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Universities Worry that Global Programs Only Benefit Wealthy Students

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This is an article from *University World News*, an online publication that covers global higher education. It is presented here under an agreement with *The Chronicle*.

A survey of more than 1,300 institutions worldwide by the International Association of Universities has identified the biggest institutional risk of internationalisation as being that it primarily benefits wealthier students, and the most significant societal risk as the growing commercialisation of higher education.

There is increasing focus on internationalisation in higher education institutions worldwide, with more and more universities opening their doors to peers in other countries, according to the *4th Global Survey* of the International Association of Universities, or IAU.

The report, which draws on a survey conducted in 2013, highlights some of the important considerations for best internationalisation strategies for higher education institutions. It is not freely available but may be ordered from the IAU.

The survey drew sponsorship from the European Association for International Education, or EAIE, as well as the European Commission, British Council and NAFSA: Association of International Educators in the United States.

It was sent electronically to heads of institutions and-or heads of international relations of universities worldwide, and completed

questionnaires were received from 1,336 institutions in 131 countries.

“Making the best use of internationalisation, including developing specific internationalisation strategies and activities that bring maximum benefit to institutions and systems, has become a key challenge for higher education leaders and policy-makers,” said Ross Hudson, programme officer for IAU.

Internationalisation policy-makers needed institutional, regional and global understanding of the benefits and risks of internationalisation, obstacles to advancing the process, activities being prioritised within strategies and support structures.

“What internationalisation activities are being funded in particular and where does this funding come from? What are the priority regions for internationalisation? What are the goals for student mobility, and how do these goals compare with reality? How have these trends changed over time? How do they compare by geographic region?”

The intention of the survey, Hudson added, was to provide answers to these and other questions and to advance knowledge and understanding of the process of internationalisation.

The responses

The findings were revealing, and some of them encouraging, the IAU believes.

More than half of the responding universities had policies in place for internationalisation and a further 25% said one was in preparation.

In most regions, universities said their geographic focus for internationalisation was on their own region. Europe was also a strong focus for most regions.

The top ranked expected benefit in pursuing internationalisation was increasing the international awareness of students, which was

in line with the results of the previous two IAU global surveys in 2005 and 2009.

Institution heads were perceived as the most important internal drivers of the process, while the top ranked external driver was government – or national, state or municipal – policy.

Questions included perceived obstacles to advancing internationalisation. Here, lack of funding – both internally and externally – was seen as the most significant challenge.

More than 50% of respondents said funding for internationalisation came from the general institutional budget.

Internationalisation comes at a financial cost – and not only at institutional level.

For 31% of responding universities, the problem of international opportunities being available only to students with financial resources was ranked as the most significant potential risk of internationalisation for institutions.

Universities saw the most significant societal risk to be the growing commercialisation of higher education.

On the issues of value, activities and funding, results showed that academic goals were central to institutional internationalisation efforts.

Outgoing mobility opportunities for students and international research collaboration were noted as the highest priority internationalisation activities, by 29% and 24% of respondents respectively.

Student knowledge of international issues was cited as the most significant benefit of internationalisation, and was regarded as such by 32% of respondents. The values of equity and sharing internationalisation's benefits were central features in the approach to internationalising institutions.

EAIE Barometer survey

Expected to reveal equally vital information is a survey currently being conducted by the European Association for International Education, or EAIE. Last month it launched a new EAIE Barometer study of internationalisation in European universities.

Leonard Engel, EAIE executive director, told *University World News*: "Although many studies have taken place before on the topic, this is the only one to focus directly on those who make internationalisation work in practice.

"We aim to utilise our extensive network of individuals across Europe to produce a comprehensive picture of where internationalisation stands today, where it is potentially heading, and how we can help drive it further."

Engel explained the difference between the IAU survey and the new EAIE Barometer study. "The IAU's work focuses primarily on the top level of universities, whereas the EAIE barometer focuses on practitioners and their perceptions.

"I trust these different perspectives will be complementary. It could also be that how things are experienced by those actually doing the work differs from how people at the top of an organisation perceive it: in other words, a case of the top level talking the talk while walking the walk might be a different story."

For more than two decades, Engel added, the EAIE had during its annual conference brought together individuals from around the world who were working to internationalise their higher education institutions.

"We have seen first-hand the rapid transformation institutions have undergone to internationalise. These changes haven't been the same everywhere in Europe, however, and the needs differ greatly."

The barometer survey, he said, was the first major research project the EIAE had undertaken and the organisation hoped to do more

of these on a regular basis.

One of the survey's aims was "to discover, at the level of the individual, what challenges practitioners face in their daily work and what they would need to do their jobs better. We want to see if countries and regions differ greatly within the European higher education area and map the degree of internationalisation across Europe."

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Wow! A sociologist finds out that fisherman go fishing to catch fish.

More seriously this is a real problem. Study abroad is almost inaccessible to poor students. The criteria used are often socioeconomic gatekeepers that have the effect of excluding students with limited resources. I am a first generation graduate and PhD and my first chance to study abroad was as a post-doc. I had to pay my own airfares and moving expenses to Europe and US.

In Australia the vast bulk of overseas students are full fee paying students from SE Asia and China from very wealthy elite families. Their supremacist social attitudes often horrify Australian students (both of asian and european origin I might add).

Those who come on scholarships, whether undergraduate or graduate students are entirely different and make a great contribution to the university.

Furthermore they are spread throughout the faculties of the university, unlike the full-fee paying overseas students.

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