc.
- e) Higher education institutions should facilitate a dialogue between staff members working in internationalisation and quality assurance professionals at different levels inside the organisation (e.g. heads of office, central level, faculty/departmental level).
- f) Higher education institutions that perceive their international partnerships as important for their institutional strategy should also be willing to evaluate their international partnerships in a systematic and well-informed manner, and to include these regular partnership evaluations in the internal quality assurance system of the institution.
- g) Higher education institutions may consider the application for a voluntary assessment of internationalisation as a useful tool to seek external confirmation or advise on the effectiveness of their internationalisation policies, including their policies on international partnerships.