

KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

University of Applied Sciences

Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management

Karoliina Daelemans

IMPROVING MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION
DEGREE PROGRAMMES THROUGH BENCHMARKING

Master's Thesis 2011

ABSTRACT

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DAELEMANS, KAROLIINA

Improving Marketing Management of Higher Education
Degree Programmes through Benchmarking

Master's Thesis

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Keywords

Benchmarking, degree programmes, higher education,
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Research project aims to answer to how can the marketing management process of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences degree programmes conducted in English be improved to attract higher numbers of motivated international students.

Benchmarking was chosen as the method for identifying needs for development as the entire purpose of the research was to learn from other higher education organizations. Collecting data independently, observing internal processes, and conducting internal and external interviews were used in identifying different factors in the marketing management process.

Results of the research indicate that there are several different ways of distributing the responsibilities in the marketing management of degree programmes. In addition there were notable differences between Kymenlaakso UAS and the comparator institutions in forms of cooperation, issues related to marketing and the best practices in use.

Based on the findings involving top management, launching a recruitment team concentrating in recruiting international degree students and establishing functional cooperation are the most important actions suggested for Kymenlaakso UAS. In addition, the timing of the marketing process should be re-evaluated and resources should be increased.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

1	INTRODUCTION	6
1.1	Motivation for Research	6
1.2	Defining the Focus Area	11
1.3	Research Objectives	13
1.4	Research Project Overview	13
2	KYMENLAAKSO UAS DEGREE PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED IN ENGLISH	15
2.1	Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English	17
2.2	Master's Degree Programmes Conducted in English	21
2.3	Balance of Nationalities in Degree Programmes	22
3	MARKETING MANAGEMENT PROCESS	25
3.1	Marketing Management	25
3.2	Marketing of Higher Education	33
4	ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	38
4.1	International Students as a Marketing Segment	38
4.2	Creating Attraction for Higher Education	40
5	BENCHMARKING AS A METHOD FOR IMPROVEMENT	44
5.1	Introduction to Benchmarking Method	44
5.2	Higher Education Benchmarking	52
5.3	Benchmarking Exercise Stages	54
5.4	Executing the Benchmarking Exercise	57
6	RESULTS	62
6.1	Independently Collected Data	62
6.2	Internal Observation and Interviews	66
6.3	External Interviews	74
7	CONCLUSION	79
7.1	Summary of Results	80

7.2 Managerial Implication	85
7.3 Evaluation of Research Method and Results	92
7.4 Further Research	93
REFERENCES	94
APPENDICES	
Appendix 1. Marketing of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes Conducted in English 2011-2012	99
Appendix 2. Degree Programmes Conducted in English in the Selected Higher Education Institutions in 2011-2012	101
Appendix 3. Question Matrix for Benchmarking Exercise	103
Appendix 4. Distribution of Responsibilities in Marketing of Degree Programmes Conducted in English Identified by Interviewees	104
Appendix 5. Forms of Cooperation Identified by the Interviewees	106
Appendix 6. Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Identified by the Interviewees	108
Appendix 7. Best Practises Identified by the Interviewees	110
FIGURES	
Figure 1. Research Structure by Karoliina Daelemans	14
Figure 2. Karoliina Daelemans' Way to Increase the Number of Motivated International Applicants for Kymenlaakso UAS	14
Figure 3. Applications for the Kymenlaakso UAS Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English in 2007-2011	20
Figure 4. Shares of Different Nationalities in the Degree Students Admitted to KyUAS Degree Programmes Conducted in English 2008-2011	22
Figure 5. Shares of Different Nationalities in the Degree Students Admitted to KyUAS Degree Programme in International Business 2008-2011	23
Figure 6. Marketing Management Stages	26
Figure 7. Holistic Marketing Dimensions	27
Figure 8. Marketing Management	29
Figure 9. Marketing Planning Stages	31
Figure 10. The CORD Model of Marketing Strategy	36
Figure 11. Response Hierarchy Models	42
Figure 12. Classification of Benchmarking	47

Figure 13. Typology of Externally Focused Benchmarking Activities	47
Figure 14. Nature of Benchmarking Activities	48
Figure 15. Different Foci for Benchmarking Activities	49
Figure 16. Referencing Processes Used in Benchmarking	49
Figure 17. Number of All Students and Students with Nationality other than Finnish in Youth Education Leading to Degree, Year 2010	62
Figure 18. Applicants per Study Place Ratio in Joint Application Period for Bachelor's Degree Programmes conducted in English, Spring 2011	64
Figure 19. All Kymenlaakso UAS Applicants, Spring 2011 Application Period for Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English	65
Figure 20. Marketing Budgets of 25 Universities of Applied Sciences for Spring 2011 Joint Application Period, Euros Used per Student	66

TABLES

Table 1. Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes Conducted in English, Academic Year 2011-2012	15
Table 2. Similar Degree Programmes Offered by Other UASs, Academic Year 2011-2012	17
Table 3. Internal – External and Independent – Collaborative as Benchmarking Modifier	50
Table 4. Competitive – Collaborative and Functional – Generic as Benchmarking Modifiers	51
Table 5. Differences in Distribution of Responsibilities in Marketing of Degree Programmes Conducted in English Identified by Interviewees	80
Table 6. Differences in Forms of Cooperation Identified by the Interviewees	81
Table 7. Differences in Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Identified by the Interviewees	82
Table 8. Differences in Best Practices Identified by the Interviewees	83
Table 9. Implementing Different Processes into Kymenlaakso UAS	85
Table 10. Implementing New Forms of Cooperation to Kymenlaakso UAS	86
Table 11. Reflection and Preparation for Different Issues and Challenges Related to Marketing in Kymenlaakso UAS	87
Table 12. Implementation of Best Practices to Kymenlaakso UAS	89

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for Research

The field of higher education is facing pressure for improving the quality and operations in general, due to changing world of economy and professional life. According to the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (2010, 8) factors such as the aging population, climate change, and globalization are bound to have a considerable effect in Finland and other European countries. The rapidly changing economic structure makes planning difficult. Also, the lifelong learning approach is altering the whole concept of education from educating mainly children and youth to educating also adults – not only because of the aging nation, but also to help the economic world acquire the newly required competencies quickly.

Finland is facing severe demographical challenges in the future, when the number of young people, the biggest target group for higher education, is declining compared to the increasing elderly age group (Official Statistics of Finland, 2011). The higher education institutions will need more young people to educate in order to survive and Finland will need more educated work force from abroad in order to support the aging nation. On the other hand, the development of the changing economy and society needs the competence of the higher education field. This has been acknowledged in Finland's Ministry of Education's *Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009–2015* (Ministry of Education 2009, 32). The strategy points out that the attractiveness of Finland as a business, work, and living environment must be increased. Also, it is a necessity to internationalize higher education, research, and innovation. Internationalization of the education supports the multicultural society by promoting diversity also in the business community, international networking, competitiveness, and innovativeness - improving the overall well-being and competences of the citizens (Ministry of Education 2009, 9).

According to the goals of the internationalization strategy (Ministry of Education 2009, 32) Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences, like any other higher education institution in Finland, needs to attract a considerably higher number of international degree students in the near future. The number of international degree students educated in 2007 should increase by over 8,000 students in total by 2015. In addition, the higher education institutions should have a considerable growth in the

international exchange activities among students, trainees, lectures, and other personnel.

Additional and considerable challenges, that in particular the universities of applied sciences in Finland are facing, can be seen in the new Ministry of Education's guidelines published in September 2011 (Ministry of Education, 2011). These guidelines are based on the new Government Programme, prepared by the Finnish Government formed after the Parliamentary Elections in April 2011. According to the guidelines a total of 2,200 starting places will be cut by 2013 in the universities of applied sciences, concentrating mostly on the study fields of culture, tourism, technology, and transport. In addition, the number of UAS units, as well as the total number of universities of applied sciences in Finland, will be cut. The goal is to have only 18 universities of applied sciences instead of 25 that exist at the moment (Ministry of Education 2011, 2).

The new government is also trying to take measures to balance its budget in order to survive in the difficult financial situation. Therefore the Government Programme introduced cuts of 51 million Euros in the funding of the universities of applied sciences by 2015, causing substantial pressure for spending cuts within the institutions in the coming years. The focus of internationalization, however, still remains (Ministry of Education, 2011, 1-2).

These factors will undoubtedly result in increasing competition between the universities of applied sciences in Finland, aiming to comply with the governmental requirements in order to receive sufficient or increased funding. In addition, to internationalization of education these requirements include speeding the graduation process, graduated students progressing faster into the working life, improving the efficiency of administration, and improving the quality of teaching and research (Ministry of Education, 2011, 1). The threat of insufficient funding and universities of applied sciences' units being cut will surely act as a powerful motivation for the institutions. It is therefore very important for universities of applied sciences to develop their education conducted in English, to increase the overall efficiency, and to attract motivated international students as well as providing them the support needed for timely graduation.

As Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 147) state, marketing is an important tool in student enrolment. Therefore focusing the Master's thesis work on benchmarking of marketing management processes of degree programmes conducted in English can ideally help Kymenlaakso UAS improve its own processes. This can help the institution attract higher numbers of motivated international applicants, who will stay at Kymenlaakso UAS for the entire duration of their studies and eventually graduate in the planned timeframe.

The initial interest for this research topic arose at the annually held *Conference in International Affairs in Finnish Higher Education Institutions*, organized by Oulu University of Applied Sciences and Oulu University in May 2009 and by Satakunta University of Applied Sciences and University Consortium of Pori in May 2010, upon realizing how well some higher education institutions appear to have coordinated and developed their degree programmes conducted in English when it comes to marketing, admission procedures, programme development, and the different units keeping it all under control. Many of the presentations, including themes like *International Marketing – Co-operation or Individual Performances*, *Executing the Internationalization Strategy of Ministry of Education*, *Regional Marketing – but with What Money?* and *Does Finland's Higher Education Need a Brand?* instigated interest in finding out if there were better and more efficient ways to manage the activities connected to the international degree programmes in Kymenlaakso UAS.

There appears to be several different ways of dividing the responsibilities within the higher education institutions in Finland, even in the marketing of the programmes alone. During the past five years when working at Kymenlaakso UAS' Student Affairs Office and Admissions Office, I have observed that there seems to be a "pointing fingers mentality" between certain departments or key persons involved in the degree programmes conducted in English, blaming the others for work that hasn't been done properly - without even understanding whose responsibility it really is. In addition, at Kymenlaakso UAS most key persons have seemed to carry out the responsibilities very independently rather than through team work, when in other institutions marketing, developing the degree programmes, or taking care of the application practicalities is a joint effort. The lack of cooperation in Kymenlaakso UAS appears to have created information gaps, lack of knowledge, and conflicts of interests. Processes could be much better and more efficient if the procedures and responsibilities would

be clear to everyone. Teamwork can be a great source of innovation and development. A concrete idea of how the marketing responsibilities have been divided within Kymenlaakso UAS' degree programmes conducted in English, how other universities of applied sciences are doing things in marketing of their degree programmes, and what are considered the most effective and beneficial processes was needed.

Marketing of higher education is not as straight-forward as it may sound. The higher education marketing often seems controversial, combining very different interests. One of the main reasons behind the need for higher education marketing appears to be the overall commercialization of the higher education. Another – and probably the most important – instigator is the ever-increasing competition between the higher education institutions. Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 23) quote Hassan's (2003, 79) notion, giving an idea of the scale of change in the higher education during the past decades:

In the last twenty years... [the university] has metamorphosed rapidly into a completely different institution – if such a perpetually mobile business-oriented entity may still be called an 'institution'. So radically has the university changed that the typical academic, administrator or student from the 1960s or 1970s would barely recognize it today. It might seem to them to be more akin to a marketing company or advertising agency, so concerned is it with profit, products, clients, market share, branding and image.

Bok (2005, 1-15) suggests several factors that have created the foundation for the commercialization of higher education. First of all, the institutions have traditionally been financed by the governments, which in return have benefited of the highly educated workforce, expert knowledge, and scientific innovations the universities have produced. These have been turned into valuable new products or even life-saving treatments and cures – producing growth and prosperity for the country. The difficult economical periods after the wars and recessions have forced the governments to cut the funding of higher education for example in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Scandinavia, and Holland, pushing the universities into looking for additional sources of income. After all, the higher education institutions need funds in order to stay at the cutting edge, by being able to offer better – and naturally more expensive technology, books, journals, professors, and other facilities to support the

education and research. In addition, the entrepreneurship has become an important trend, affecting the rules and regulations concerning higher education and making commercial activities possible. This has also created confusion in regards to the academic values. The increasing competition between institutions has caused additional pressure for commercialization. The possibilities for profit-making, aided by the technologically advanced and knowledge-based economy, have been the determining factors in the process.

Bok (2005, 5-17) also warns that even if the most important purpose of the profit-creating projects is to improve the university's teaching and research there are still concerns over the impact the commercialization can have on the academic and intellectual values. Some even fear that the value of the degree programme will be evaluated based more on the profit it brings to the university, rather than the intellectual quality it creates. The entrepreneurial focus, appealing high executive salaries, and aggressive marketing techniques have all been copied from the business world. Several scholars have argued that the recent growth of money-making activities has happened because of the lack of purpose in the university.

It is not only the scholars and other academics who are concerned about the commercial activities of the institutions. Bok (2005, 115-116) states that there is a risk of damaging the reputation of higher education in the eyes of the general public. After all, the trust towards all institutions, including universities, has sharply declined in the United States because of their commercial ambitions. Traditionally the universities have been thought to fall in the category of self-serving institutions, because of their dedication to truth and understanding and for the reason that their professors earned considerably less than for example the executives in the private sector. Commercialization can seriously harm this reputation.

Even though the higher education institutions in Finland have not been as involved in the moneymaking activities as their counterparts in the United States or the United Kingdom, providing tuition-free education to students of all nationalities, the effects of commercialization have started to reach the higher education in Finland, too. The introduction of tuition fees in some Master's degree studies for the non-EU/EEA students and the regulations allowing education export are good examples.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 1-2) explain that marketing, sales, advertising, and public relations are matters that the members of the higher education institutions who believe more in the *knowledge for knowledge's sake*, want to stay away from. However, it should be understood that marketing can provide positive contribution to the social and economic capital of the institutions, but changing the views of the academics is quite a challenge. A comment by a Finnish UAS rector in an article discussing the advertising budgets used by the Finnish universities of applied sciences (Peltomäki 2011) is a good example: *Higher education should not be sold like soap. What does a higher education institution do with a Marketing Manager? In addition, all of this is done with the taxpayers' money.*

The title of the Helsingin Sanomat article (Peltomäki 2011) sums up the recent development: *tough competition has made the advertising of the universities of applied sciences a business of millions of Euros.* Indeed, the total sum used for advertising by the Finnish universities of applied sciences alone in spring 2011 was 2,5 million Euros. According to Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 1) this is a global development, as a UNESCO survey has showed that institutions and governments spend approximately 6 per cent of their overall budgets on education marketing. The use of these large sums should be carefully planned and targeted. In addition, as Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 160-161) suggest, the higher education institutions should steer away from using the images of mass culture in their advertising in order to avoid putting the values and standards of higher education at risk as. According to their view education should be aware of its responsibilities and be careful with the consumption ideology in today's society.

1.2 Defining the Focus Area

In the beginning of the research the topic needed to be defined and narrowed down in order to have a clear focus in the project. This also helped to set the concrete research objectives and to review the literature offering the foundation for the theoretical framework.

The research project started by summing up the main issues identified in Kymenlaakso UAS degree programmes. First of all, the core issue was the low applicant numbers of the degree programmes conducted in English. Concentrating on marketing in the research projects was relevant as marketing is an important tool in

seeking a response from a prospect (Kotler & Keller 2009, 47). The response wanted in the case of Kymenlaakso UAS is an application submitted by a potential student. Marketing, however, is a wide concept and further narrowing was needed. Since the lack of co-operation was another considerable issue, it was beneficial to find ways to improve the marketing management processes. According to the observations lack of co-operation was largely the result of decentralized marketing management.

Higher education marketing has its own special features that must be taken into consideration. After all, marketing an intangible service entity in the public sector is quite different from marketing a concrete product, sold in the business sector. Combining a traditionally commercial concept, marketing, with a traditionally non-profit service as the product offer has its own challenges.

In addition, the market must also be analyzed. It is not financially or resourcefully effective to market higher education conducted in English to all the possible customers everywhere (Kotler & Keller 2009, 248). That is why there has to be a clear marketing segment to target. Kymenlaakso UAS degree programmes conducted in English are primarily aimed at prospective applicants living in Finland and abroad, being either Finnish or foreign nationals. The research concentrates on the marketing segment of international students, since the Ministry of Education's *Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015* (Ministry of Education 2009), aiming to increase the number of international degree students, acts as the main instigator for the research.

Also, the marketing segment of international students includes both the international prospective applicants living in Finland and abroad, but the number of the prospective applicants living abroad is substantially higher compared to the ones living in Finland. That is why marketing internationally has more potential to increase the number of international applicants.

For benchmarking purposes, it was assumed that other higher education institutions in Finland are managing the marketing of degree programmes conducted in English better than Kymenlaakso UAS, reaching higher applicant numbers and having functional co-operation within the organization. Benchmarking is an excellent method for improvement, especially since the aim of the research is to learn from the other

higher education institutions and suggest how the best practices can be implemented to Kymenlaakso UAS.

1.3 Research Objectives

Researching the marketing activities of higher education degree programmes conducted in English can ideally help answering questions about how Kymenlaakso UAS's bachelor's degree programmes can reach higher applicant numbers of good quality students and what can be done to fill the study places of the Master's level degree programmes in the future. Understanding what Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences has done previously in marketing, how the responsibilities have been shared, and how it compares to the other higher education institutions in Finland, it is possible to find room for improvement and new ways of thinking.

The most important aims in the thesis are to provide the top management of Kymenlaakso UAS and the persons responsible for marketing of the Kymenlaakso UAS degree programmes conducted in English a better understanding of the current state of its marketing actions, what other higher education institutions in Finland are doing concerning the marketing of their degree programmes conducted in English, and identifying the best practices.

In a nutshell the research question is: how can the marketing management process of Kymenlaakso UAS degree programmes conducted in English be improved to attract higher numbers of motivated international students?

1.4 Research Project Overview

Theory of marketing management, presented in chapter 4, gives the research the basic understanding of how the processes should be ideally done, as well as setting its own benchmarks for the evaluation exercise. It also forms the base for comparing the different ways of sharing responsibilities within the organization with other Finnish higher education institution as well as offer the model for doing things correctly at Kymenlaakso UAS. In addition, the special nature of international students as a marketing segment, introduced in chapter 4, must be considered when planning the marketing of the degree programmes.

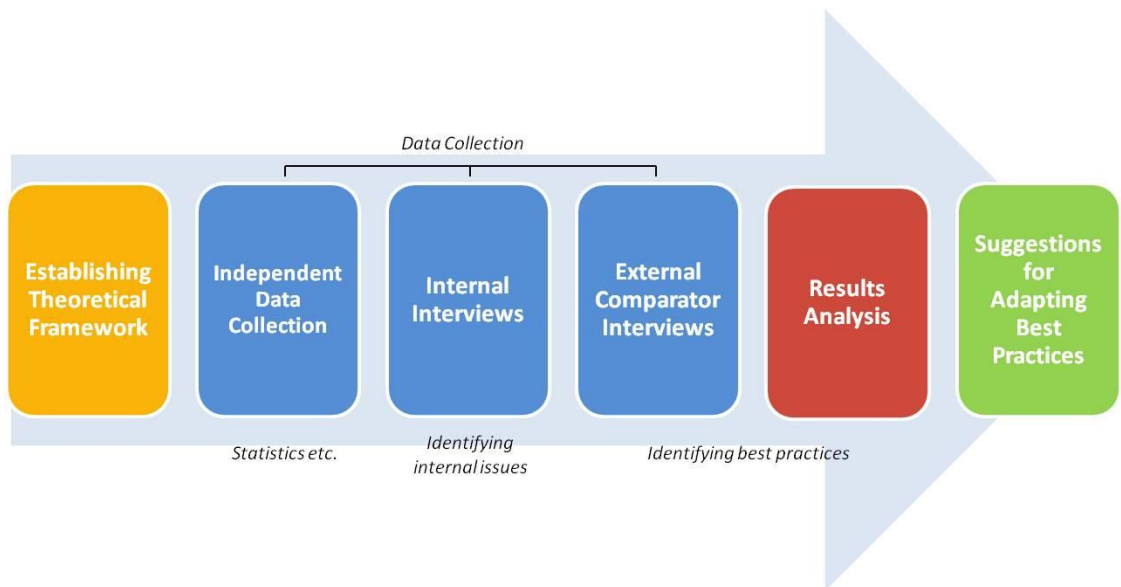


Figure 1. Research Structure by Karoliina Daelemans

The research methodology is explained in chapter 5, offering an introduction to benchmarking as a method and the special features of educational benchmarking. The benchmarking exercise will act as the main source for improvement needs, but as the processes used by other higher education institutions may not be ideal compared to the theoretical view of marketing management, also the theoretically correct marketing management should be taken into consideration. The benchmarking exercise stages introduced in chapter 5 offer a further understanding of the theoretical framework.

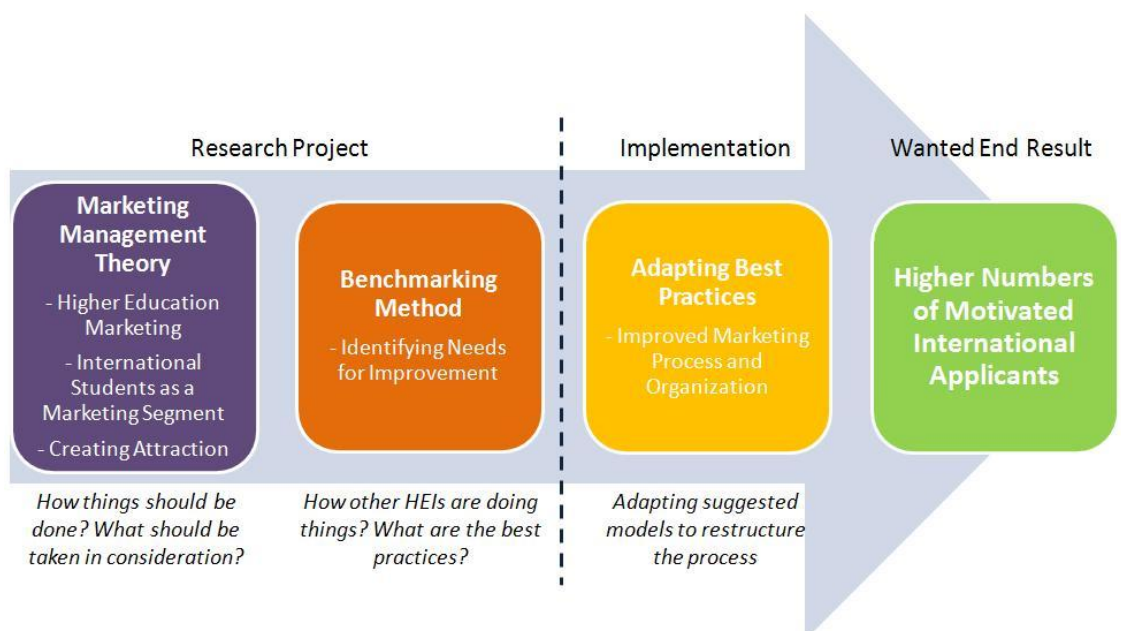


Figure 2. Karoliina Daelemans' Way to Increase the Number of Motivated International Applicants for Kymenlaakso UAS

2 KYMENLAAKSO UAS DEGREE PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED IN ENGLISH

24 universities of applied sciences out of 25 (Finnish Board of Education 2011) and 15 academic universities out of 16 (CIMO 2011) operating under the Ministry of Education of Finland, offer degree programmes conducted in English, either on the undergraduate/bachelor's level, postgraduate/master's level, or both. There are degree programmes available in a large variety of educational fields and disciplines.

Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences has four degree programmes that are conducted in English: Bachelor's Degree Programme in Design, Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business, Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion and Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management. A fifth one, Master's Degree Programme in Design, will start in autumn 2012. The fulltime undergraduate, bachelor's degree programmes, are aimed for upper secondary education graduates and the part-time postgraduate, master's degree programmes are aimed at students holding a bachelor's degree and working fulltime.

Table 1. Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes Conducted in English, Academic Year 2011-2012.

Bachelor's Degree Programme in Design	Bachelor of Culture and Arts, muotoilija (AMK)	240 cr
Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business	Bachelor of Business Administration, tradenomi	210 cr
Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion	Master of Health Care, <i>previously awarded degree</i> (ylempi AMK)	90 cr
Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management	Master of Business Administration, tradenomi (ylempi AMK)	90 cr

The applying system is different between the bachelor's level and the master's level programmes in the universities of applied sciences. The applicants apply to the bachelor's level UAS degrees by submitting an online application in the joint application period which is administrated by the Finnish National Board of Education. The applicant can choose a maximum of four choices to apply to, in the order of preference. The first choice UAS will check the eligibility of the applicant and invite the applicant to the entrance examination, if he/she is found eligible. The master's degree programmes' application period, for the programmes conducted in English, is arranged as a separate application period in each UAS. The applicants send their completed application forms and required attachments directly to the Admissions Office of the chosen UAS. As the application periods are separate, an applicant can apply to as many programmes as he/she wants to.

Both application periods follow the eligibility requirements stated in the Polytechnics Act, which is the platform for the eligibility recommendations of Finnish National Board of Education (2011). The eligible applicants will be invited to the entrance examinations. The admitted students are allowed to accept one study place in higher education per academic term. However, the master's level degree programmes conducted in English make the only exception to this rule, as they conduct their own, separate application periods, not taking part in the joint application periods.

Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences signed a strategic partnership with Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences in December 2009 (Kymenlaakso UAS 2011). This will also impact the degree programmes both universities of applied sciences will offer in the future, as the Ministry of Education encourages the partnering institutes of higher education to minimize overlapping degree programmes. This can already be seen in the master's degree level programmes in the business field. Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS agreed to start their business field master's degree programmes every other year, taking turns, in autumn 2011 and autumn 2012. The difference in the programmes is, however, that the Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management of Kymenlaakso UAS is conducted in English and the Master's Degree Programme in Entrepreneurship and Business Operations of Mikkeli UAS is conducted in Finnish. In fact, Mikkeli UAS does not offer Master's degree studies in English at all.

Table 2. Similar Degree Programmes Offered by Other UASs, Academic Year 2011-2012. (Finnish National Board of Education 2011, Centre for International Mobility CIMO 2011)

DPs offered by Kymenlaakso UAS	Number of UASs offering the same DP	Number of UASs offering a DP in the same field on the same level
Bachelor's Degree Programme in Design	2	4
Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business	15	22
Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion	1	3
Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management	6	11

2.1 Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English

Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences has participated in the joint application period of the bachelor's degree programmes conducted in English from when it was first established, in 2007. Back then Kymenlaakso UAS offered only one bachelor's degree programme in English: the Degree Programme in International Business. In 2008 Kymenlaakso UAS launched its second international bachelor's degree programme, the Degree Programme in Design. Degree Programme in International Business participated in the autumn application period, with the intake groups starting their studies in January when Degree Programme in Design participated in the spring application period and the studies began in August.

During the autumn application periods in 2007 and 2008, for the studies starting in the following Januaries, Degree Programme in International Business of Kymenlaakso UAS received thousands of applications. In 2007 the total number of all applications was 3.989 applicants and in 2008 the number was 4.909 applicants (OPH / UBS 2011). In other words there were 99,73 applicants per study place in 2007 and 122,73 applicants per study place in 2008, for the intake groups of 40 students. The only other university of applied sciences participating in the autumn application period these two years was HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences, with two degree programmes (Degree Programme in International Business and Degree Programme in Business Information Technology) in 2007 and with just one (Degree Programme in International Business) in 2008. All the other universities of applied sciences participated in the spring application period, also cooperating in different networks to arrange entrance examinations abroad. Due to the small number of degree programmes in the autumn application period there were not resources or even real needs for entrance examination cooperation. Financially it would've been impossible to arrange entrance examination abroad in several locations alone. However, Kymenlaakso UAS decided to arrange entrance examinations abroad in China in 2007 and in 2008. In addition, the entrance examinations were held also in Bangladesh and Vietnam in 2008. Kymenlaakso UAS lecturers were sent to supervise the examinations in Bangladesh and a colleague from Lahti University of Applied Sciences was requested to supervise the examinations in Vietnam.

Though there were plenty of applicants, the hard work for checking the eligibilities of hundreds of applicants based on the thousands of sent document copies, sending the invitations and notification letters to each applicant and replying to a constant stream of enquiries over the phone and via e-mails was in vain, because only the applicants living in Finland or China in 2007 and in Finland, Bangladesh, China or Vietnam in 2008 could participate in the entrance examination due to visa limitations. A considerable share of the applicants came from Nigeria and Ghana but they couldn't receive a visa for just attending an entrance examination in the Schengen Area. Still, the vast amount of work in eligibility checking and the hundreds of eligible applicants applying for a visa at the Finnish Embassies caused a pointless workload for both the universities of applied sciences and the Finnish Embassies abroad, not to mention the frustration caused to the applicants.

As the Finnish National Board of Education was also trying to cut the whole autumn application period to save costs, a decision was made by Kymenlaakso UAS Degree Programme in International Business to start participating in the spring application period instead. This decision was made also to access the cooperation networks in order to have the possibility of more international applicants participating in the entrance examination abroad. Also, Kymenlaakso UAS' Degree Programme in Design has participated in the spring application period ever since the programme was launched, from spring joint application period 2008.

One of the new forms of cooperation accessible for Kymenlaakso UAS after the move between the two application periods, was the Finnish Network of International Business established in 2009, now known as Finnish Network for International Programmes. It was established by 14 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland as a response to the Great Capital Network formed by HAAGA-HELIA UAS, Metropolia UAS, Lahti UAS and HAMK UAS earlier in 2009. The universities left out of the Great Capital Network coalition began negotiations in order to form a network of their own and this succeeded in the autumn 2009. These new networks were established following the collapse of so called Asia Network, The Finnish Network for International Business Studies, which had previously coordinated and arranged the entrance examinations in different locations in Asia. Indeed, the most important aspect in these agreements was the entrance examination cooperation both in Finland and abroad. After all, the FINNIBS network, which changed its name to Finnish Network for International Programmes (FINNIPS) for academic year 2010-2011, arranged entrance examinations in 12 different countries in 2010 - Bangladesh, China, Ethiopia, Ghana, Hungary, India, Kenya, Latvia, Nepal, Poland, Russia and Vietnam - for 43 different degree programmes and in 16 different countries in 2011 – Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, Great Britain, Hungary, Kenya, Latvia, Nepal, Poland, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Vietnam - for 66 different degree programmes. Eligible applicants from most of these countries would have not been able to participate in the entrance examination in Finland because of the tight visa requirements. FINNIPS has some form of marketing, too, mostly concentrating on the website and additionally participating in a few educational fairs in the Baltic countries, Hungary in Romania in 2011. In academic year 2011-2012 the total number of degree programmes in the network has gone up to 70 and the number of participating universities of applied sciences is 22 out of 25 UASs in Finland.

The spring 2010 joint application period was the first time the Degree Programme in International Business of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences participated in the application period during the spring cycle, for studies starting in autumn 2010. The end result of the application period was a surprise for Kymenlaakso UAS, as the applicant numbers plummeted from the thousands of applicants to just 135 applicants in total (Figure 3).

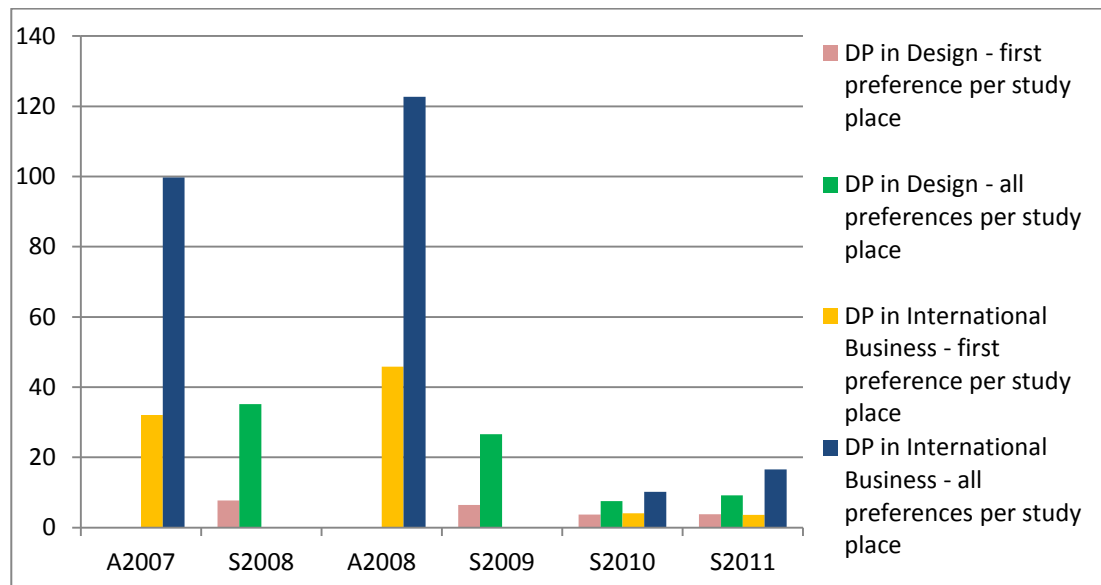


Figure 3. Applications for the Kymenlaakso UAS Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English in 2007-2011, Applications per Study Place (OPH / UBS 2011).

Even though the total number of applications multiplied in spring 2011 application period compared to the previous year (from 135 applicants in total to 662 applicants in total), the number of eligible students was alarmingly low, mostly due to the new rules limiting the use of discretionary admission - used by the applicants who do not fulfil all eligibility requirements, including non-EU/EEA students graduating during the spring - for only the applicants living either in Finland or Russia as per a decision made by the board of Kymenlaakso UAS. The situation was even worse for the Degree Programme in Design, which did not use discretionary admission at all in spring 2011 application period, dropping for example all Russian last-year students of higher secondary school from the list of applicants to be invited to the entrance examination.

Degree Programme in Design on the other hand has had a fairly steady, though slightly decreasing applicant numbers. This can be considered being logical, since the degree programme has not changed the application period it participates in.

2.2 Master's Degree Programmes Conducted in English

Kyminlaakso University of Applied Science had only one master's degree level programme conducted in English until 2011: Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management. The programme started for the first time in autumn 2007, and has had 20 study places available until 2010. An additional or continued application period has been needed on most years to fill the starting places of the study group.

As stated before, the strategic partnership with Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences affects the master's degree programmes in the business field for the academic year 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 intakes by moving the study places from the other institution to the other, allowing bigger study groups per degree programme. Therefore Kyminlaakso UAS's Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management started in autumn 2011 with 40 study places and will have a gap year in 2012. Mikkeli UAS's Master's Degree Programme in Entrepreneurship and Business Operations, conducted in Finnish, will start in autumn 2012 with 40 study places and had a gap year in 2011.

Offering twice as many study places in the Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management in 2011 proved challenging and an additional application period was needed, once again. By the end of the main and additional application periods the total number of applicants was 108 - the applicants per study place ratio being 2,7 - out of which 71 were eligible and 54 attended the entrance examination. 44 students were eventually admitted (OPH / UBS 2011).

A new Masters level degree programme conducted in English was launched in autumn 2011 after successful negotiations with the Ministry of Education during year 2010. The new programme was Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion. Just 13 applicants, out of whom only 10 applicants were eligible, applied to study in the programme during the official application period. The application period was decided to be continued by one and a half months to fill the study group. The total number of

applicants was 29 – 1,6 applicants per study place - and eventually 16 students were admitted (OPH / UBS 2011).

Master's Degree Programme in Design was also approved by the Ministry of Culture and Education in the 2010 negotiations and the programme will start in autumn 2012 with 18 starting places.

2.3 Balance of Nationalities in the Degree Programmes

According to the overall number of different nationalities in the student body as well as the overall balance of nationalities in degree students admitted between 2008 and 2011, Degree Programme in International Business shows the most even distribution of students from different origins (figure 4).

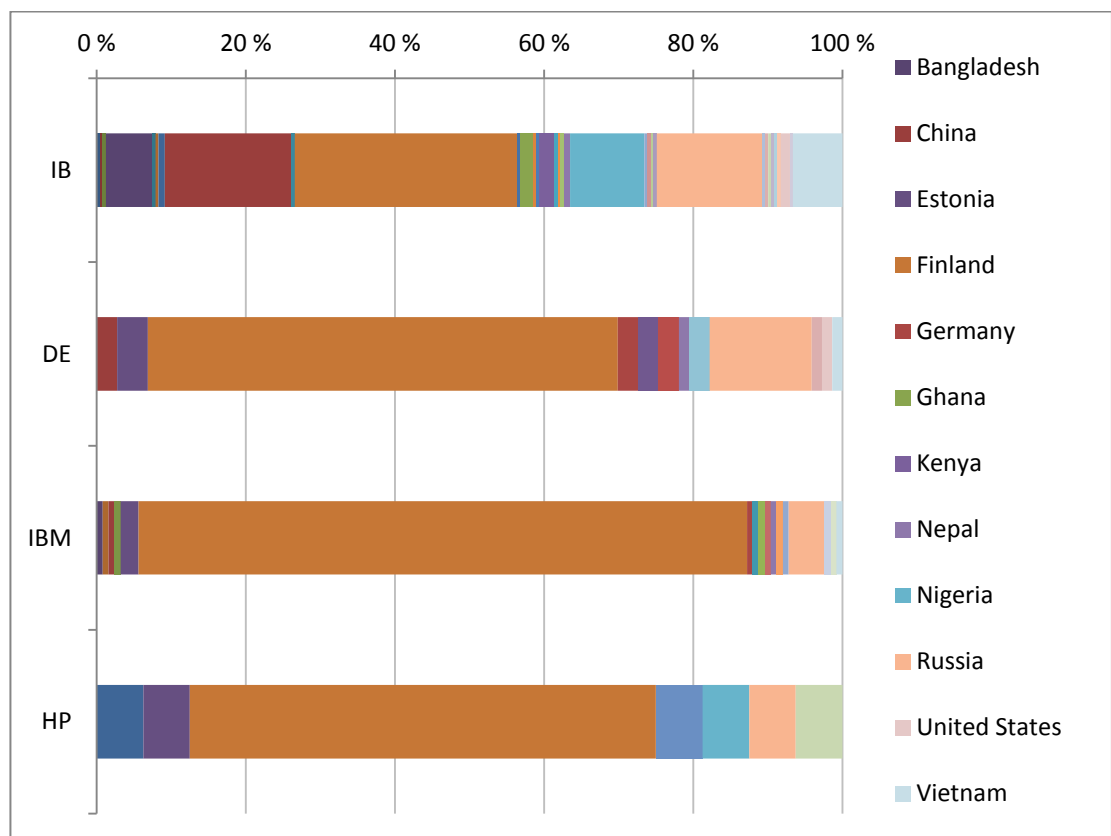


Figure 4. Shares of Different Nationalities in the Degree Students Admitted to KyUAS Degree Programmes Conducted in English 2008-2011. (WinhaPro 2011)

However, looking at the different study groups of Degree Programme in International Business, there are considerable differences (figure 5). The shifts in nationalities

mainly reflect the locations, where the entrance examinations were held: in autumn 2007 (for study group IB08) the entrance examinations abroad were held only in China, in autumn 2008 (for study group IB09) in China, Bangladesh and Vietnam, in spring 2010 (for study group IB10) in 12 different countries, including Ghana - where also Nigerian applicants were invited to - and in spring 2011 (for study group IB11) in 16 different countries. The large number of admitted Russian students can also be explained by the decision to restrict the use of discretionary admission to only the applicants applying to study International Business who lived in either Finland or Russia. In addition, Kymenlaakso UAS focused the majority of its international marketing to Russia for the 2011 application period.

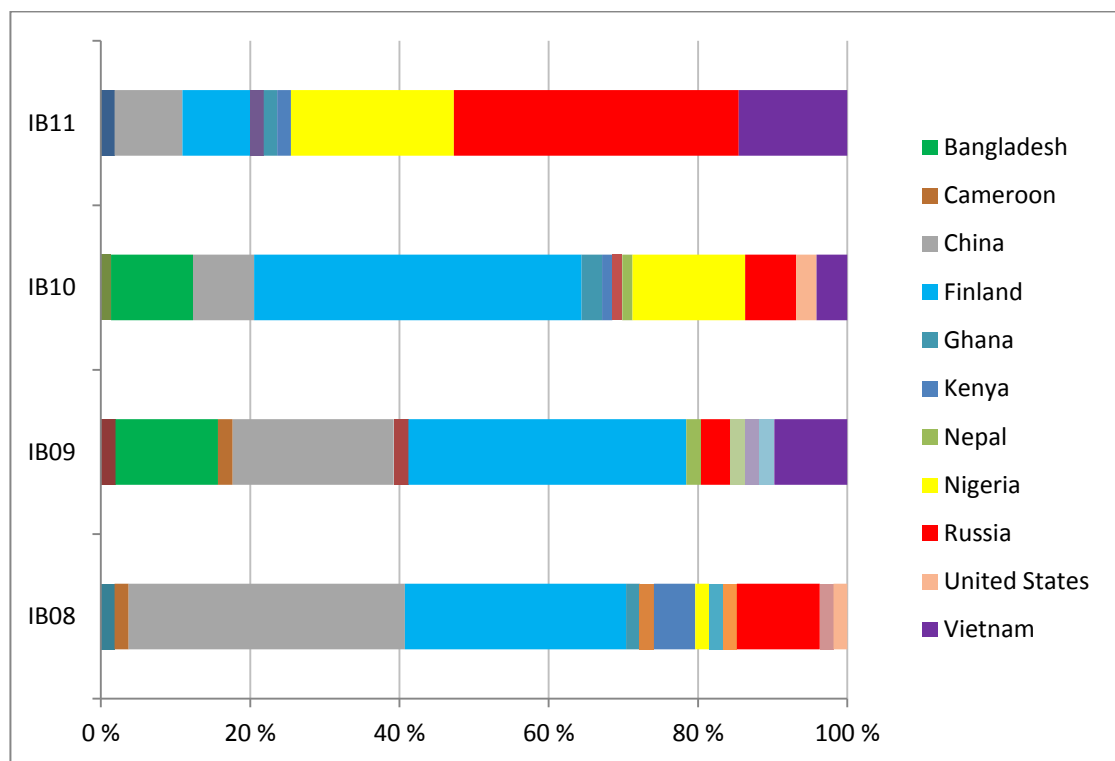


Figure 5. Shares of Different Nationalities in the Degree Students Admitted to KyUAS Degree Programme in International Business 2008-2011. (WinhaPro 2011)

Degree Programme in Design has taken part in the international entrance examination cooperation only once, in 2011, when only a handful of foreign applicants took the examination in one of the entrance examinations held abroad. Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management has only held the entrance examination in Finland and Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion interviewed only a couple of foreign applicants using web cameras and a video link.

Therefore these programmes have admitted a limited number of international students, attracting mostly foreign applicants already living in Finland.

The share of Finnish students especially in the master's degree programmes is substantial as it has proved challenging to have such a diverse group of different nationalities in the master's degree programmes. One of the challenges of obtaining a more international student body in the programmes is that they are conducted as a part-time education, designed to be completed while working full time. Also, arranging entrance examinations abroad would need additional resources.

3 MARKETING MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Marketing is a broad concept and could be introduced by explaining numerous different marketing tasks and tools. It is often seen as an essential function for a successful company. Kotler and Keller (2009, 44-45) even argue that the financial success of the company or organization often depends especially on the marketing ability - as other functions within the organization do not even matter if there isn't enough demand.

The aim was to establish understanding of how the companies and organizations should ideally manage their marketing to be able to compare the processes of the higher education institutions. That is why the research concentrates in the process of marketing management for a managerial take rather than go into the details of executing different marketing activities on the practical level.

3.1 Marketing Management

Kotler and Keller (2009, 45-51) offer a short and simple definition for marketing: *meeting needs profitably* - in other words identifying and meeting human needs and social needs. They also point out that there are more people involved in the marketing activities than just the marketing department of the company or organization. Marketing should affect everything in the customer experience and managing all the touch points is very important. Also, the executives of the organization should adopt the thinking of the marketers and the marketers should adopt the thinking of the executives to understand the big picture and to create a strong marketing organization.

According to Kotler and Keller (2009, 50-51) marketing has a straight-forward and logical process of *analyzing the market opportunities, selecting target markets, designing marketing strategies, developing marketing programs* and *managing the marketing effort*. Also, the model introduced by Lahtinen, Isoviita and Hytönen (1995, 141) follows quite a similar process of marketing management stages (figure 6). According to their definition (1995, 126-127) marketing management is carrying out a chosen line of action. In their view marketing should not be executed too strictly, according to a certain model or formula, but in a way that will lead into success within the markets. There are numerous ways of doing things successfully but what really

matters is identifying possibilities the current or new situation creates. Sensitivity to the situation at hand is one of the most important attributes of a successful marketer.

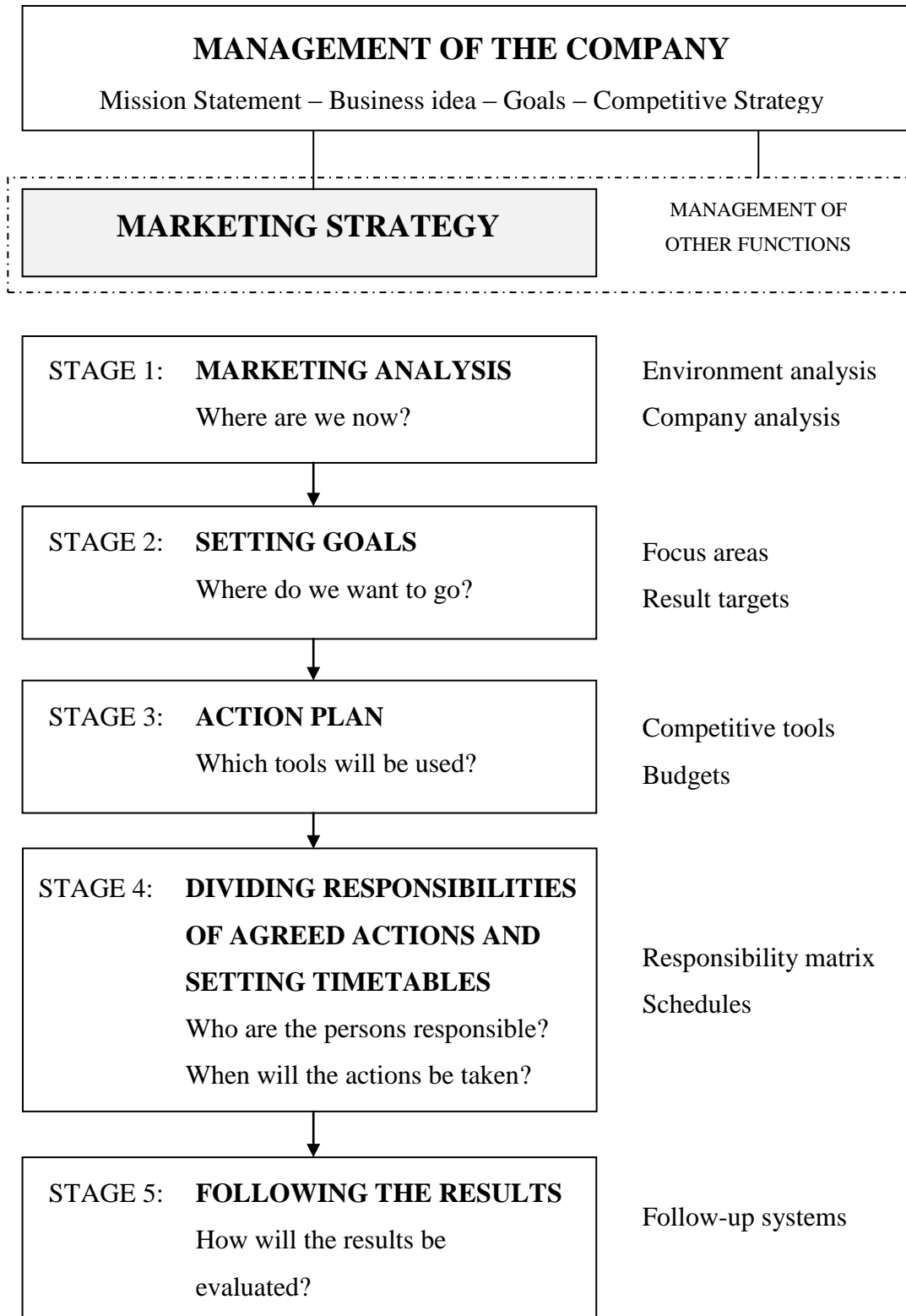


Figure 6. Marketing Management Stages (Lahtinen, Isoviita & Hytönen 1995, 141)

Kotler and Keller (2009, 44-67) explain that from the managerial point of view marketing is an organizational process which includes creating, communicating and customer value delivering processes that benefit the organization and the stakeholders. They summarize the marketing management as *the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value*. There are numerous different aspects and levels to be taken into consideration when planning and managing marketing, such as demand management, the type of products or services being marketed, different marketplaces and competing concepts. Also, the rapidly changing competitive marketplace requires re-evaluating and changing the marketing plans on regular basis. The past strengths do not convince the customers anymore, but the companies need to move forward with their marketing programs, innovative products and services, and importantly staying in touch with what the customers need.

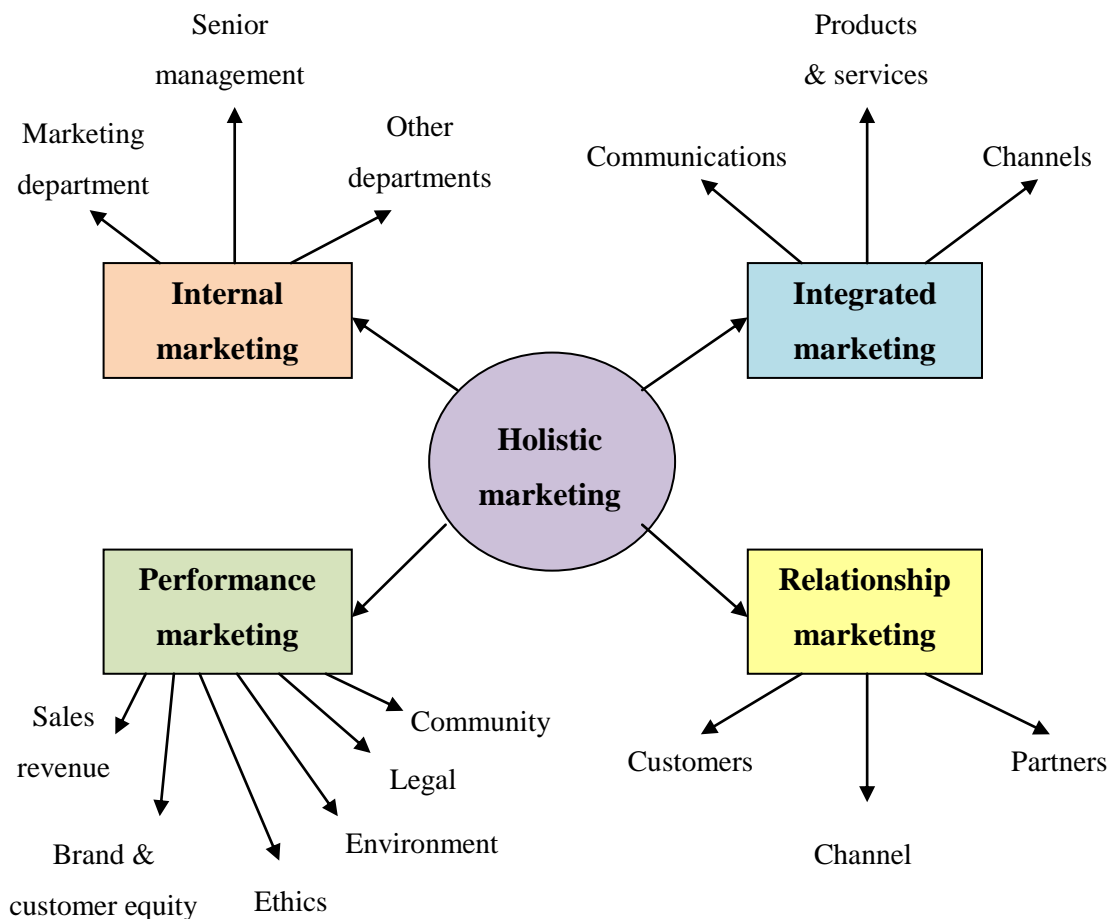


Figure 7. Holistic Marketing Dimensions (Kotler & Keller 2009, 61)

Kotler and Keller (2009, 59-70) have used the holistic marketing philosophy (figure 7) as a base for identifying sets of tasks in successful marketing management. The holistic marketing concept is based on the realization that everything matters in marketing. Holistic marketing takes into consideration *the development, design, and implementation of marketing programs, processes, and activities that recognize their breadth and interdependencies*. There are four core concepts to holistic marketing: relationship marketing, integrated marketing, internal marketing, and socially responsible marketing.

According to Kotler and Keller (2009, 666-667) there are different trends in the marketing practices which should be taken into consideration when managing a holistic marketing organization for the long run, as a response to the rapidly changing environment. These are *reengineering, outsourcing, benchmarking, supplier partnering, customer partnering, merging, globalizing, flattening, focusing, accelerating and empowering*. They translate to appointing teams to manage customer-value-building processes and encouraging cooperation between departments, buying more goods and services from vendors, improving performance by learning from the best practice companies, finding good value-adding supplier partners, having close cooperation with customers for value adding, merging with firms in the same or complementary industries to gain economies in scale and scope, increasing global thinking and local acting, simplifying the organization to get closer to the customer, designing the organization and its processes to respond more quickly to changes in the environment, and encouraging personnel to produce more ideas and take more initiative.

Lahtinen, Isoviita and Hytönen (1995, 126-127) explain that there is a clear difference between *managing* and *planning*. Planning itself is one of the functions of management. Its share of the management process is significant but there are still plenty of other functions in managing a company. It should also be noted that a person without the authority to manage can still do marketing planning. Separating the management and the planning on a practical level is complicated and that is why Lahtinen, Isoviita and Hytönen use the term *marketing planning* when they are discussing issues connected with the actual *marketing management*. From the marketing point of view management is more strategic when planning can be either strategic or operative.

There is also a difference between two types of management under the marketing management itself (figure 8): *strategic management*, which answers to questions about what are the right things the organization should do and *operative management*, which concentrates in are the right things done the right way. (Lahtinen, Isoviita & Hytönen 1995, 143)

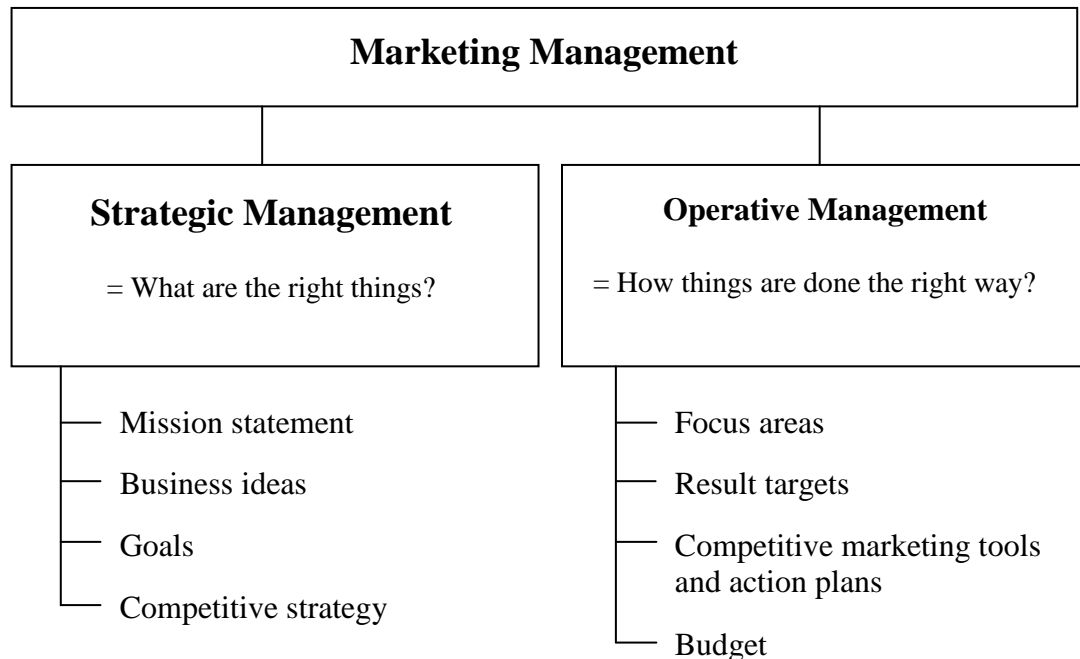


Figure 8. Marketing Management (Lahtinen, Isoviita & Hytönen 1995, 143)

Kotler and Keller (2009, 47-52) explain that the modern environment creates demanding requirements for the marketing executives. Marketers are expected to have quantitative and qualitative skills, an entrepreneurial attitude, and a good understanding of creating value through marketing actions. The five key functions for a chief marketing officer are *strengthening the brands, measuring marketing effectiveness, driving new product development based on customer needs, gathering meaningful customer insights, and utilizing new marketing technology*. One of the key skills of marketers is demand stimulation, but Kotler and Keller argue it is a limited view of the marketer's tasks. The marketers are responsible for demand management, finding ways to *influence the level, timing and composition of demand to meet the organizations objectives*. There are eight possible demand states: negative, nonexistent, latent, declining, irregular, full, overfull and unwholesome demand.

Kotler and Keller (2009, 47-52) explicate the set of tasks needed for successful marketing management. Developing *marketing strategies and plans* includes finding long term opportunities based on the experiences in the market and the company's core competencies. Chief marketing officer must *capture marketing insight* by having a reliable marketing information system to help the company evaluate and monitor the marketing environment in order to measure market potential, forecast demand, and make basic decisions concerning the marketing expenditures, activities, and allocation. *Connecting with a customer* is important in identifying ways to create the best value for the target markets and developing profitable long-term relationships. Understanding the markets and dividing the market into segments will help identify whose need the organization can meet the best. Another important task is *building strong brands*, which can only be achieved by understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the brand from the customers' point of view. It is also important to pay attention to the competition and predict its possible moves as well as having a plan for swift counteraction. The company also needs to *shape the marketing offer* - the tangible product of the company - to gain competitive advantage. The process should take the product quality, design, features, and packaging into consideration as well as the possibility to offer for example delivery, repair, or training as an additional service. *Delivering the value* of the products and services to the target market includes identifying, recruiting, and linking various marketing facilitators to supply its products and services efficiently to the target market. *Communicating value* on the other hand includes communicating the value of the products and services to the target market. This can be done by integrated marketing communication program, including mass communication - such as advertising, sales promotion, events, public relations - and/or personal communications - direct and interactive marketing done by trained and motivated salespeople. A strategy taking changing global opportunities and challenges into consideration based on the product positioning is needed for *creating long-term growth*. Developing new products, testing, and launching are part of long-term activities. The organization must also build a marketing organization capable of executing the marketing plan.

Timeframe of the marketing planning can be divided in several different ways. Lahtinen, Isoviita and Hytönen (1995, 133) suggest a basic marketing plan should have a span of two or three years, annual marketing plan a year - as the name

suggests, marketing campaign plan a timeframe of few weeks or days and the weekly or daily plans would include the planning of daily tasks (figure 9).

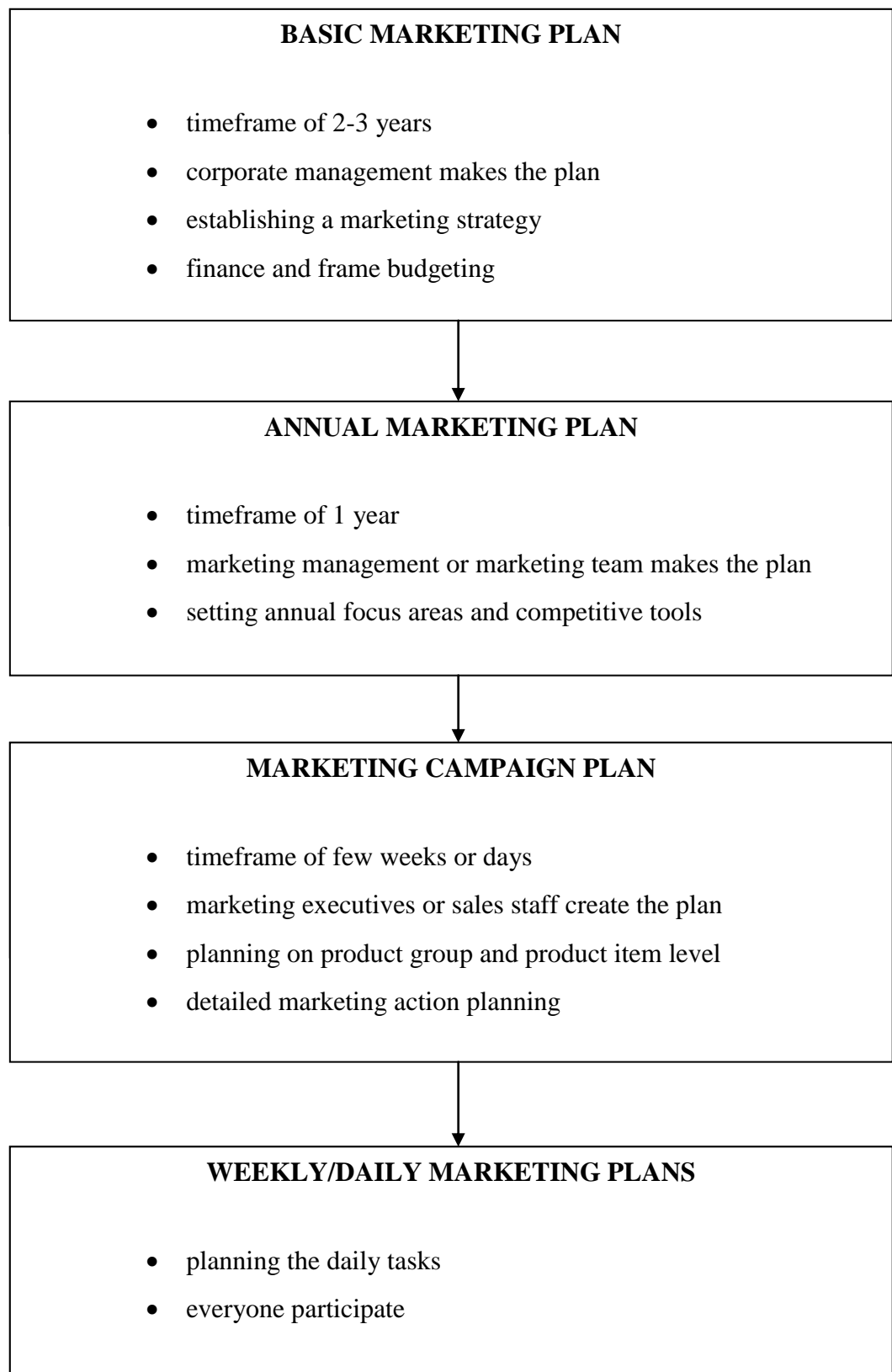


Figure 9. Marketing Planning Stages (Lahtinen, Isoviita & Hytönen 1995, 133)

Kotler and Keller (2009, 161) discuss the changing role of marketing in the organization, as any functional part of a networked organization can interact directly with the customer instead of just the marketing department. Therefore the organizations should integrate all the customer-facing processes, to offer the customers a single point of contact – a single face and voice – when interacting with the company. Earlier the marketers have been considered the middlemen in the process, understanding customer needs and forwarding *the voice of the customer* within the organization.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 5-6) explain that a good marketing team should be multidisciplinary. Marketing is a social and managerial process, but its commercial nature should also be realized. Marketing planning and implementation can be made more understandable to everyone in the organization by involving as many people as possible - through workshops, by asking for comments, and obtaining input from stakeholders.

Kotler and Keller (2009, 697-700) explain that the top management has recognized that marketing must be holistic and less departmental in the future, stepping away from the past wasteful nature. In addition, the marketers must achieve larger influence in the company in order to be able to build the business strategy. Continuous creation of new ideas, striving for customer insight, treating customers individually, building brands through performance rather than through promotion, and building superior information and communication systems will be essential in establishing a successful company in a *hyper-competitive* economy. As a result, marketing will become a more holistic, cost effective and accurate activity, with its focus in *return of investment* thinking achieved by targeting the right customers with automated marketing, which has been based on marketing science rather than intuition. This will cause a need for different skills among the marketers, such as *customer relationship management, partner relationship management, database marketing and data-mining, contact centre management and telemarketing, public relations marketing and brand-building and brand-asset management, experiential marketing, integrated marketing communication, and profitability analysis skills.*

3.2 Marketing of Higher Education

The traditional marketing management often deals with companies aiming to reach high profits and offering tangible products. Marketing of higher education has to be approached from its own standpoint as there are special aspects when in marketing a traditionally non-profit service. However, the introduction of tuition fees has changed the nature of service in several countries, especially in the Anglo-Saxon area.

According to some views, the universities risk failing to recruit students should they not use the promotional tool of marketing. Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 161) claim that the increasing competition in higher education makes the institutions get involved in the professional marketing activities. In addition, the result of the marketing action is heavily dependent on the informational sources that are controlled by the higher education institution. Being satisfactory is not enough – if the content is not attractive or persuasive enough the sale will be lost. Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 3-4) explain that despite of higher education institution competing in a market with other institutions, profit making is not considered the primary indicator or success. However, the governmental and market pressures are changing this and the universities are starting to accept the need for professional marketing.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 6-8) discuss the approach presented in the traditional marketing publications, which suggests that the right marketing activities resolve the financial and competitive crisis in the sector. This approach requires seeing the students as consumers, education as a product and higher education institutions as service providers. The *student as consumer* thinking has become more common especially due to introducing tuition fees as the students have become paying customers. Paying for the education prompts also higher expectations for the quality of the degree and its ability to secure a well paid work position after graduation. Also, the reputation of the institution can play an important role. However, there is now a call for going back from the customer approach to the learner approach in order to focus again on *engaging in collaborative resource allocation instead of divisive market-driven competition*. After all, the higher education's overall move towards the market orientation has caused considerable mistrust in higher education and has also increased the value of the institutions' reputation, consequently distorted the conception of the degrees the students complete.

Bok (2005, 2) explains that higher education marketing is not a new phenomenon at all. The universities have been involved in marketing for considerably longer than one might think. For example University of Pennsylvania had a Bureau of Publicity to become more visible and University of Chicago advertised already in early 1900s - naturally to attract students. Bok (2005, 9-10) also points out that the tough competition has existed in higher education as a chronic condition. The American universities have always competed for the best students and faculties. Aggressive marketing methods have been used already in the early twentieth century to attract tuition-paying students.

Although traditional universities are not organized to make a profit, they do compete vigorously with one another and the goals are varied (Bok 2005, 159.) Even if the competition between the universities has increased on the financial side, the main competition is still about the students. After all, as Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 103) quote the statement of Kotler and Fox: *Students provide most educational institutions with their reason for being*. Also, Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 147) point out that the universities would serve a very limited purpose if they did not have students, as they give the higher education institution the overall reason for existence. This is where the enrolment management comes to play.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 147) use *enrolment* as a core concept in the marketing of higher education. Marketing itself can be thought of as something that delivers value to those who the institution wants to establish a relationship with – or has already established one. Strategic management approach to student enrolment is very important for the universities. Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 103) explain that the higher education institutions must plan what kind of students they want, identify the core competencies of the institution, understand why they need the students, know what the institution can offer the students and how to keep the students. Often the institutions do not pay attention to the reasons why the student stay or leave in the institution and adjust their strategies accordingly.

When a higher education institution is planning its recruitment strategy – may it be for students or personnel – it should know what the institution wants to become and stick with the plan for reaching that goal. Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 103-104) claim that the image of the institution must be clear to students investing their time and money in

their degrees. Sometimes the existing strategy of the institution has to be neglected and the reality of what the actual position in the market is has to be used as the starting point. The questions to be answered are: why students are attending your institution, what you provide them, and how could you do it better. The position can always be gradually changed but the first step is to know where the institution is now. Only then can the plan for attracting students be established.

According to Gibbs and Knapp (2002,4) there are four core concepts that should be kept in mind planning the higher education marketing process: *the complexity of the offering, the complicated social role of educational institutions, the increasing importance of financial performance and an approach to the market that sees students as informed consumers.*

Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 7) argue that university marketing doesn't have the needed contextualization, is poorly organized and co-ordinated, is largely responsive rather than strategic, and that its application lacks formal operational guidelines. Therefore a model was designed to help with these issues. The CORD model (figure 10) – standing for Contextualization, Organization and co-ordination, Research and Development – offers *a framework for raising a profile, for the strategic focus, and for developing a home-grown educational marketing philosophy.* According to the model designing the content of the degree programme is also part of the marketing activities. *Contextualization* is a process in which the higher education institute examines and understands the internal and external environments in which they operate and develop the curriculum accordingly. The organization of the higher education institution should emphasize team building and involve everyone in the marketing process. *Organization and coordination framework* includes organization and team building in a way that ensures the marketing becoming a grassroots process, including as diverse range of institution personnel as possible. *Researching* the customer interface allows the developers to use different marketing techniques, helping the developers to draft a degree programme curriculum which does not only reflect the needs and wants of potential customers, but can also make a valid claim for including them in the new educational environment. *Development* stage includes a well-rehearsed cycle of curriculum development, trials and evaluation as integral aspects of the process. (Maringe & Gibbs 2009, 7)

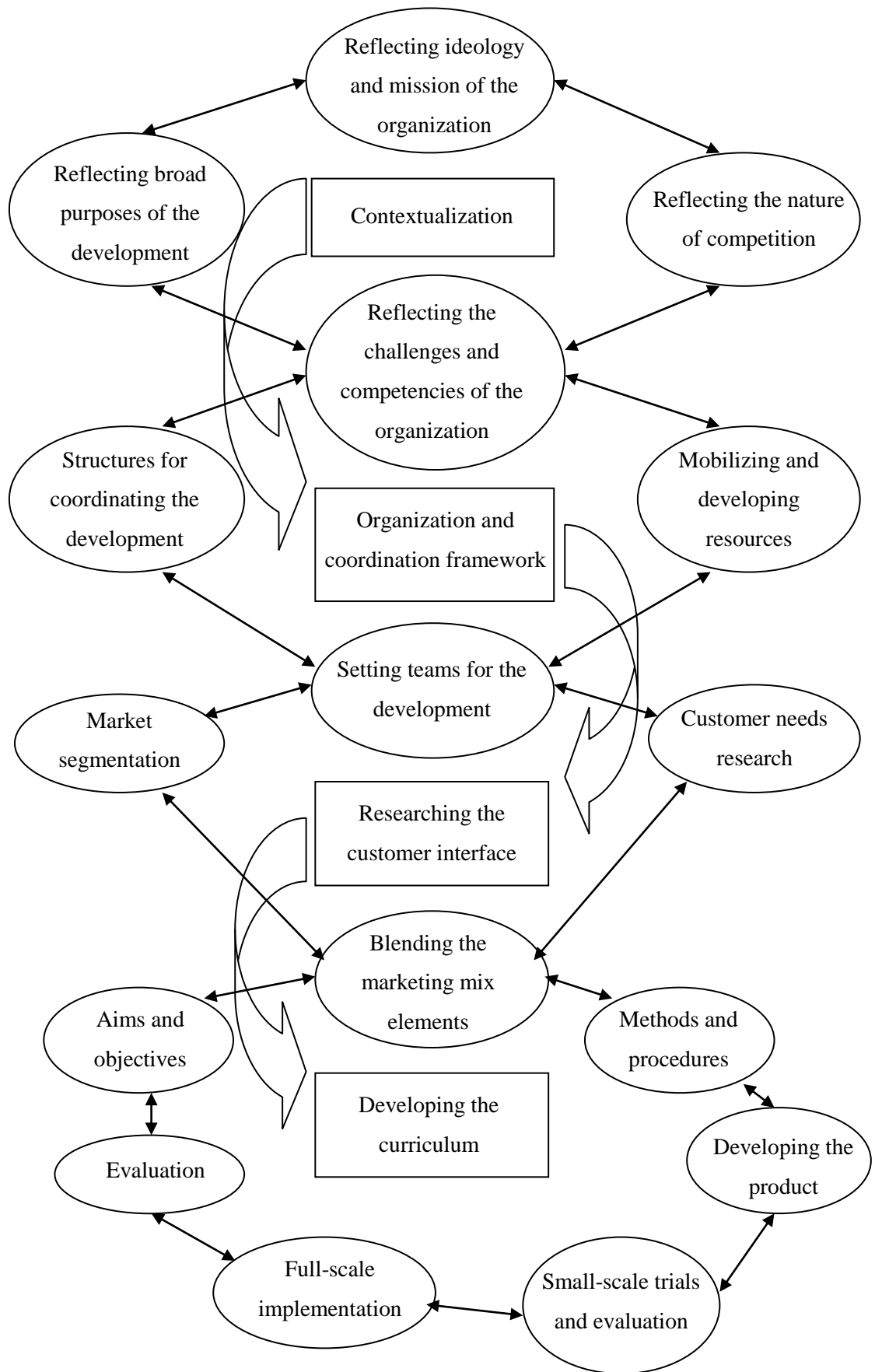


Figure 10. The CORD Model of Marketing Strategy (Maringe & Gibbs 2009, 50)

Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 7) explain that there are no guarantees that the CORD model will solve all the problems related to higher education marketing but it is still an attempt to fix the crisis that higher education marketing faces as using imported external skills as the basis and ignoring the importance of curriculum development it will be difficult to adopt the needed marketing orientation.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 2) claim that it is essential to put the educational offering into the context of a marketing process. It is a logical progression in the marketing process that can help institutions understand who their customers are, how their needs are changing and how an institution needs to adapt, develop and change to meet these needs. The ever-increasing pace and scale of change that has happened during the recent years in the higher education and use of knowledge mean that the marketing practices of focus, segmentation and customer satisfaction have growing importance. Even the location of the institutions and campuses do not matter as much due to the technological advances in education. It is essential for the institutions to identify their core competencies and skills, what they can offer, and how they can convince others that they provide quality, flexibility and content in order to add value for the students, researchers and other stakeholders.

4 ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students, coming to Finland from abroad, are from very different cultural environments compared to the environment where their Finnish higher education institution operates. They also have different needs compared to the students living in Finland. Therefore they form a challenging marketing segment to manage - and to meeting their needs effectively.

4.1 International Students as a Marketing Segment

As Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 147) claim, the universities would serve a very limited purpose if they did not have students, as they give the higher education institution the overall reason for existence. In this research project a *student* of higher education in Finland has a straightforward meaning: a student is a person, who has applied to study in a degree programme, proved his/her eligibility for higher education according to the requirements, has completed an entrance examination or an interview successfully in order to be admitted to study for a degree, and has accepted the offered study place and registered for the academic year by the given deadline. In the Finnish universities of applied sciences a student can register as absent for a maximum of two academic years during his/her study right. The concept of *international student* can be understood slightly differently, when it comes to nationality, where the student lives or which language he/she speaks. For example, one could argue that a student who has been born in a different country and therefore has a different nationality, but lives in Finland, speaks Finnish fluently, and has completed the upper secondary education in Finland in Finnish language cannot be considered as an international student the same way as for example a student who has lived in a different country until starting the studies in Finland, doesn't speak Finnish, and has applied using an upper secondary degree completed in the home country. In this research the concept of international student is used when discussing a student, whose nationality is other than Finnish, as the reporting of Finnish National Board of Education separates the applicants by either their nationality or the country they live in.

A student can be seen as the customer of the higher education institution. However, Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 33-34) explicate that there is a debate around the *student as a customer* approach. The terminology is originally commercial as the word *customer* usually means someone purchasing a product or a service from a provider. Even if the

students pay tuition fees, they are not commercial consumers in a traditional sense, as they do not have the similar rights. Students can for example fail a course but do not have a right for compensation. A traditional consumer can return a faulty product and receive compensation, but a student will not get the money paid for the intangible product of education back, even if they are not satisfied with the teaching they have received.

Mass marketing for all possible buyers is considered to be a dying form of marketing, as it is increasingly difficult and expensive to reach the customers due to the exponential growth of advertising media and distribution channels. Kotler and Keller (2009, 248) explain that segment marketing offers key benefits over mass marketing. *Marketing segment* is a group of potential customers sharing similar needs and wants. Identifying – rather than creating – segments as well as deciding which ones to target are included in the marketer's tasks.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 40) claim, that many segments of potential students can be identified through observing the attributes of certain student groups. Institutions can target one segment or many segments to develop the most appropriate offering. After identifying the segments the next step is to decide how to communicate the wanted message to the target group. When the segments can be considered appropriate – showing stability, accessibility and profitability - the segments can be managed. Successful segment management can be measured by increase in market share in the targeted segment and well as possible income connected to it. Knowing the segments, understanding their needs and targeting the institution's services and promotion is a requirement for motivating, adding value, and increasing the institutions reputation.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 39-40) explain that the students have different needs and there are certain limitations for satisfying the needs as an individual higher education institution. The markets need to be broken down, establishing groups with more specified needs. Segmenting is widely used in Europe and the United States but for example Russia, China and India still attempt to educate the mass market. The three main reasons for institutions to segment the market are enhanced value ideally leading to higher profit, improved match with customer needs, and excluding the segments that do not match the values. Gibbs and Knapp suggest identifying the prospective students by benefit segmentation, demographic segmentation and lifestyle

segmentation. Benefit segmentation, includes for example job relatedness of the education, relevance to recreational interests or usable recognition in the market. Lifestyle segmentation on the other hand concentrates in the continuing professional development for students or lifelong learners. Demographic segmentation is done by dividing the market by the socio-economic grouping and ethnic origin. For example, in the case of potential international students, according to the world's aging population and youth graphics published by Reuters (2011) the most potential areas can be found in East Asia and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where a bigger share of the population is young.

4.2 Creating Attraction for Higher Education

The Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015 (Ministry of Education 2009, 10-11) has five major aims: a genuinely international higher education community, increasing the quality and attractiveness of higher education institutions, promoting the export of expertise, supporting the multicultural society and promoting global responsibility. The research concentrates in exploring what are the factors that can increase the attractiveness of higher education from an international applicant's and higher education institution's point of views.

As stated before, the Finnish higher education institutions need to educate a growing number of international students (Ministry of Education, 2009, 32.) Therefore there is also a need to make the institutions more visible outside Finland, to attract international applicants. One of the most important questions to ask is what creates attraction for higher education among the potential international students.

Coleman and Viggars (2000, 132-135) claim that the factors creating attraction in the higher education institution may include anything between the educational quality rankings and the availability of student accommodation to even the price of a pint at the student union. However, according to the Finland's Ministry of Education (2009, 34-35) the primary factors in the attractiveness of higher education are high-level research and competence, high-quality basic and further education, and competitive education and research environment. Additional important pull factors are the services supporting the entry and integration into the Finnish work and living environment, emphasising the importance of the support activities helping the arriving students.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 156-157) discuss the importance of developing a strategic enrolment management plan in order to be effective in the competitive market. Most of the institutions will make a difference between recruiting domestically and internationally as they need their own consideration and strategies. Both, however, affect bringing, keeping and delivering value to the students.

Another fundamental issue from an international applicant's point of view is naturally the language of instruction. Higher education institutions in Finland have increased the education offered in foreign languages, allowing international students an easier access. Finnish HEIs offer an exceptionally large amount of education in English language in proportion to the size of the higher education sector, even compared on the international level (Ministry of Education 2009, 14).

The internationalization strategy (Ministry of Education 2009, 12-17) summarizes that Finland's higher education already has a good reputation abroad as Finland has been ranked high in different comparisons in international education, research, technology and innovation. Comparing the number of scientific publications, taking the population and gross domestic product into account, Finland is one of the biggest producers. Finland's education has increased its visibility abroad, largely thanks to the success in PISA survey as well as in comparison in competitiveness and innovation. Also, the Erasmus programme has been successful and the number of Finnish students completing their student exchange abroad has over quadrupled in the last ten years. Finland is also one of the leading countries in teacher exchange. In addition, Finnish higher education has been very active in the European cooperation, being one of the first countries to implement the reforms needed for following the Bologna Process. The work that has been done in the previous years has also increased the interest in Finnish higher education among the foreign students and for example the share of foreign scientific postgraduate degree students has increased in all fields.

However, there are challenges that should be overcome to get the potential applicants to apply to study at the higher education institutions in Finland. (Ministry of Education 2009, 14-15). Even though there has been progress, the level of internationalization is still low when compared to competition. The speed of change in the environment is faster than Finnish higher education has developed its international functions. Finland is also one of the few countries in OECD that are suffering from

brain drain, in other words there are more people with high education degrees moving abroad rather than into Finland. It is quite alarming that Finland hasn't been left behind the large science nations but also the small development countries when it comes to researcher, teacher and student mobility.

Stages	AIDA Model	Hierarchy-of-Effects Model	Innovation-Adoption Model	Communications Model
Cognitive Stage	Attention ↓	Awareness ↓ Knowledge ↓	Awareness ↓	Exposure ↓ Reception ↓ Cognitive response ↓
Affective Stage	Interest ↓ Desire ↓	Liking ↓ Preference ↓ Conviction ↓	Interest ↓ Evaluation ↓	Attitude ↓ Intention ↓
Behaviour Stage	Action	Purchase	Trial ↓ Adoption	Behaviour

Figure 11. Response Hierarchy Models. (Kotler & Keller 2009, 515)

If even the cognitive stage in the response hierarchy models (figure 11) cannot be reached among the potential international students, the chances of reaching the behaviour stage are near nonexistent. The response hierarchy models – E.K. Strong's *AIDA Model*, Robert J. Lavidge's and Gary A. Steiner's *Hierarchy-of-Effects Model*, Everett M. Rogers's *Innovation-Adoption Model* and *Communications Model* - summarized by Kotler and Keller (2009, 515) demonstrate that actions should be first taken to raise attention, awareness and knowledge, which can then lead to interest, liking, preference, intention and desire – finally resulting in action, trial or adoption.

The Ministry of Education (2009, 37) suggest several different measures for increasing the quality and attractiveness of the Finnish higher education. One of them is aiming to reach a leading position in the development of European-level research infrastructures in the fields Finland has competence that has been recognized

internationally by consolidating, cooperating and participating in the development of infrastructures both on national and international level. Another one is to increase the cooperation between the academic universities and universities of applied sciences in both research and development activities that are strategically important. In addition, the higher education institutions should ensure having enough top level researchers in the strategic and competence areas as well as offering centralized information on services helping the arriving international students or staff member integrate or settle down in Finland. Also, the higher education institutions are to develop the student selection processes in order to make the recruitment of non-Finnish student and students with immigrant background more efficient.

Gibbs and Knapp (2002, 104-105) explain that a well-designed and delivered promotion plan is not sufficient in attracting students. An integrated market plan takes into consideration the higher education institution as a product itself. Therefore the main focus should be in identifying what the attributes affecting the students' institution selection are – maybe including matters like scenic location or the city or campus location. Locality can be a strong factor for example to part-time or adult students.

5 BENCHMARKING AS A METHOD FOR IMPROVEMENT

Benchmarking method is used in the research project to compare other Finnish higher education institutions in order to identify similarities or differences in the marketing management processes. The best practices should then be implemented to Kymenlaakso UAS. The benchmarking exercise will be conducted by collecting data independently, interviewing key personnel of Kymenlaakso UAS and interviewing persons responsible of marketing of degree programmes conducted in English in the comparator institutions and analysing the results.

5.1 Introduction to Benchmarking Method

Karjalainen (2002, 12) explains that the definition of benchmarking originates from a method of comparing against a certain concrete measure, such as the first erected post at a building site which will act as a point of reference for leveling the foundation structures. In other words the post, and the measure drawn on it, can be called a benchmark. The majority of the reference literature covering the term benchmarking sees it as an evaluation in which the benchmarks - points of reference - suitable for the situation are being searched for and researched.

Benchmarking was introduced by Xerox Corporation in the early 1980s but has since become a common term. American Productivity and Quality Centre (1993, 3-5) offer one of the many definitions for benchmarking is that *“it is the process of continuously comparing and measuring an organization with business leaders anywhere in the world to gain information which will help the organization take action to improve its performance.”* Andersen and Pettersen (1996, 3) introduce another, more philosophical definition of benchmarking, which was also defined by the APQC: *“benchmarking is the practice of being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and being wise enough to learn how to match and even surpass them at it”*. Karjalainen (2002, 10) points out that one distinctive fact separates benchmarking from other evaluation techniques. Benchmarking always includes comparison and interest in what the other companies or organizations are doing and how they are functioning. Also, the pragmatic factor is especially concrete in benchmarking activities. Jackson and Lund (2000, 6) on the other hand acknowledge benchmarking as a strategy that enables people to *think outside the boxes*, like the departments, units or institutions they work for. After all, the most important task of

benchmarking is to create a learning process which allows the organization to compare and evaluate its services, activities or products to point out the strengths and weaknesses and finding *better and smarter* ways of doing things – as well as understanding what makes them better and smarter.

As a method benchmarking is an important tool in finding something that has already been invented and used before and trying to pick the best practices, most effective produces and innovation, too. This will reduce the efforts needed by the organization itself when it comes to developing something completely new. Another risk is that an organization might miss the benefit of the innovation or development the others have already made. The idea is to borrow the best practises, both internally and externally, and apply them after modification according to the needs of the organization or department. The benchmarking process should also be a continuing process to keep the performance and further development going, not a onetime exercise. (Bogan & English 1994, 1-5)

Bogan and English (1994, 14) acknowledge the long lists of the numerous advantages that benchmarking method holds. One of the summaries include: *“improving organizational quality; leading to lower cost positions; creating buy-in for change; exposing people to new ideas; broadening the organization’s operating perspective; creating a culture that is open to new ideas; serving as a catalyst for learning; increasing front-line employees’ satisfaction through involvement; empowerment and a sense of job ownership; testing the rigor of internal operating targets; overcoming front-line employees’ natural disbelief that they can perform better; creating an external business view and raising the organization’s level of maximum potential performance.”* However, the most important benefit of the method is teaching the management how to compete with others.

According to Karjalainen (2002, 17) one methodological feature if benchmarking separates it from the other institutional evaluation techniques. Most of these other evaluation methods include a somewhat forced requirement for action when benchmarking is done with a more voluntarily nature. In other words the process can be called true benchmarking only if there are no external bodies pressuring the organization into the evaluation activity. Another distinctive difference is the curiousness towards another party. One of the explanations for the popularity of

benchmarking is that following the actions and processes of another party is inspiring and motivating. The method gives a permission to be a positively curious and gives a good base for opening a door into the *secret world* of other parties and organizations.

Though the lists of definitions only offer a certain number of different types of benchmarking, the term can still mean almost any kind of evaluation – there are tens of definitions and subcategories available. (Karjalainen 2002, 13)

One of the main tasks of the benchmarking process, identified by APQC (1993, 4-5), is to evaluate the internal processes and practises and to compare them with another company or organization. The two main types of benchmarking are competitive benchmarking and process benchmarking. The difference between these two is that the competitive method measures the organizational performance when the process method measures performance and functionality in general. Internal benchmarking focuses in the processes of different departments within the organization and comparing them to each other. Competitive benchmarking on the other hand compares the competing organizations and their products, processes or other methods. Functional or industry benchmarking concentrates in comparing similar functions within the same industry or the processes of the industry leaders. Generic benchmarking compares the practices or processes which are not dependent of the industry.

Andersen and Pettersen (1996, 5-7) introduce internal benchmarking as a soft start for benchmarking activities. The advantage of internal benchmarking is that it is fairly easy to find comparable processes. Also, the data and information are easily accessed and often in a standard format. Competitive benchmarking is more sensitive, as it includes also competitor analysis and there might be issues with sharing sensitive information. There can also be legal and ethical limitations or the information given can be superficial or too focused on key figures. Functional benchmarking on the other hand has the potential for finding new technologies or processes leading to a breakthrough. It also allows learning from the closest parties - the customers, suppliers or other companies within the same industry, which are also easy to get in touch with. In addition, they often have similar problems. Generic benchmarking can be seen as a creative exercise, comparing unrelated industries performing similar processes, transferring knowledge from one industry to another. Performance benchmarking is

usually done to see how well the company or organization is doing compared to others using performance indicators, such as financial numbers. Strategic benchmarking concentrates in comparing the strategic choices of the benchmarking partners in order to collect information and to develop the decision making and planning of the company or organization in the long run. Strategic benchmarking appears important especially from a managerial point of view.

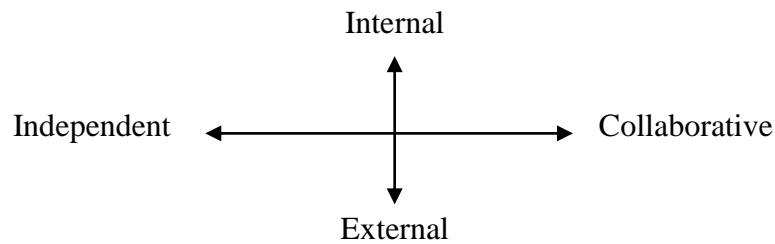


Figure 12. Classification of Benchmarking (Jackson & Lund 2000, 8)

Jackson and Lund (2000, 7-11) introduce different combinations of benchmarking types in a four-fold classification, offering new dimensions to the method. The first combination is done by combining internally or externally focused benchmarking with independent or collaborative benchmarking (Figure 12).

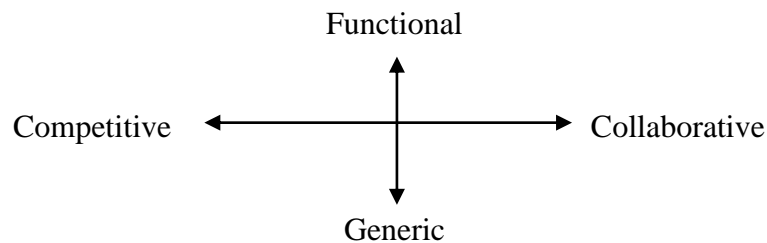


Figure 13. Typology of Externally Focused Benchmarking Activities (Jackson & Lund 2000, 9)

The second combination introduced by Jackson and Lund (Figure 13) uses the three types of external benchmarking: competitive, functional and generic benchmarking. Competitive benchmarking, which evaluates the performance of own organization compared to the competitor's has the potential to gain competitive advantages over direct competitors or reduce a competitor's market advantage. It is therefore the most sensitive type of benchmarking, as also Andersen and Pettersen (1996, 7) point out. Functional benchmarking on the other hand compares the practices of own

organization with other organizations performing similar activities. The main aim of the generic benchmarking is to find the overall “best in class” partner to compare processes with. The comparator can operate in a different field but is known for being an innovative party and a market leader in the field.

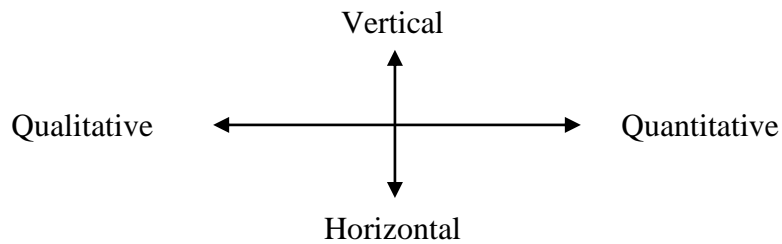


Figure 14. Nature of Benchmarking Activities (Jackson & Lund 2000, 9)

In addition, Jackson and Lund (2000, 9) introduce the combination of vertical and horizontal processes (Figure 14), classified by Alstete. The vertical process aims to *quantify or qualitatively understand work processes in a discrete functional area*. Horizontal benchmarking, on the other hand, aims to compare the operations of different units in the same organization. The use of quantitative or qualitative methods is another classification. The processes, work practices, professional behaviours or value systems to be compared must be somehow measured or identified for the comparison to be possible. This can be a very complex process due to the large number of different variables and needs both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Jackson and Lund (2000, 10) explain that Price (1994) defined the functional or process benchmarking as the quantitative analysis of what has been done, combined with the qualitative analysis of how it is done and the factors and conditions that influence how it is done. Andersen and Pettersen (1996, 4) warn of the risk of getting only a very limited view of benchmarking if only key figures, such as financial numbers of the company, are being used. This may give easily comparable performance indicators in order to see the ranking compared to others, but can ignore the qualitative factors of processes, such as how the tasks are completed.

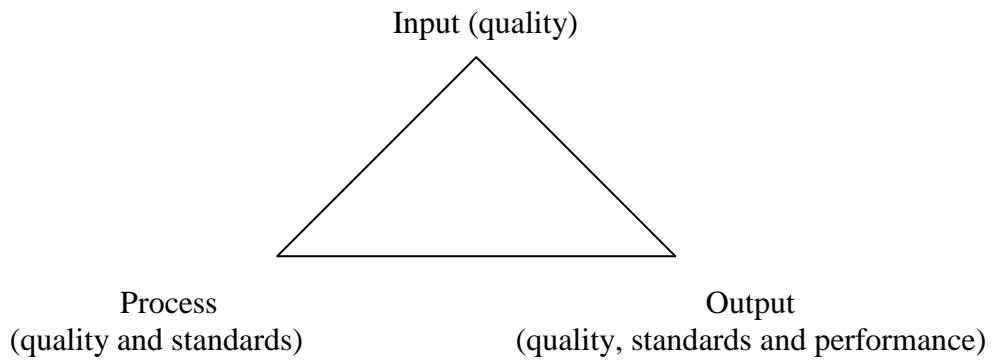


Figure 15. Different Foci for Benchmarking Activities (Jackson & Lund 2000, 10)

Another take benchmarking project can have is the input – process – output focus. In other words *benchmarking can be focused on the process and/or the inputs into and outputs from the process* (figure 15). Output benchmarking is more concerned with comparing the outputs of certain activities between organizations, when the process benchmarking focuses in comparing the capabilities and systems used by organizations to achieve the results. Most benchmarking activities aim to map the relationship between all three foci. (Jackson & Lund 2000, 10-11.)

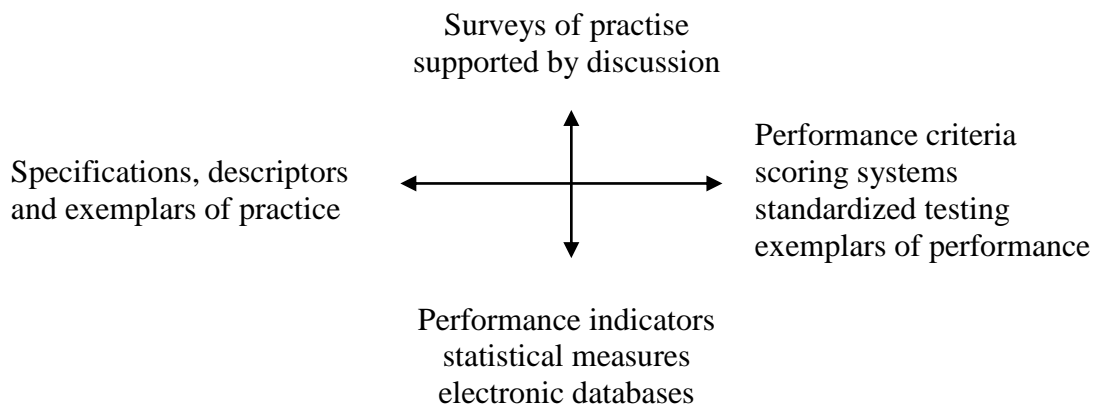


Figure 16. Referencing Processes Used in Benchmarking (Jackson & Lund 2000, 11)

There are also different types of referencing processes in benchmarking, dependent on what kind of mechanism has been used in the comparison. Four different referencing processes can be seen in figure 16. According to Jackson and Lund (2000, 11) a benchmarking exercise might rely on one particular approach or it might utilize a combination of approaches.

According to Karjalainen (2002, 14-15) arguing what is right and genuine benchmarking or wrong and untrue benchmarking is not relevant at all. What he sees more interesting is combining different types of benchmarking to see how different dimensions work together as opposites or pairs. They can also clarify and deepen each other. Cross referencing creates new classes of benchmarking.

Karjalainen (2002, 15) summed some of the benchmarking theory presented by Jackson & Lund by charting internal-external and independent-collaborative benchmarking together in one table (table 3) and competitive-collaborative and functional-generic benchmarking in another one (table 4).

Table 3. Internal – External and Independent – Collaborative as Benchmarking Modifier. (Karjalainen 2002, 15)

BENCHMARKING	INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
INDEPENDENT	Researching the statistics and performance indicators produced by the organization itself or by another party. Comparing the units within the organization.	Comparing own organization with the targeted organizations by using available data without contact with the comparator.
COLLABORATIVE	Gathering the units of the own organization to discuss, analyze and compare the processes and results.	Gathering a group of organizations, which perform comparison between them and share the information. Comparison can be also done by two parties and it can include a possibility of commitment.

Karjalainen (2002, 15) explains that the tabulation helps defining the different approaches and forming new ideas. These ideas can then be used to plan the structure

of the benchmarking exercise, as they help to understand the characteristics of the method. The joint effect of different benchmarking types can also produce critical questions.

Table 4. Competitive – Collaborative and Functional – Generic as Benchmarking Modifiers. (Karjalainen, 2002, 15)

BENCHMARKING	COMPETITIVE	COLLABORATIVE
FUNCTIONAL	Performing competitor analysis. Increasing knowledge of the competitive environment. If the execution is independent it is easy to perform “behind-the-scenes.”	Using different benchmarks to look for potential collaboration partners. The aim is to find partners that are on a higher level. Establishing the cooperation can be problematic.
GENERIC	Striving for maximising the competitive advantage of own organization by becoming acquainted with carefully selected targets within the same field. Can lead into restrained interaction between partners and further secrecy and hedging.	Preparing as fruitful cooperation as possible through evaluation benefitting both partners. Operation is dialogic and requires high level of commitment. Cultural collisions are likely.

Karjalainen sees the combination of competitive - collaborative and functional - generic (table 4) especially interesting, as they form the *historical and current tension* typical for the method.

5.2 Benchmarking Higher Education

Since the benchmarking method was established in the business sector, there must be a reason for the higher education adapting it, too. Karjalainen (2002, 13) refers to the question asked by Epper: Why higher education institutions should get interested in benchmarking? The answer, also given by Epper, was: *because of the competition*.

Jackson and Lund (2000, 4) explain that universities, even though non-profit organizations, need to have enough income to develop their functions and support the education they offer. After all, the higher education institutions operate in competitive local, regional, national and global markets. Finding ways to gain competitive advantage and to improve the reputation of providing high quality education are important motivators for benchmarking. The method was imported from the business sector to the higher education in the North America in early 1990s and was soon used also in Australia and later in the United Kingdom. Continental Europe started using the higher education benchmarking too but not on the same level as North America, Australia and United Kingdom.

The work of the higher education institutions in Finland has also become more demanding and challenging over the last decades. Hämäläinen and Kaartinen-Koutaniemi (2002, 7) explicate that in addition, to teaching and research the regional development has been added to the list of higher education responsibilities. Also, the student numbers have multiplied from the 1970s, international cooperation has increased and research has started using more and more international standards in evaluation. This has created strong pressure for a change and developing the functions. Evaluating the teaching, research, administration, international functions, library services etc have helped the institutions to identify their strengths and needs for improvement.

Karjalainen (2002, 12) points out that benchmarking is often perceived as accreditation evaluation in higher education. The accreditation methods have a long history for example in the United States which makes it seem that benchmarking in higher education could have a century long history. However, the term benchmarking has not been used even in accreditation though the structure of the evaluation system has been very similar. There are also opinions in the reference literature that the kind

of benchmarking that has been used for accreditation purposes is not true benchmarking. After all, only when the method has been extended to identify the best practices and to modifying them to develop the processes of one's own organization can it be called true benchmarking.

Hämäläinen and Kaartinen-Koutaniemi (2002, 7) claim that the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) has guided and encouraged the Finnish higher education institutions to start using the benchmarking method in their development projects and has supported the institutions' self-motivated development projects using evaluation as the starting point. (Hämäläinen & Kaartinen-Koutaniemi 2002, 7) After all, as Smith, Armstrong and Brown (1999, 31) suggest, benchmarking is seen as a huge benefit and potential for improvement of higher education, as long as the results will be used to develop the organizations and not just as a measurement action. Hämäläinen and Kaartinen-Koutaniemi (2002, 7) also praise the flexibility of the method, allowing the institutions to plan the process according to their own needs.

As stated before, the competition has increased among the institutions, very importantly also in student recruitment. Coleman and Viggars (2000, 129) claim that it is important to analyze the available data, for example gathered by the national bodies, to find out who the potential applicants are when planning a marketing campaign. Coleman and Viggars (2000, 136-137) explain that benchmarking plays an important part in assessment, planning and marketing the institution. The method is used in advertising, attracting additional funding, monitoring initiatives and adjusting course contents. Advertising benchmarking offers the institution a better view of current and target markets which helps planning and focusing. It is important to attract as many applicants as possible and *demonstrate unmet demand* to receive more funding. This can be done by showing possible gaps in the offering of certain courses or degree programmes.

Coleman and Viggars (2000, 138) argue that the most important matter in benchmarking is to find a good mix of the available data and to use multivariate techniques to create performance indicators that are easier to measure and compare. Different methods can be used to describe, illustrate and summarize the complex data available concerning institutions performance in different functions, for example in student recruitment. The institutions have to prepare the benchmarking exercise by

asking certain questions. *What information is needed and why? What data is required to illustrate this information? What factors could affect the analysis and how can this information be best illustrated?*

It is very important to link the conclusions of the benchmarking exercise to context since it is essential to understand the connections between different data, as well as possible gaps. Coleman and Viggars (2000, 138) point out that drafting new strategies shouldn't be based just on straight-forward statistics gathered by national bodies when benchmarking student recruitment. There are several matters affecting the applicants and higher education institutions and these should be considered in a wider manner. Also, external factors, like regional, national or international demographics, local and national economies and government policies must be taken into consideration. In addition, Jackson and Lund (2000, 11-12) remind that the benchmarks used in higher education are complex as they often include qualitative, semi-quantitative or quantitative benchmarks.

Karjalainen (2002, 17) acknowledges that there has been very little criticism against the benchmarking method, although the notions of benchmarking being fashionable, having obscure concepts and *mythical glamour* can be understood as such. Some have pointed out that the method seems to work in organizations that are already well developed and have good resources. The adoption and the success of the method is challenging in an organization with authoritarian and individualistic culture – often predominant in the higher education. The most serious criticism, philosophically speaking, was proposed by Dervitsiotis, who claims that the method cannot be used as a guideline for operations having a clear focus in the future, because it concentrates in finding solutions from existing processes rather than developing new and potentially more useful ones for the future scenarios. According to him it is also naive to even suggest that the organizations would unveil real innovations or success factors, should they have invented come up with some. According to Dervitsiotis the best way to get truthful information of the competitor is to recruit its former employees.

5.3 Benchmarking Exercise Stages

American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC 1993, 44) states that a *benchmark study must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time framed*. Bogan and English (1994, 68-69) see that one of the most important matters for a benchmarking

project is that it is well planned and narrowed down appropriately. Too wide or too narrow topic can prevent the exercise bringing the wanted benefits. Another crucial factor for the success of the benchmarking project is the support of the management. The senior management should provide training for the benchmarking team, give sufficient resources and encourage learning in the projects.

There are many different types of benchmarking models utilized, depending on the company. These range from the most basic four-step models to even 12-step process models. Bogan and English (1994, 81-84) explain that the most successful model is the one created to suite the organization culture and its existing initiatives for improving quality. Bogan and English introduce *The Simple Consensus Model*, created by the Strategic Planning Institute's Council on Benchmarking. The model has five simply articulated steps as a base for the benchmark processes: *launch, organize, reach out, assimilate* and *act*. Andersen and Pettersen (1996, 14) translate the model slightly differently, as *Plan – Search – Observe – Analyse – Adapt*. As Karjalainen (2002, 12) explains, these simple stages can be interpreted as self-evaluation, searching for comparison partner, comparison, critical and creative analysis of the results and adapting the results into the context of the organization.

Bogan and English (1994, 82) introduce further benchmarking steps that companies have made to fit their needs better. For example Bristol-Myers and Baxter International have stretched their benchmarking projects to a seven-step system: determining which functions to benchmark, identifying key performance variables to measure, identifying the best-in-class companies, measuring performance of best-in-class, measuring your own performance, specifying programs and actions to meet and surpass and finally implementing and monitoring results. Another more detailed benchmarking process has been used by the AT&T. The 9-step model includes identifying what to benchmark, developing a benchmarking plan, choosing a data collection method, collecting data, choosing best-in-class companies, collecting data during a site visit, comparing processes and identify gaps and development, implementing recommendations and finally recalibrating benchmarks. The benchmark process creator, Xerox Corporation, has developed even a 12-step system for the benchmarking project, including four main stages with more detailed activities under each stage. *Phase 1* includes planning actions, such as identifying what to benchmark, the comparative companies, determining data collection method and collecting the

data. *Phase 2* is the analysis stage, which helps to determine the current performance gap and project the future performance level. *Phase 3* is the integration, in other words communicating the findings and gaining acceptance as well as establishing functional goals. *Phase 4* translates the results to action – developing action plans, implementing specific actions, monitoring the progress and recalibrating the benchmarks. The last stage, *Phase 5*, is the maturity where leadership position is attained and practices are fully integrated into the processes. The benchmarking processes used by Xerox Corporation and AT&T support the notion that benchmarking should be a continuing process instead of an one time effort (Bogan & English 1994, 1-5). The fact that both companies have included the recalibrating of the benchmarks in the process indicates that the process will continue further.

When choosing the partners for benchmarking exercise there are several different criteria to use. Morgan (2000, 45) uses the example of Thames Valley University which used similar or contrasting structures, long-term operation, range of subjects, progression structures and requirements, academic, administrative, IT and curricular support structures as indicators of the other universities potential in their benchmarking project. Fielden and Carr (2000, 209) offer a straight-forward criteria used by Liverpool University, when choosing between having a closer benchmarking project with a smaller group of institutions selected based on the comparability in type and scale and developing a more distant benchmarking relationship with individual higher education institutions that are *known for excellence* in certain areas.

Bogan and English (1994, 95) explain that in the business sector the benchmark partners can be found by looking for financial, size, output, function, requirement, logistic, input, industry, market sector, organizational and divisional comparability. In the field of higher education Coleman and Viggars (2000, 131-132) recommend that a minimum of six institutions should be compared in order to maintain the individual institution's confidentiality. However, also what is being benchmarked has an influence on the number of comparators. If planning decisions is the topic for benchmarking using just one or two institutions is not enough as the data will not offer sufficient grounds for change. On the other hand, too many comparator institutions can blur the analysis. Therefore it is suggested that an optimal number of comparator institutions is somewhere between six and twenty, depending on course provision, type of institution and other factors.

Institution region is one of the four factors that can be used when indentifying comparators. For example, since 1994 there has been an increasing trend towards applicants applying to study in their home region based on the information gathered by Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) in Great Britain. This trend is visible in all applicant groups but especially among the older applicants, applicants from ethnic minorities and *partly skilled and unskilled social classes*. In this sense it would be a good idea to pick institutions within the same region as the comparators, especially if a large number of applicants come from the same area. (Coleman & Viggars 2000, 132.)

Another useful criterion suggested by Coleman and Viggars (2000, 132-135) is the probability of the institutions being the applicants' *other choice*. In Great Britain each applicant is permitted to make up to six applications through UCAS. Going through a list of other institutions the applicants have applied to can give a very accurate view of the competitors. Often the applicants apply to study the same subject in different institutions but the choice of the particular institutions is usually based on the availability of study places and courses, entry requirements, the institution's perceived reputation or any combination of these factors. In addition, to the other choice institution there is also the subject mix to be considered as a comparator indicator – choosing an institution with the same subject mix is probably highly comparable in the exercise. Finally, the overall institutional profile is last of four factor to be considered when looking for the comparators, which can include the institution's location, size, provision, market and other diverse factors affecting application numbers for the institutions.

5.4 Executing the Benchmarking Exercise

Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland was contacted to enquire if they had a clear view of the numbers and topics of the benchmarking exercises done by the higher education institutions in Finland. According to the correspondence with Matti Kajaste (2011) from Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Committee, the problem with getting actual figures of the benchmarking projects is that the institutions do these types of exercises vastly and there are no statistics collected of them. Then again, Kajaste did not think there should even be any statistics collected as

benchmarking should be a standard method rather than an exceptional procedure for developing the processes.

When the drafting of the overall plan for the benchmarking exercise was started, a fairly simple and straight forward five-step benchmarking model suggested by Pettersen and Andersen (1996, 14), including steps of *plan – search – observe – analyze – adapt* was chosen for the exercise. Some of the more extensive models include the adaptation of the best practices as well as recalibrating the benchmarks, which is not possible in the timeframe of the research. However, it was beneficial to use the different earlier stages introduced in the 7-step, 9-step and 12-step models, used for example by Bristol-Myers, Baxter International, AT&T and Xerox Corporation before, as an additional reference, for added depth in the different stages.

The first stage in the model - the *planning* stage - includes self-evaluation and setting the goals and targets. The specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time framed nature of benchmark study (APQC 1993, 44) as well as the planning and narrowing the topic down properly (Bogan & English 1994, 68-69) was to be kept in mind when starting the project. In addition, Coleman and Viggars (2000, 138) claim, that it is essential to carefully consider what information is needed and why, as well as what data is required to illustrate the needed information. The factors that could affect the analysis and how the information is best illustrated should be taken into consideration as well. Another important issue is finding a good mix of the available data – quantitative and qualitative - and using multivariate techniques to create performance indicators that are easier to measure and compare.

Making the research achievable and realistic required understanding the limitations in the resources in use. The limited time in use for completing the research possesses a danger of rushed research, resulting in superficial analysis and results. Not being able to use the office hours for travelling narrowed the options for conducting the interviews down. Internal interviews were easier to conduct personally but the external interviews had to be done as telephone interviews.

Setting goals and targets had to be reflected to the actual research question and make sure that the research will be specific and also measurable. Measurability was a challenging aspect, as the wanted results have more to do with the marketing management processes and sharing responsibilities within the organization, producing

qualitative data rather than quantitative. However, different statistics including for example degree student numbers, applicant numbers and marketing budgets created more measurable, quantitative data.

Getting a better idea of the comparator situation when it comes to the level of international students already studying in the institution as well as the recent application numbers for the degree programmes conducted in English was needed as a starting point. Therefore searching for the statistics in the application reporting databases had to be done first. In addition, relevant information from the websites of the higher education institutions was also found.

After gathering the independent background information data, a plan for conducting the internal interviews was made, to get an idea of the issues concerning Kymenlaakso UAS degree programme marketing first and then identify the issues needing a solution. Finally, interviewing the key personnel of the selected higher education institutions in Finland could ideally help me to understand what kind of structure the different universities and universities of applied sciences have in their decision making and organization, as well as mapping the main challenges and also the best practices of the institutions, offering a solution to the challenges of Kymenlaakso UAS. Comparing processes with competitors included a risk of receiving somewhat distorted answers, affecting the reliability of the analysis of the research. This had to be kept in mind when drafting the question matrix, in order to avoid too intrusive questions. Receiving defensive reaction during the interviews could prevent the open and honest conversation.

The *search* stage includes identifying the comparison partners and data collection. The quantitative and qualitative approaches require collecting numerical data as well as qualitative. As Coleman & Viggars (2000, 131-132) suggest, the number of comparator institutions is between six and twenty, depending of the nature of the benchmarking exercise. Too many comparator institutions can blur the analysis. Also, Fielden and Carr (2000, 209) discuss the closer benchmarking project with a smaller group of institutions selected based on the comparability in type and scale. Bogan and English (1994, 95) explain that in the business sector the benchmark partners can be found by looking for financial, size, output, function, requirement, logistic, input, industry, market sector, organizational and divisional comparability. In addition,

Coleman and Viggars (2000, 132-135) suggest choosing the applicants' *other choice* institution, with the same subject mix for high comparability - as well as the overall institutional profile, including the institution's location, size, provision, market and other factors affecting application numbers for the institutions.

A decision to concentrate in a minimum of six higher education institutions and a maximum of eight was done in order to not overdo or blur the analysis, rather implementing a thorough evaluation of the chosen few comparators. A variety of criteria was included in the benchmarking project when choosing different higher education institutions as comparators, also taking the location in consideration. The chosen comparators were to include a *best-in-class* partner, a partner with a successful marketing project, a partner with strong relations and knowledge in an important target area, a partner with a good reputation in coordinating the international matters and a partner with identical offering of bachelor's degree programmes conducted in English. In addition, an academic university was added to the partner list to see if they have special issues compared to universities of applied sciences or different solutions to the challenges.

The chosen benchmarking partners were HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences, HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences, Oulu University of Applied Sciences, North Karelia University of Applied Sciences and Lappeenranta University of Technology as comparators. First of all, Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS have signed a strategic partnership agreement and will plan their marketing and communications strategy together. In addition, Mikkeli UAS has ready networks in Russia, which is also one of Kymenlaakso UAS's target areas. HAAGA-HELIA UAS is often the institution where the students transferring out of Kymenlaakso UAS transfer to. HAAGA-HELIA UAS has a good reputation in general, also among the applicants and the degree students. The level of their education is thought to be superior. The location in the capital of Finland must have its own effect and first raised a question about the comparability. Still, HAAGA-HELIA UAS has the sought after *best-in-class* factor. HAMK UAS representative, Antti Isoviita, gave a presentation at the *Conference in International Affairs in Finnish Higher Education Institutions* in May 2010 introducing their successful international marketing project *VIEHKO*, which HAMK UAS launched in autumn 2009. Hearing more about the project and the organization behind it was of interest. Oulu UAS was

another interesting target because of their active International Affairs team, participating in different functions in the organization. The distribution of the different responsibilities at Oulu UAS was interesting, as members of their International Office have actively participated in the meetings for the admissions personnel. At least from Kymenlaakso UAS perspective it can be considered quite unusual. North Karelia UAS offers the exact same bachelor's degree programmes conducted in English as Kymenlaakso UAS: Degree Programme in Design and Degree Programme in International Business. Therefore it can be considered *the other choice* for the applicants. Also, the location in a fairly remote Joensuu and its possible affects in the marketing interest me. In addition to the universities of applied sciences an academic university was added in the comparison, in order to get a view of possible similarities or differences between universities of applied sciences and academic universities. Lappeenranta University of Technology was an ideal comparator because of its proximity to Kymenlaakso UAS campuses. It also has close cooperation with a Russian university and offers education in more or less corresponding fields: technology, technology management, and business.

Next stages in the exercise – *observing* and comparing the practices and distribution of responsibilities by interviewing the comparators, critical and creative *analysis* of the results and *adapting* the results into the context of the organization already concern introducing the results of the exercise, which is done in chapter 6.

6 RESULTS

6.1 Independently Collected Data

The gathered independent data needed for the *observation* stage of the exercise included information from the register for applications maintained by Finnish National Board of Education (OPH / UBS 2011), statistics database *Vipunen* owned by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish Board of Education (2011) and the websites of the comparator institutions (HAMK – Hämeen ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, HAAGA-HELIA ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Oulun Seudun ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Pohjois-Karjalan ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Lappeenrannan teknillinen yliopisto 2011).

As one of the first things needed was a better understanding of the overall level of international students in the institutions. However, in the academic university statistics the possibility of choosing nationalities of the students was not available. Therefore Lappeenranta University of Technology is missing from the comparison (figure 17).

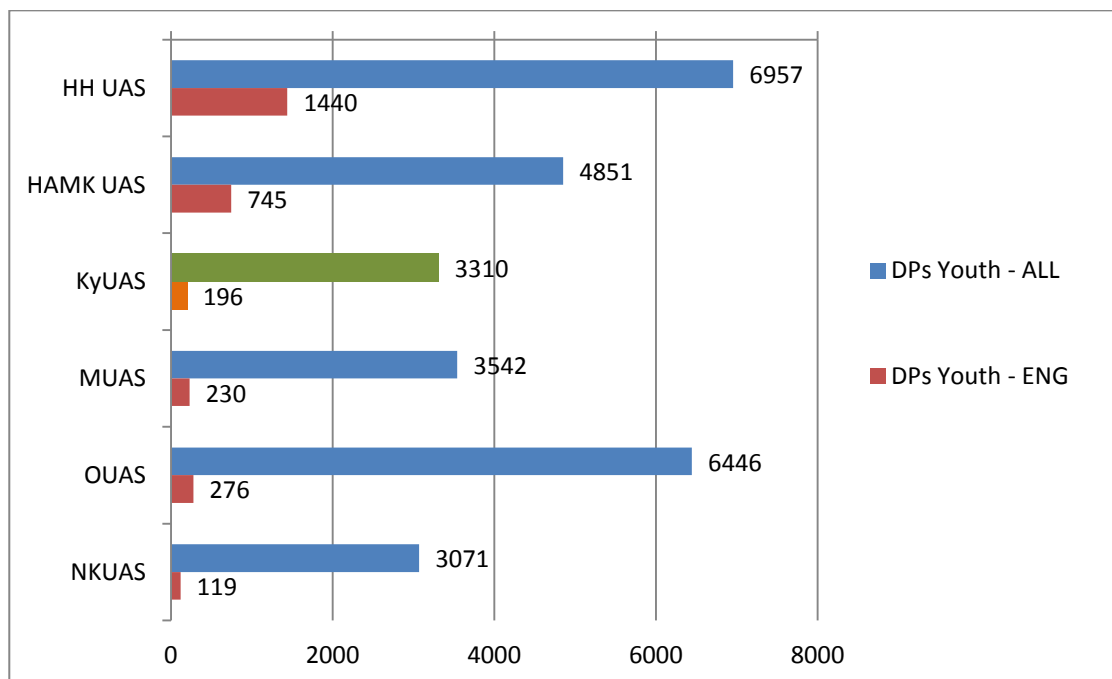


Figure 17. Number of All Students and Students with Nationality other than Finnish in Youth Education Leading to Degree, Year 2010. (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Board of Education 2011)

HAAGA-HELIA UAS and Oulu UAS have by far the highest overall number of degree students in youth education, reaching well over 6.000 students. HAMK UAS has a total of 4.851 students when the remaining three – Kymenlaakso UAS, Mikkeli UAS and North Karelia UAS – have just over 3.000 degree students in youth education. In other words, HAAGA-HELIA UAS and Oulu UAS have over double the degree student number compared to North Karelia UAS and Kymenlaakso UAS.

Looking at the numbers of degree students with other nationality than Finnish, the situation is quite different. HAAGA-HELIA UAS and HAMK UAS have also a high number of international students compared to the total number – 20,7 % of in HAAGA-HELIA UAS and 15,4 % in HAMK UAS. Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS are more or less on the same level compared to each other, 5,9 % of the non-Finnish degree students in youth education and 6,5 % of Mikkeli UAS degree students. Even though Oulu UAS has a high number of degree students in total the number of non-Finnish students is only 4,3 % of the student body in youth education.

The high number of international students in HAAGA-HELIA UAS and HAMK UAS can be explained with the high number of degree programmes that are conducted in English – HAAGA-HELIA UAS offers nine bachelor's degree programmes and five master's degree programmes and HAMK UAS six bachelor's and one master's degree in English (Appendix 1). It was interesting to notice that Kymenlaakso UAS is the only university of applied sciences in the comparator list offering the equal number or more master's level studies in English than bachelor's degree programmes. Kymenlaakso UAS offers just two bachelor's degree programmes in English but will offer three degree programmes on the master's level conducted in English from academic year 2012-2013 on. The KyUAS ratio between the two different levels is currently 2/2 when other comparator universities of applied sciences have the focus in the bachelor's degree programmes. HAAGA-HELIA UAS's ratio is 9/5, HAMK UAS' 6/1, MUAS' 3/0, NKUAS' 2/0 and OUAS' 3/2. Also, two of these universities of applied sciences do not offer master's degree education in English at all: Mikkeli UAS and North Karelia UAS. Therefore what can look like a small amount of undergraduate degree programmes in Kymenlaakso UAS compared to other institutions can partly be explained with the strong focus on the postgraduate programmes.

When the overall situation of the international students and degree programmes was established, getting an understanding of how the comparators did in the most recent application period for the UAS undergraduate programmes (figure 18) was needed. Surprisingly, the institution that was expected to be the top institution in application figures, too, was in fact third on the list of the comparators, Oulu UAS and HAMK UAS being the top institutions in overall application numbers. Kymenlaakso UAS could indeed do so better, as the application numbers demonstrate. Especially the applicant numbers of Oulu UAS appear impressive when the low number of degree programmes is considered.

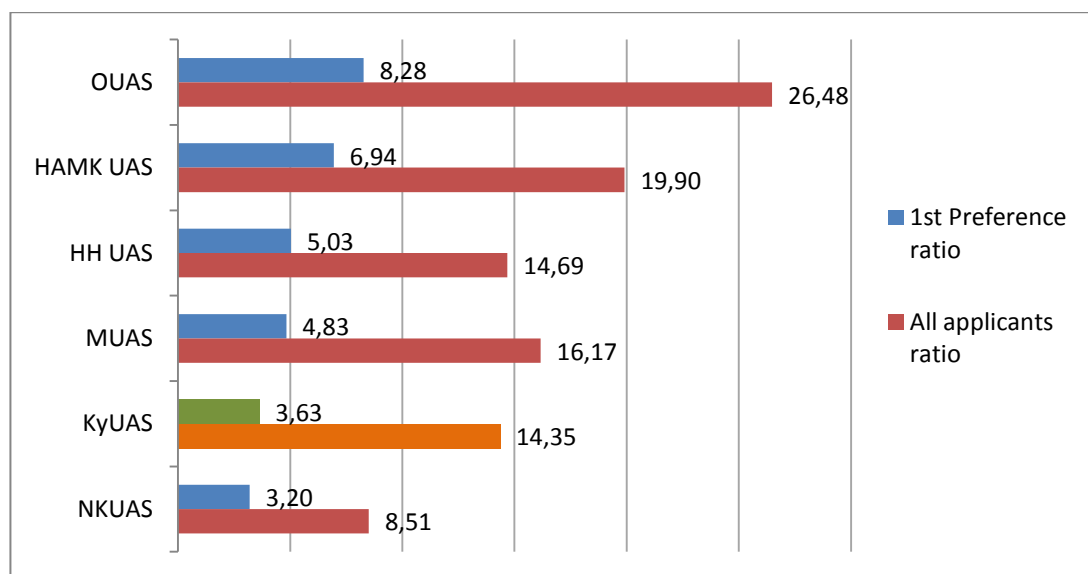


Figure 18. Applicants per Study Place Ratio in Joint Application Period for Bachelor's Degree Programmes conducted in English, Spring 2011 (OPH / UBS 2011)

However, the spring application period ratios do not tell the whole truth as HAAGA-HELIA UAS also participates in the autumn joint application period. In autumn application period 2011 HAAGA-HELIA UAS offered two degree programmes, receiving 10,4 first choice applications per study place and 30,9 applications in total per study place. Only two other universities of applied sciences took part in the same application period. (OPH / UBS 2011)

It was also interesting to see the overall balance of different nationalities among the applicants applying to Kymenlaakso UAS in spring 2011 (figure 19) and reflect it to the focus areas of Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS - EU countries (Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), Russia, United States and Canada -

stated in chapter 7. The statistics show that the highest applicant numbers in spring 2011 were from Vietnam, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Russia. Only one of these countries is among the Kymenlaakso UAS target country list. Therefore it can be concluded that a lot of effort will be needed to increase the number of applicants from the desired countries.

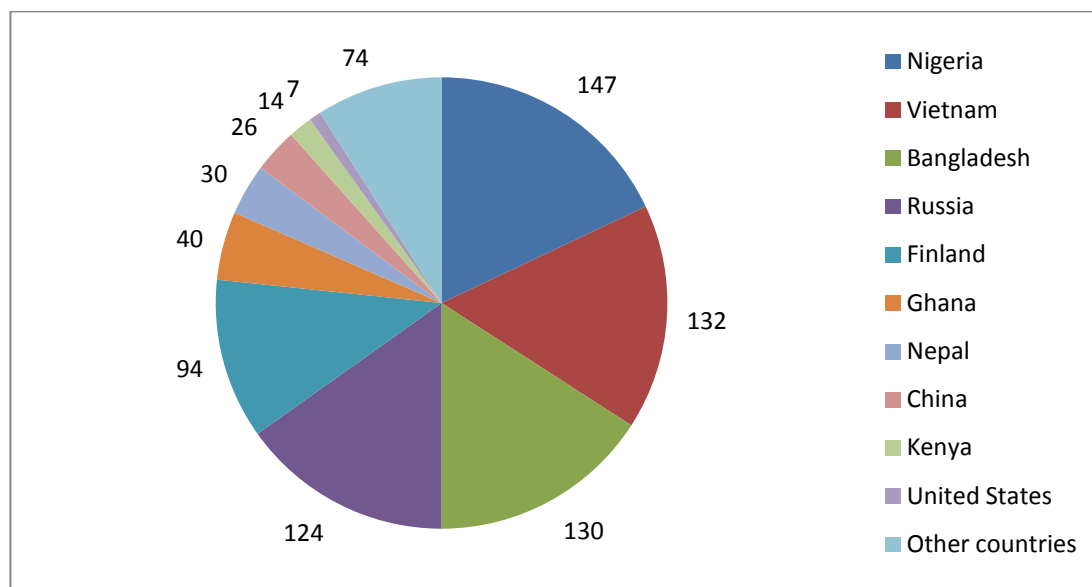


Figure 19. All Kymenlaakso UAS Applicants, Spring 2011 Application Period for Bachelor's Degree Programmes Conducted in English. (OPH / UBS 2011)

In addition to this information, relevant data and comparison gathered by a journalist was published by the national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat (Peltomäki 2011). The table shows the marketing budgets the universities of applied sciences in Finland used for spring 2011 application period (figure 20). It was very surprising to see Kymenlaakso UAS in the top four institutions in *Euros spent per student* comparison. However, there was no information available concerning which application periods were included in the sum, as there were five different application periods just during spring 2011: joint application period for youth education conducted in English, joint application period for youth education conducted in Finnish or Swedish, joint application period for adult education conducted in Finnish or Swedish, joint application period for higher university of applied sciences degree conducted in Finnish or Swedish and separate application period for higher university of applied sciences degree conducted in English. Therefore it remains unclear what kind of budgets the universities of applied sciences have in use for marketing their international degree programmes and how they compare.

Looking at the figures it is still easy to see, that the sum used by Oulu UAS is incredibly low compared to most of the other institutions. Compared to Kymenlaakso UAS Oulu UAS spent 227,60 Euros less per student for marketing, but still had high numbers of applicants – at least for their international degree programmes.

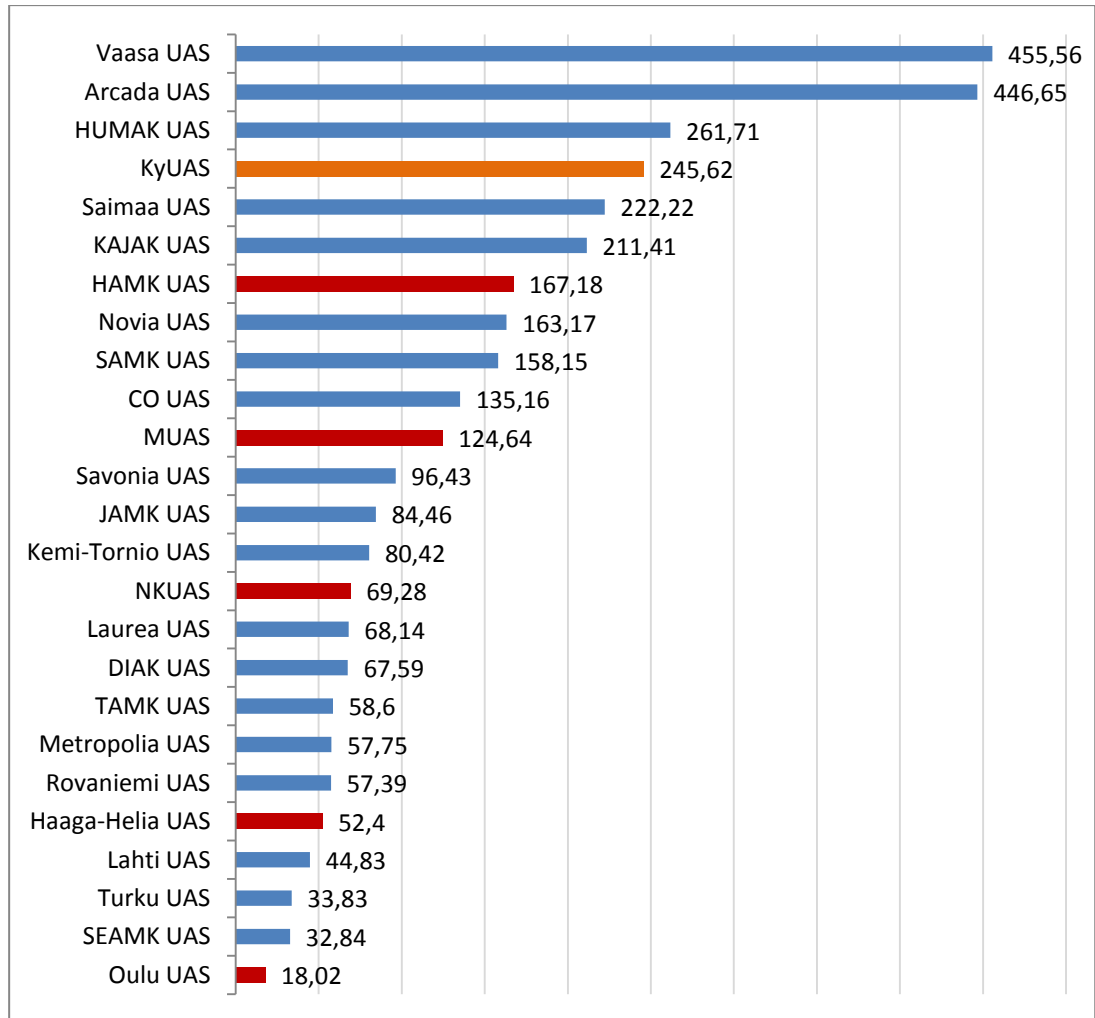


Figure 20. Marketing Budgets of 25 Universities of Applied Sciences for Spring 2011 Joint Application Period, Euros Used per Student. (Peltomäki 2011)

6.2 Internal Observation and Interviews

The worrying situation of the applicant numbers in spring 2010 joint application period was discussed in a meeting held in May 2010. Vice Rector, Degree Programme Heads, Faculty Director, Managers of Departments, Communications Manager, Head of International Affairs, Admissions Office representatives and Media Company representative attended the meeting. The meeting offered a change to observe the possible issues in the meeting to have foundation for the exercise. Main concerns

addressed in the meeting were connected to budgeting and other resources available for marketing, the responsibilities between different units and overall cooperation. Also, the new distribution of responsibilities in marketing – International Affairs taking over the responsibility of international marketing of the degree programmes from Communications Services in 2010 - had not been properly evaluated. In addition, Degree Programme in International Business moving from the autumn application period to spring application period and the possible consequences had not been properly predicted.

Based on the information and concerns gathered in the meeting, a table was drafted of the different marketing tasks and responsibilities stated in order to have all the information together. The table would then help key persons to see who is supposed to do what, by when and by which unit's budget the costs will be covered. This table (appendix 1) was eventually introduced when a second meeting was held in September 2011, in which the results of spring 2011 application period were discussed. The table also acts as the skeleton for the research project.

Russian & International Affairs Coordinator Gregory Budin introduced the joint international promotion plan 2011-2012 (Kymenlaakso UAS & Mikkeli UAS 2011) for Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS in the meeting. The plan aimed to *increase own share in international education market in the fields of international business, design, health care, engineering and technology*. The target groups included *high school graduates looking for possibilities to study abroad/Finland and their families, non-European high school graduates and their families looking for options, university students looking for options abroad, and organizations and NGO's representing/interested in Finland*. Target areas included EU countries - such as Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Russia especially St. Petersburg region and Petrozavodsk, and the United States and Canada. Promotion activities were to include direct marketing to the United States, Canada and Russia, personal selling by school visits and parents' evenings in Russia, participating in educational fairs in Germany, Baltic countries, Ireland and Russia, and organizing visits from Russia to Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS. Also, some additional advertising has been planned.

The collaborative internal approach of the research began with interviewing the key persons of Kymenlaakso UAS. The interviews were conducted in order to get a clearer picture of how the marketing related responsibilities have been divided in Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences and how the cooperation is perceived in order to avoid relying on hear-say or researcher's own perceptions. A summary of what has been done in the marketing of the degree programmes conducted in English and by whom was also needed. Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences' Communications Manager, the Degree Programme Heads of degree programmes conducted in English and Kymenlaakso and Mikkeli Universities of Applied Sciences' Head of International Affairs were asked for their input as they have the overall responsibility of the marketing of the programmes or the degree programmes themselves. Including all lecturers of the programmes would have included a large number of interviewees, who necessarily do not have a lot to do with the marketing or management of the programmes.

The Communications Manager makes the overall decisions of the marketing activities of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences. In addition, the marketing responsibilities have been divided between marketing domestically and internationally. The Communication Services handles the domestic side when the merged International Affairs of Kymenlaakso and Mikkeli Universities of Applied Sciences take care of the international marketing of the degree programmes.

During five years I had heard quite a number of separately presented comments from different people representing the degree programmes concerning the lack of cooperation or actions taken in the marketing of the international degree programmes. The programme representatives felt that their hands were tied, because of the budgeting and the organizational hierarchy of decision making in the marketing matters. As there was not a concrete picture of the situation it was relevant to interview the Degree Programme Heads in order to get their actual views. After talking to some past and present Degree Programme Heads of the degree programmes conducted in English the previous perceptions of lacking cooperation and dissatisfaction among the degree programmes were validated to some extent. Some potential interviewees were not even eager to talk about the topic and to be then quoted in the research. One anonymously given comment stated: *Marketing was scant, since there weren't chips to play with. Everything went through*

Communications Services and the suggestions were either approved or not, they live completely their own lives there. The best one I remember was an ad I saw in a volleyball magazine.

According to Degree Programme Head of Design, Jan Kettula (2011) the marketing tasks and responsibilities and how they have been divided within Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences were quite confusing and unclear when he started working for Kymenlaakso UAS in autumn 2010. Also, the somewhat superficial cooperation made it challenging to understand what needed to be done. Kettula questioned how Communication Services and International Affairs understand cooperation in the first place, as it seems like both departments keep the degree programmes and other units in a safe distance. Simply knowing what was needed, for what and by when was not stated very clearly to a new degree programme head. Different requests and the deadlines just suddenly seemed to pop up without preliminary warning. Since the Communications Services seem to have a pre-determined timeline for updating information for different purposes, it would be beneficial for everyone to have such a timeline in use.

One of the first tasks the Communication Services asked Kettula (2011) to do was the degree programme description for the KyUAS website as well as for the Application Guide. After the description had been written by the degree programme - with the emphasis in the substance of the programme - it was written into *a cute and clever* form by the Communication Services, changing the original message the degree programme wanted to communicate. Sending e-mails forth and back for several times felt frustrating, when sitting down by the same table and discussing what the content should be from the both parties' point of views would probably have resulted in completing the task more quickly and also producing a better understanding of the different interests. Kettula was hoping for a more efficient practice.

According to Kettula the degree programmes do not have any influence over the marketing of the programmes, as all they can do is to request certain actions and hope that they will be approved. He understands that the marketing is part of the Communication Services and International Affairs' domain, but in an ideal situation the degree programme would be able to influence the media used in marketing or in the targeting of the international marketing. One of the main concerns is that there is

too narrow targeting used in the international marketing which could lead to having a large number of same ethnic group within a small study groups, such as the ones in Degree Programme in Design. For instance, though the *Russia know-how* is a strategic focus point of Kymenlaakso UAS having Russia as a target area shouldn't take resources away from other international marketing. (Kettula, 2011)

It was a positive surprise to hear that for example the Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management has had a considerable freedom in its marketing, even using funds from the Business Department's budget for the majority of its marketing actions. Head of Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management, Ari Lindeman (2011), feels that the degree programme has a say in the marketing matters but the resources for implementation is a different matter. Even though the development of the degree programme has been listed in the Degree Programme Head's responsibilities, marketing isn't often considered being part of it.

According to Lindeman's understanding most of the costs were covered by the business department's budget but for example the brochures probably from the Communication Services' budget. However, the exact figures and how the costs had been divided were not clear to him. From his point of view the Communications Services has taken care of the degree programme's advertising in both the printed media and online media – and quite successfully so. Lindeman gives credit to the Communications Services for developing and managing the online advertising of Kymenlaakso UAS. One concern that Lindeman has is the master's degree programmes visibility in some freely distributed local newspapers, questioning does it serve the image of the programmes targeted to the professionals the way it should. (Lindeman, 2011)

As stated before, according to Lindeman (2011) the degree programme has a say in the marketing matters and there are not strict restrictions in the marketing actions from his point of view. However, the marketing and the communication of the degree programme have become more cautious, for example all press releases have to be approved by the Communication Services first. On the other hand it is also an excellent matter, because the communication is more controlled and follows the overall guidelines. The most important thing is that the right people are planning and agreeing matters, as well as *being awake* at all times.

Head of Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion, Marja-Leena Kauronen (2011), had quite similar views with Lindeman. The faculty of Social and Health Care has funded for example the brochures for the programme and their postage to selected recipients in Finland and abroad: the offices dealing with foreigners or immigrants in Kotka, Turku, Vaasa, Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa areas, cooperation partners in Kymenlaakso area, professional health care units in Tallinn, Tartu and Keila areas in Estonia etc.

Kauronen (2011) herself, as a Degree Programme Head, had done a great deal of planning, research and mapping of the potential contacts and areas in Finland - and in Estonia from where she has gained personal experience, contacts and knowledge concerning the local organization. The mapping was done in order to determine where to send either some printed brochures or digital brochures via e-mail. Kauronen has received support from the team of Kymenlaakso UAS colleagues and also from the Kymenlaakso UAS International Affairs, which offered letter drafts to be modified and used as cover letter when sending the brochures. International Affairs also gave their existing address databases to be used for the degree programme's marketing. However, there was also a negative surprise for Kauronen in the marketing efforts. She had mapped the possible health care field's professional publications in Finland, the deadlines for delivering adverts, the prices and other related information already in January 2011 and offered them to the Communication Services. Her suggestion was turned down due to saving measures, though the prices were only in the region of hundreds of Euros. This decision turned out to be a mistake, as the application period needed to be extended due to the low number of applicants and only then advertising in the professional publications – or even placing an expensive advert in Helsingin Sanomat – was accepted. It was, however, too late at this stage to advertise in the professional publications, as they are published only a few times a year and all the deadlines had already passed.

Kauronen (2011) hoped that the target groups of the Master's degrees and their differences compared to the biggest target group of the universities in general – the vast mass of young, 18-20 year-olds – would be taken into consideration when planning the media use for the marketing campaigns. The Master's degree programme students are usually 30-40 years old professionals who have children and therefore will probably not have time to surf the net and see the web advertising. In addition, the

Communication Services insisted on the marketing in Finnish for potential applicants living in Finland, though the programme is conducted in English.

According to Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences' Communications Manager Marja Metso (2011), the role of Communication Services in the marketing of the degree programmes is much more complex than what people usually think. The foundation of the communication and marketing activities is created by the quality management system of the UAS, Content Management System TWEB, the Intranet and the website of the UAS. When all these factors are in order the matter at hand can be communicated further or some paid-for marketing can be used as appropriate. In other words the Communications Services are using a principal of having the product - may it be education, project, process or something else - in order first when it comes to goals, key persons and contact information, before the communication can be published. This background work takes considerably more time, effort and working hours than for example just publishing a press release or buying visibility. In addition, the paid advertising and marketing is the last resort in the communications process. It is also considered more important to strive for offering all the communications and information both in Finnish and English for the present KyUAS students and personnel as well as prospective applicants searching for information for example on Kymenlaakso UAS' website.

Though the Head of International Affairs of both Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS, Henrik Luikko (2011) is the person with overall responsibility for marketing the degree programmes abroad, the Communications Manager is the person responsible for marketing the international degree programmes in Finland. As stated earlier the redistribution of responsibilities happened only in 2010, before that Communications Services held the responsibility of international marketing as well. According to Luikko the marketing used to be more of a responsibility of the degree programmes themselves. Today the international marketing plan for the degree programmes conducted in English are sketched together with the Degree Programme Heads and International Affairs Head. The cooperation requires constant conversation for development and the plan is an *open paper*. Determining which areas to target is largely connected to identifying the nationalities having the best potential for integration in Finland. Therefore the focus countries for Kymenlaakso UAS are the EU countries, Russia, and North America. The overall trends as well as factors such as

tuition fees collected by the universities have an effect on the plans. However, the international marketing budget of Kymenlaakso UAS is minimal compared to other higher education institutions. Luikko claims that for example HAMK UAS has a budget 30 times bigger than Kymenlaakso UAS and even the strategic partner, Mikkeli UAS has a budget five times bigger compared to that of Kymenlaakso UAS. Luikko explicates that the budgeting does not really support the merged model of International Affairs of Kymenlaakso and Mikkeli UAS'. In addition, the share of international marketing is modest even compared to the overall communications budget of the organization. Marketing the degree programmes internationally is a long term work and it should be considered also in the resourcing.

Luikko (2011) recognizes that educational marketing is a big global business. There are constantly plenty of sales letters arriving and other contacts taken by different website administrators, exhibition organizers, e-media, etc. The e-media is something of interest, but it also is an expensive form of marketing and standing out of the vast mass of different institutions is difficult. Participating in the educational exhibitions possesses the same problem, as there are many commercially experienced institutions competing for the attention of the potential students with their impressive stands. Another issue Kymenlaakso UAS has in visibility is the fact that it only offers two undergraduate programmes, which is a low number, especially compared to HAAGA-HELIA UAS' nine undergraduate programmes. In addition, the master's degree programmes form a problematic product to market internationally due to its eligibility requirement of three years work experience after graduation. In Luikko's view the bachelor's degree programmes should have more faith in themselves as they are the core product for universities of applied sciences.

According to Luikko (2011) there should be clear guidelines for the operations. Luikko also questions why the joint application period for degree programmes conducted in English are in a different application period in the first place as many potential Finnish students miss it because of its timing. From the perspective of timing the marketing planning in Kymenlaakso UAS is also late. Having a meeting to discuss the application numbers and drafting a plan in September is nearly half a year late. The process should be started in early spring and finalized in early summer, with decisions concerning who will participate to what and where, what materials are needed etc. Autumn should be left for executing the plan.

According to Luikko (2011) Centre for International Mobility CIMO leans more towards the academic universities in Finland the universities of applied sciences should join forces in the marketing and its development. After all, alone the institutions are small players in the educational field.

As a conclusion, based on the internal observation and interviews, it could be said that there indeed is some level of friction between the different departments or key persons. Increased cooperation between the degree programmes, Communication Services and International Affairs seems essential and should be taken seriously. Also, clarifying whose responsibility different marketing tasks are and which budget should be used for the marketing costs would most likely make the situation clearer to everyone. According to another observation the marketing of the degree programmes does not seem to have a very strategic take. At times the argument Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 7) make about university marketing being largely responsive rather than strategic is accurate, when expensive advertising is added as a *panic reaction* to low applicant numbers in the running application period, after initially rejecting suggestions made by the Degree Programme Head. In addition, reflecting the application numbers for next application period's marketing has been done late. Luikko's (2011) statement concerning the timeframe is very important – the planning should already be done during the spring, agreed by summer and executed from the beginning of autumn.

6.3 External Interviews

The selection of comparator institution representatives to be interview was done by considering who would have the best overall picture of the marketing of all the institutions' degree programmes conducted in English. Also, aiming to interview all Degree Programme Heads would have given an unbalanced result, as the institutions have a very different number of degree programmes which are offered in English. However, interviewing also the Degree Programme Heads would have given a different perspective to the research.

When the selected benchmarking partners were first approached, with the presumption of the Head of International Affairs being the person responsible for international marketing like in Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS – it soon became evident that the presumption was not correct at all. Out of six requests sent four were forwarded to

someone else in the organization. Two of these were Communications Managers, one was Coordinators of International Affairs and one Coordinator of Student Recruitment.

Very soon into the external benchmarking exercise it became apparent that what was thought of being *external – competitive* exercise became more an *external – collaborative* benchmarking process, discussed in chapter 5. It was a pleasant surprise to get such a positive and overall interested reaction and the interviews were agreed very quickly after the initial contact. Only one chosen higher education institution comparator declined, stating confidentiality in the marketing actions as the reason.

The external interviews started by interviewing Communication Manager of HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences, Ari Nevalainen (2011). The responsibilities in the international marketing have been shared based on the type of international education as HAAGA-HELIA UAS offers: programmes leading to a degree, student exchange and also education export. Only the degree student recruitment falls under the Communication Manager's responsibilities. Marketing plan of HAAGA-HELIA UAS is established by a team, which includes the Rector/CEO, Heads of Degree Programmes and Communication Manager. They sit down by the same table to discuss the general guidelines and long term targets, for several years to come, taking the different interests of the degree programmes into account in order to reach a mutual vision. Communications Department then drafts a proposal and gives it to the degree programme heads to comment. It involves strategic choices, such as who the institution really wants to recruit as degree students. For example the dramatically increased tuition fees in the United Kingdom were brought to Communications Managers' attention by the Degree Programme Heads, who were eager to change the focus there as soon as possible. However, as the overall guidelines are decided for a longer timeframe the changes will not be made as suddenly. The budget of international marketing is included in the funds for communications, defined in the overall budget of the organization. It covers all marketing measures of the degree programmes, too. However, the two thirds of the budget are used to market in the Helsinki region, as HAAGA-HELIA UAS had decided to target the foreigners already living in Finland rather than recruit from abroad – or arrange entrance examination abroad. However, there are some countries that have been chosen as the target areas: Germany, the Baltic Region, Russia, China and England. HAAGA-HELIA UAS is an

international institution already, with a high number of foreign students. In addition, HAAGA-HELIA UAS has approximately 180 partner universities abroad, adding to the international focus, which receive a HAAGA-HELIA UAS newsletter regularly.

Director for International Affairs of Lappeenranta University of Technology, Janne Hokkanen (2011), noted the fairly short history of the education offered in English by the university. 10 years ago Lappeenranta UT had only one degree programme conducted in English – in 2011 there are nine degree programmes with 18 different majors available. The offering has grown dramatically as well as the needed resources. 26 % of the degree students are foreigners nowadays. The short history also means that the course of action and overall plan is still being created. The work has properly kicked off only about one and a half years ago. The cooperation between Degree Programme Heads, Communications Services and International Affairs has been working very well and there is a trusting work relationship between the key units. However, it has been discussed would it be easier, if the Communications Services took care of the international marketing of the programmes, too. On the other hand the International Affairs have the knowledge of *where the institution should go*, the target areas are Russia, China, Europe, Middle-East, but good students come also from Nepal, Iran, Pakistan and India. In addition, South America is becoming increasingly interesting, as the local governments strongly support studying abroad. The general marketing of the institution is done from the institutional budget, but the degree programme specific marketing actions are done using the faculties' own budgets. Actions include the integrated website, educational exhibitions, print media advertisement and printed as well as digital brochures. Alumni have not been utilized as well as it could have but existing degree students participate in promoting the institution. Academic universities, including Lappeenranta UT, do not arrange entrance examinations abroad, selecting the students based for example on their bachelor's degree grades. University Admissions Finland checks the eligibility of the applicants and the faculties or degree programmes interview the candidates online.

Communications Manager of HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Lea Mustonen (2011) explained that HAMK UAS has its own initiative for developing the degree programmes conducted in English. The *VIEHKO initiative* includes two different parts – development of the programmes, including development of teaching and development of the marketing of these programmes, including development of

marketing communication and student welfare and also piloting new ways of executing marketing. The piloting is done using the internal budget of the organization when the traditional marketing – including print advertising, brochures and educational exhibitions - is done using degree programme budgets. Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences has also participated in education exhibitions together in China and has produced mutual brochures and roll-ups, there are additional plans for the future, too. The oldest international programme of HAMK UAS, Degree Programme in International Business, has traditionally focused in China, but launching the new programmes in the field of technology has changed the focus are of the whole institution. The targeted countries are decided based on the area's industrial and commercial strategy – from where the workforce is needed – as well as which nationalities are more likely to be employed and from where there is expertise. For example Eastern Europe is another HAMK UAS' target area in addition to China.

Oulu University of Applied Sciences' International Relations Officer Marjo Pääskylä (2011) explained that International Relations are part of Study Affairs of the institution, belonging to the Rector's Office. However, there has been a proposal concerning forming a separate International Relations Team. In addition, the Head of International Relations has been away for three years and has just returned. Therefore some re-organizing is needed in the international relations. There is also a need for clarifying the international communication. Degree Recruitment team is an active team with its own special features and goals, taking the requests from the degree programme into consideration. When it comes to marketing of the degree programmes Pääskylä acknowledges that there is a need for a conversational team, exchanging experiences and creating guidelines. As the international degree programmes are a minority in the organization, compared to the Finnish degree programmes, it would be challenging to get the message through in bigger forums.

Aspects that were especially picked up from the conversation with Pääskylä (2011) included the active cooperation with the University of Oulu and also with the City of Oulu. Having mutual marketing activities with the local university, both in marketing done in Finland and abroad, has higher potential for increasing visibility of both institutions rather than going it alone. *Study in Oulu* initiative promoting the higher education institutions of Oulu internationally was carried out as a project of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and produced good material,

including a joint website, but when the initiative finished so did the resources. In addition, having different recruitment systems, own websites and different starting points imposes challenges in the cooperation. City of Oulu cooperates with Oulu UAS in different international schemes, such as in *Home like Oulu* initiative funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), promoting integration of immigrants to Oulu region. In addition, there has been also an Expat Oulu initiative, in which Oulu UAS participated. Oulu UAS has also close cooperation with the International Activity Centre Villa Victor in organising info sessions for immigrants.

In North Karelia University of Applied Sciences the person responsible of degree programme marketing is Student Recruitment Coordinator, Tarja Tuononen. Tuononen (2011) has been developing marketing to prospective applicants for five years and her background is in the international relations. In North Karelia UAS the International Office takes care of the marketing to the partners of the organization. Student Services on the other hand provide services for the applicants and both Finnish and international students. Tuononen works in the Student Services and handles the visibility of the international degree programmes. The Centre for Design and International Business participates in the implementation of the general international marketing plan. Admissions Office participates actively in marketing, too – for example by representing North Karelia UAS at educational exhibitions together with the Design and International Business representatives. According to Tuononen international marketing of the degree programmes is challenging because there are only two programmes with an annual intake of 80 students, especially since the resources are limited. After all, international marketing is expensive and should be systematic and strategic. Ad hoc activities are not appreciated. Still, increasing the number of international applicants is a goal stated in the strategy and international marketing activities are developed accordingly.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical framework provided the understanding of how the marketing management process should ideally be conducted and what aspects should be taken into consideration in marketing of the higher education as well as the marketing segment of international students. This understanding helped to collect relevant data for the research.

It must be acknowledged that interviewing the key people of both Kymenlaakso UAS and the interviewees representing other higher education institutions was the most enjoyable part of the research. Not only were the differences in the procedures and needs for improvement identified, but also a picture of the overall challenges that the Finnish higher education institutions face in the worldwide competition was formed. The conversations were extremely interesting and had a very open and cooperative spirit. This was a very positive surprise, considering that the competition among the 25 universities of applied sciences and 19 academic universities in Finland is quite intense. Also, the overall reaction to the research was very supportive and encouraging, with Heads of International Affairs and Communications Managers expressing their curiosity and interest in reading the thesis when it is ready. This tells me there is clear will for cooperation with other higher education institutions in international marketing.

The critical and creative *analysis* of the results - stated in the benchmarking stages (chapter 5) - is the last part of the research project. The research project started by concentrating on the issue of low applicant numbers of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences' degree programmes conducted in English, raising a question of how improving the marketing management processes through benchmarking could help increase the applicant numbers. After completing the benchmarking exercise it became evident that *the big picture* had been somewhat neglected – the underlying issue of the lack of awareness abroad is in fact national rather than institutional. However, on the institutional level there is also room for improvement and improving the processes on the institutional level is a step to the right direction.

7.1 Summary of Results

The results of internal results were compared against the result obtained from external tables. Table showing a summary of distribution of the responsibilities in the marketing process of degree programmes conducted in English identified by the interviewees (appendix 4), shows the persons responsible for international marketing of the programmes, as well as other decisions makers and participants in the planning process.

The results show that there are several different ways of distributing the responsibilities. Table 5 shows a summary of the main differences compared to Kymenlaakso UAS. For example HAMK UAS has two different teams with clear distribution of the tasks, which has clarified the overall process and responsibilities. It was also interesting to notice how many institutions had had discussions concerning the marketing responsibilities between Communications Services and International Affairs, demonstrating the complex nature of the programmes' marketing considering the domestic and international markets as well as the special skills of both units.

Table 5. Differences in Distribution of Responsibilities in Marketing of Degree Programmes Conducted in English Identifies by Interviewees (appendix 4).

Differences in Distribution of Responsibilities Compared to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top management actively involved in developing marketing strategies (CEO/Rector in HH UAS, Vice Rector in HAMK UAS, board in LUT) • One person responsible of both domestic and international marketing of the degree programmes (Communications Manager in HAMK UAS and HH UAS) • Degree recruitment or other project teams with a variety of representatives and regular meetings (HAMK UAS, NKUAS, OUAS)

Appendix 5 demonstrates the different forms of cooperation the interviewees (Hokkanen, Luikko, Mustonen, Nevalainen, Pääskylä & Tuononen 2011) identified during the interviews. One of the most predictable cooperation partners that were mentioned was Centre for International Mobility CIMO and its *Study in Finland* website and higher education database. Surely the majority of all higher education

institutions in Finland see CIMO as an important partner in student mobility as well as providing expertise in the international marketing efforts. Another commonly named cooperative network was the FINNIPS network, organizing entrance examinations abroad in cooperation with 23 universities of applied sciences in Finland. All benchmarking comparators except HAAGA-HELIA UAS and Lappeenranta University of Technology are members of the FINNIPS network. Also, PINNET – *Universities of Applied Sciences' Internationalization Network* – was stated by a majority of the comparators. This shows that there are quite a few cooperation networks already in place, though the institutions still seem to be hoping for better cooperation in the field. It can be questioned should the existing networks be re-evaluated and re-organized in order to reflect the needs of the institutions better.

The strategic partnerships formed in the recent years by different universities of applied sciences form another interesting feature, which can in the long run lead into a full merger. Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS have formed such a partnership, as well as North Karelia UAS and Savonia UAS. HAMK UAS on the other hand has a strategic partnership with both Lahti UAS and Laurea UAS, called *Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences* (FUAS). Oulu UAS cooperates with local University of Oulu, also in marketing of the institutions.

Table 6. Differences in Forms of Cooperation Identified by the Interviewees (appendix 5)

Differences in Forms of Cooperation Compared to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with the local city or municipality (OUAS)

Table 6 presents a summary of the main difference in forms of cooperation between the comparators and Kymenlaakso UAS. The one form of cooperation that appeared to be missing from the Kymenlaakso UAS' point of view is the tight cooperation Oulu UAS has with the City of Oulu. The cooperation covers different international schemes, such as *Home like Oulu* initiative promoting integration of immigrants to Oulu region, the former expat initiative and the International Activity Centre Villa Victor.

Challenges related to marketing of degree programmes conducted in English, as identified by the interviewees (appendix 6), include factors such as the budget or overall resources available, difficulty of choosing the target markets in the big global marketplace, visibility as an individual institution and the low number of Finnish applicants. For example Kymenlaakso UAS & Mikkeli UAS and North Karelia UAS stated the limited resources they have available for international marketing of the programmes, which understandably cannot help increasing the visibility of the small institutions. Even the bigger institutions struggle in standing out from the big group of competing institutions, not only in the Finnish scale but especially worldwide. Narrowing the global market down is important, but nearly all comparators expressed how difficult it is to decide where to market due to such an enormous marketplace. There are an overwhelming number of different catalogues, electronic media and educational databases available. It is difficult to predict which actions will provide the best results and which channels are reliable.

Table 7. Differences in Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Identified by the Interviewees (appendix 6)

Differences in Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Compared to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with income – students from Asia and Africa are struggling to get student visas and arrive in Finland (OUAS) • Different requests from degree programmes and finding a mutual solution to satisfy all the interests and goals (HH UAS) • Importance of international degree programmes within the university – field is still young and new (LUT) • Communicating the message to potential applicants is difficult in the current tuition fee situation and its future (LUT)

Nevalainen (2011) from HAAGA-HELIA UAS stated the *jungle of different requests* from the Degree Programme Heads and finding a mutual vision as a challenge. This is quite understandable considering that there are nine bachelor's degree programmes and five master's degree programmes in very different fields. Pääskylä (2011) from Oulu UAS expressed her concern for the difficult process of obtaining a student visa

for the admitted African and Asian students, largely due to the lack of needed income. Indeed, having classrooms half-empty because the African and Asian students are still waiting for their visa application to be processed is no one's benefit. Mustonen (2011) from HAMK UAS saw having good knowledge and expertise in the global marketplace challenging. Deciding how, when and where to market is an important decision and the factors influencing it should be well understood. Luikko (2011) from Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS was concerned about the decisions for entrance examination locations made by FINNIPS steering group as they often do not reflect the strategic target country selections of the institutions. After all, the locations of the entrance examination have a considerable effect on where the admitted students come from. Hokkanen (2011) from Lappeenranta University of Technology added that communicating the message to potential applicants has become challenging because of the confusing situation of tuition fees in the master's degree programmes. Some institutions collect the tuition fees, some do not and some are testing it. The future is quite unclear.

Table 8. Differences in Best Practices Identified by the Interviewees (appendix 7)

Differences in Best Practices Compared to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good cooperation, good conversational connection and teamwork are essential (HH UAS, NKUAS, OUAS, LUT) • Top management taking part actively (HH UAS) • Degree recruitment team and the ability to take the needs of the degree programmes and the whole UAS into consideration (OUAS) • Personal contact is the most important practice, even more important than the institutions website (HAMK UAS) • Publishing ezine which is linked to application guide (OUAS)

Identifying the best practices initially held the highest potential for improvement in the process. Rather than only using the researcher's own evaluations, challenging the interviewees by asking them to identify the best practices was used to bring up possible differences in the most effective processes, too. Appendix 7 demonstrates the

best practises stated by the interviewees and table 8 summarizes the differences compared to Kymenlaakso UAS.

One of the best practices, stated by four institutions, was the cooperation in the organization. A very important factor, stated by Hokkanen (2011), was trust. It is important to trust that colleagues are doing their jobs well, giving them work peace. Also, the student recruitment teams and the importance of the cooperation in these teams – with Admissions Office, education providers, degree programme heads etc. were stated. Nevalainen (2011) also appreciated the active participation of the top management, which aids reflecting the overall institutional strategy to degree programme marketing, too. Personal contact used in marketing of the degree programmes - including different events, visits, parents' evenings and educational exhibitions utilizing existing degree students and personnel – was considered very important and effective.

According to Pääskylä (2011) the ezine Extra published by Oulu UAS has been a good practice as it offers information to potential applicants as well as other stakeholders about what is going on in the institution. Hokkanen (2011) identified the utilization of international partner institutions in international marketing as an important benefit, as they have sent good students to study in Lappeenranta UT. Luikko (2011) named Mikkeli UAS' strong international cooperation with partner institutions as one of the best practices. For example Eastern Finland International Summer Term (EFIST) has worked as an opportunity for some students to test the institution. In addition, mass mailing of letters and brochures has been one way to stand out from other institutions, but measuring the effect is challenging.

In addition, it was interesting to notice that Nevalainen, Mustonen and Luikko wanted to emphasize the importance of recruiting in both Finnish students and other potential applicants already living in Finland. Even though recruiting Finnish students is not exactly a priority in the *Strategy for the Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Finland 2009-2015* it still makes sense in terms of other goals of the strategy. Integration and attracting potential foreign applicants already living in Finland are closely connected.

7.2 Managerial Implications

The final stage of the benchmarking exercise requires *adapting* the results into the context of the organization, suggesting managerial implications and follow-up (chapter 5).

According to Kotler and Keller (2009, 44-45) the financial success of the company or organization often depends especially on the marketing ability since the other functions within the organization do not matter if there isn't enough demand. In addition, Kotler and Keller (2009, 45-51) argue that the executives of the organization should adopt the thinking of the marketers and the marketers should adopt the thinking of the executives to understand the big picture and to create a strong marketing organization. This indicates that there should be more importance given to marketing in the organization and the top management should be actively involved. In addition, the active involvement of top management was one of the identified differences between comparator institutions and Kymenlaakso UAS.

Table 9. Implementing Different Processes into Kymenlaakso UAS.

Differences in Distribution of Responsibilities Compared to KyUAS	Implementation to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top management actively involved in developing marketing strategies 	→ Getting Vice Rector / Rector / board members involved and to increase the importance of marketing in general
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One person responsible of both domestic and international marketing of the degree programmes 	→ Re-evaluating the distribution of domestic/international marketing of the degree programmes conducted in English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree recruitment or other project teams with a variety of representatives and regular meetings 	→ Establishing and launching a degree recruitment team, including representatives from all units involved

Drafting the annual degree programme marketing strategies and plans for the whole organization should be a joint effort including the degree programmes and the Admissions Office from the beginning of the process, as many of the higher education institutions in the benchmarking exercise see it. The benchmarking partners considered the student recruitment teams as *must-have* in the marketing process and it is strongly recommend for Kymenlaakso UAS to establish one, too. It was understood that having own student recruitment teams is very beneficial and such teams should include people from several different functions – as per Kotler’s & Keller’s suggestion of multidisciplinary marketing teams. Mapping all different responsibilities in Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences in all stages of the international student recruitment first, then determining who should be involved to include every unit in the process, and agreeing how the responsibilities should be shared would be a good starting point. A wider selection of the institution staff would make the marketing process more institutional rather than departmental.

The CORD Model presented by Maringe and Gibbs (2009, 7) looks at the marketing strategy from a different view point, including contextualization, organization and co-ordination, research and development in the process. According to the model designing the content of the degree programme is an important part of the marketing activities. This combined to Kotler’s and Keller’s (2009, 45-51) notion of executives adopting the thinking of the marketers suggests that the members of staff developing the degree programmes should adopt the marketing thinking in the planning work.

Table 10. Implementing New Forms of Cooperation to Kymenlaakso UAS

Differences in Forms of Cooperation Compared to KyUAS	Implementation to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation with the local city or municipality (OUAS) 	→ Establishing a more active cooperation with City of Kouvola and the local immigration services

Establishing a closer cooperation between Kymenlaakso UAS and City of Kouvola - where the Campus of International Business and Culture is located – is highly advisable. Activities promoting the integration of local immigrants as well as offering

them information about educational possibilities would surely be a *win-win* situation for both parties. Oulu UAS and City of Oulu provide a good example of this form of cooperation. Negotiations could be started for example by the International Affairs or top management of the Campus of International Business and Culture.

Table 11. Reflection and Preparation for Different Issues and Challenges Related to Marketing in Kymenlaakso UAS

Differences in Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Compared to KyUAS	Reflection to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with income – students from Asia and Africa are struggling to get student visas and arrive in Finland (OUAS) 	<p>→ Strategic decisions on target countries and influencing the selection of entrance examination locations of FINNIPS network</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different requests from degree programmes and finding a mutual solution to satisfy all the interests and goals (HH UAS) 	<p>→ Involving degree programme heads / representatives in the planning process from the start and promoting open communication</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of international degree programmes within the university – field is still young and new (LUT) 	<p>→ Establishing an understanding within the institution of why recruiting international students is so important</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicating the message to potential applicants is difficult in the current tuition fee situation and its future (LUT) 	<p>→ Giving clear information on the website and other communication concerning the tuition fees in different master's degree programmes, listings of non-tuition fee programmes and tuition collecting programmes on a national website?</p>

The challenges or issues the interviewees identified in the marketing process of their degree programmes had several mutual themes, such as the vast size of the global marketplace and identifying the right target areas. Other things that Kymenlaakso UAS should keep in mind and take into consideration when making plans and strategies for the future are for example the lack of income of the admitted student from Africa or Asia, multitude of different requests and interest by the degree programmes, level of importance of the international education compared to other education in the institution and unstable situation with tuition fee collecting programmes.

In addition the limited resources in use for marketing of the degree programmes is clearly inconsistent compared to the importance of recruiting international degree students, which is clearly stated as one of the main goals in the Ministry of Education's strategy. Involving the top management in the marketing process could potentially increase the importance of the marketing of the programmes on top level – and also result in added resources. Additional resources would help the institutions to develop the processes in selecting the right target markets and increasing visibility. The overall importance of the international education within the institutions, even if the great majority of the offered education is given in Finnish, should be clarified throughout the institutions.

The aspect that was stated as an extremely important, even essential, by the benchmarking partners was a functioning and active cooperation. Effective cooperation and establishing mutual trust requires regular contact and a good conversational connection. Sending plans and drafts back and forth only via e-mail or storing them in a mutual electronic management system is not a very encouraging way to communicate and to promote discussion. As Kettula (2011) stated, sitting down by the same table provides an opportunity to talk things through at once, giving other participants a better understanding of everyone's view in addition and encouraging open conversation.

Implementing the best practices of the comparator institutions was the ultimate goal of the research. Table 12 sums up the best practices in use at the institutions, identified by the interviewees and the suggested implementations.

Table 12. Implementation of Best Practices to Kymenlaakso UAS

Differences in Best Practices Compared to KyUAS	Implementation to KyUAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good cooperation, good conversational connection and teamwork are essential (HH UAS, NKUAS, OUAS, LUT) 	→ Regular meetings of a project team to establish good conversational connection and cooperative attitude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top management taking part actively (HH UAS) 	→ Involving the Rector, Vice Rector and/or the board
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree recruitment team and the ability to take the needs of the degree programmes and the whole UAS into consideration (OUAS) 	→ Establishing and launching a degree recruitment team, including representatives from all units involved in the student recruitment process
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal contact is the most important practice (HAMK UAS) 	→ Concentrating marketing efforts to personal contact (visits, other events, parents' evenings, exhibitions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing ezine which is linked to application guide (OUAS) 	→ Developing English ezine to send to regularly to partners and link to website

Active participation of the top management and launching the degree recruitment team were already suggested and should be the first steps in improving the marketing management process and establishing good cooperation within the organization.

The marketing activities should concentrate in the personal contact as it appears to produce the best results. Arranging staff and/or degree student visits to higher secondary schools abroad, inviting potential applicants with or without their parents to visit the institution, arranging other events and participating in exhibitions are excellent ways get in touch with the applicants. Also, as some higher secondary schools in Europe have funds for travelling the students about to graduate could be

invited for a visit with their teachers. Establishing cooperation with a set of higher secondary schools in the target countries in addition to the current international partner universities could increase the visibility in certain areas and Kymenlaakso UAS could act as a *safe option* for the graduates, as the home institution already has connections and reliable contacts.

Developing one of the existing Kymenlaakso UAS ezines in English or establishing a new English ezine would be a way to keep in touch with the international partners and inform the potential international students of what kind of activities the institution has to offer. The ezine could be linked to the electronic application guide, following Oulu UAS' model.

Another issue that should be looked into is the timing of the marketing planning and execution process. For example, in 2011 the meeting to analyse the application statistics of Kymenlaakso UAS' degree programmes conducted in English was held in September - when the practical marketing work should already have been on-going. Comparing to the comparators' timeframes of having the following year's marketing plan ready in November or starting the planning for the next application period as soon as the previous one has ended, holding a meeting in September for the following year's application period is at least half a year late, as also Luikko (2011) claimed.

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Application period (Timing in 2011)		Meeting (Analysis, suggestion for a plan)							Execution		
Application period (Improved timing)		Meeting 1 (Analysis)	Meeting 2 (Negotiations, requests)		Meeting 3 (Approving the plan)			Executing the marketing plan (September - end of application period)			

Figure 20. Current and Suggested Timing for Marketing.

Considering these differences (figure 20) in the timing of the whole process, the active planning should be started no later than receiving the final statics from the application period. In addition, there should already be a solid proposition for the next year's marketing at the end of the year as it needs to be considered in the overall annual budget of the institution.

In 2012 the application period runs 9 January – 14 February 2012 and the statistics will be available on 15 February 2012. The overall numbers of eligible students will be available later, as the applicants must deliver their document copies to the Admissions Offices by 24 February 2012. The entrance examinations will take place in April and the admissions results are published in the end of May, in 2012 on 29 May 2012. The final number of degree students starting their studies can be seen on 31 July 2012, which is the last date for accepting the study place and registering for academic year 2012-2013.

Having three student recruitment team meetings during the academic year is an absolute minimum. First meeting should be held as soon as possible after the application period statistics are available, to evaluate the progress and also from where the applications have arrived, possibly prompting for corrective actions to the marketing plan. The second meeting can be held to go through the drafted plan including the corrective measures and possible requests from different units could still be taken into consideration. Third meeting could then make the final decisions and approving the plan of action for the autumn, when the active practical marketing work is to be done and the planning of the following years marketing strategy and plan can be started for budgeting negotiations. However, having as many meetings as possible should be encouraged, especially in the beginning in order to build mutual trust. After all, some comparator institutions' teams meet six times a year or even once a month.

In addition, the notion of Lahtinen, Isoviita & Hytönen (1995, 126-127) about what really matters in marketing management should also be considered. They state that identifying possibilities the current or new situation creates is essential and sensitivity to the situation at hand is one of the most important attributes of a successful marketer. Kotler & Keller (2009, 47-67) propose that the rapidly changing competitive marketplace requires re-evaluating and changing the marketing plans on regular basis. Companies need to move forward with their marketing programmes, innovative products and services and staying in touch with what the customer needs. Therefore it can be said that more flexibility should be allowed in the marketing strategies and give space for actions needed in changing situation. In addition, the needs of the customers, in other words prospective students should be taken into consideration in the curriculum development, too. Rapidly changing market creates different needs for skills in the work life and the curriculums should correspond with

such needs. Therefore higher education institutions should allow some flexibility in their budgeting and planning for the changing environment and marketplace. At the moment the plans and strategies seem to be agreed for several years and do not appear to be very flexible.

7.3 Evaluation of Research Method and Results

The research was conducted in five different parts - establishing the theoretical framework, collecting data independently, collecting data using internal interviews, collecting data using external interviews and analysing the results.

The question matrix was only sent out to Oulu UAS as per request from the interviewee. It was decided not to send the question matrix before hand to the interviewees, hoping to get more *from top of the head* answers to the question rather than prepared answers written down on the paper. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, 320-324) suggest, a *semi-structured interview* provides a possibility to use open-ended questions as well as adding or change a few questions and the order of the questions. The semi-structured interview technique enables probing answers by making interviewees to explain their answers, too. After all, the aim was to create an open conversation around the topic and see where it will lead, hopefully bringing up issues or factors which had not been thought of.

From the technical side recording the telephone interviews proved to be difficult, as the digital voice recorder picked up quite severe disturbance from the mobile phone connection. On the other hand, the loudspeaker function of the phone that was used created such a disturbing echo, that the recoding was impossible during a couple of the interviews. Meeting the interviewees in person would have been an ideal solution but unfortunately the working schedule did not allow travelling. The summaries of the interviews were sent to the interviewees as a means of validating the statements and making sure there were no misunderstandings or mistakes in the English terminology used by the institutions, as the interviews were conducted in Finnish.

Getting an overview of the degree programme marketing from several past years proved problematic as several interviewees had only been in the position - or had had the main responsibility of international marketing of the degree programmes - only for

one or two years. However, they were able to give me a good idea of the current situation, recent development and the overall challenges.

7.4 Further Research

The research project began by assessing the application numbers of Kymenlaakso UAS, concentrating too much in the competition in Finland and not paying enough attention to the enormous worldwide competition. As stated in the previous chapter, the issues faced by Finland as a country offering higher education and by the Finnish academic universities and universities of applied sciences on an institutional level are mutual. Becoming well-known in the worldwide scale is a national challenge and requires a joint effort from all involved. Creating more awareness abroad will draw in higher applicant numbers for every higher education institution in Finland. The key is to find the ways to make it happen.

Researching other countries could provide ideas for the Finnish higher education institutions as well. The initial plan of this research was to include two international partner universities to the benchmarking comparator list, but the interview request sent to the international offices of the universities were never replied to. Adding these universities in the benchmarking exercise would potentially have allowed *outside-of-the-box* thinking and produce possible new ideas that have not been considered in Finland.

In addition, mapping the best processes of each higher education institution in Finland as well as starting concrete work for a meaningful and productive cooperation among the whole higher education field could eventually help Finland to raise its profile and increase the awareness of what Finnish higher education can offer students. Centre for International Mobility CIMO is already working hard on promoting Finnish higher education, but developing the cooperation even further will require resources and willingness to cooperate with competing institutions.

From the point of view of Kymenlaakso UAS it would be advisable to research how the current or potential students see the curriculum. Does it offer the skills and knowledge they need and what could be done better? Higher education institutions rely on their customers – the students. Being in touch with what the customers want is one of the fundamental aspects of good marketing.

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Marketing of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes
Conducted in English 2011-2012

ACTIVITY	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	EXECUTOR	TIME	IN WHICH BUDGET?
Web adverting / search engines - Foreign applicants - Finnish applicants	Communication Services			
Direct marketing - To Russia, target groups? - To other countries, where?	International Affairs			
Participating in the fairs / exhibitions - Where? Who attends? - Costs?	International Affairs (abroad), Communication Services (in Finland)			
Using own students or personnel in marketing - Target countries? - Costs?	Faculties, International Team			
Improving KyUAS website - English pages - SoleOps	Communication Services, each unit takes care of their own pages			
Entrance examinations abroad - FINNIPS	Faculty			

Responsibilities in Marketing of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes Conducted in English 2011-2012

International Affairs	International marketing in cooperation with Mikkeli UAS - Mutual marketing plan - Mutual marketing plan with Mikkeli UAS and Saimaa UAS
Communication Services	Marketing in Finland in cooperation with Mikkeli UAS - Mutual marketing activities
Faculty / Department / Degree Programme	Cooperation with FINNIPS network, other matters to consider?

Marketing Budget of Kymenlaakso University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes Conducted in English 2011-2012

International Affairs	Budget available?
Communication Services	Budget available?
Faculty / Department / Degree Programme	Budget available per degree programme?
Other matters to consider	Possible joint marketing with the FINNIPS network and its costs

Degree Programmes Conducted in English in the Selected Higher Education Institutions in 2011-2012. (HAMK – Hämeen ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, HAAGA-HELIA ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Mikkelin ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Oulun Seudun ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Pohjois-Karjalan ammattikorkeakoulu 2011, Lappeenrannan teknillinen yliopisto 2011).

HEI	Degree Programmes
KyUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Design • Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business • Master's Degree Programme in Health Promotion • Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management
H-H UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Experience and Wellness Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Tourism • Bachelor's Degree Programme for Multilingual Management Assistants • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sports and Leisure Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Sport Development and Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Business Information Technology • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Information Systems Management • Master's Degree Programme in Communication Management • Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management • Master's Degree Programme in Tourism • Master's Degree Programme in Sport Development and Management • Master's Degree Programme in Information Systems Management
HAMK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Automation Engineering • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Construction Engineering • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Industrial Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Mechanical Engineering • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Supply Chain Management

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master's Degree Programme in Business Management and Entrepreneurship
Mikkeli UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Business Management • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Environmental Engineering • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Information Technology
NKUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Design • Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business
OUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Business Information Technology • Bachelor's Degree Programme in Information Technology • Bachelor's Degree Programme in International Business • Master's Degree Programme in Industrial Management • Master's Degree Programme in Information Technology
LUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master's Degree Programme in Chemical and Process Engineering • Master's Degree Programme in Energy Technology • Master's Degree Programme in Mechanical Engineering • Master's Degree Programme in Technomathematics and Technical Physics • Master's Degree Programme in Information Technology • Master's Degree Programme in Global Innovation and Technology Management • Master's Degree Programme in International Marketing Management • Master's Degree Programme in International Technology and Innovation Management • Master's Degree Programme in Strategic Finance

Question Matrix for Benchmarking Exercise.

MARKETING ORGANIZATION

(Degree Programme Heads, International Affairs, Communication Services, Admissions Office, Board of HEI, networks, others?)

- What is the role of the person responsible for international marketing in the organization? What responsibilities does he/she have?
- What type of internal and external cooperation does the HEI have in marketing activities? Does the cooperation function as expected? What forms of cooperation are in place?
- Does the higher education institution use media companies? If yes, how are the responsibilities shared between the media company and HEI?

MARKETING STRATEGY

- Who participates in the creation of the marketing strategy/ international marketing strategy of degree programmes conducted in English and how? Who makes the final decisions? How involved is the top management?
- What does the international marketing strategy of the HEI cover/include?
- How often are the international marketing strategies and plans re-evaluated and altered? How early does the marketing planning for the next application period start?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What do you consider the main problems/issues in international marketing of the degree programmes?
- What do you consider the best practise in the international marketing of your HEI? What has produced the best results? Why?

Distribution of Responsibilities in Marketing of Degree Programmes Conducted in English Identified by Interviewees. (Hokkanen, Luikko, Mustonen, Nevalainen, Pääskylä & Tuononen 2011)

KyUAS & MUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with overall responsibility Head of International Affairs (international marketing of the DPs) and the Communications Manager (domestic marketing of the DPs) • Strategic decisions and overall guidelines agreed by International Affairs and Degree Programme Heads, plans forwarded to top management for their information. • Execution by International Affairs, other personnel, Communication Services
H-H UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with overall responsibility Communication Manager (marketing of the degree programmes) • Strategic decisions, overall guidelines and a suggestion for the marketing plan negotiated and agreed by a team formed by the CEO/Rector, Communication Manager and Degree Programmes Heads – meetings held twice a term, additionally when needed • Execution by communications team – practices, use of media, platforms, print advertising in Finland, website, Facebook, educational exhibitions, promoting by staff travelling abroad
HAMK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with overall responsibility Communication Manager (marketing of the degree programmes, managing planning and execution) • Strategic decisions and approving the marketing plan by steering group including Vice Rector, Directors of the Result Units offering degree programmes in English, Communications Manager, VIEHKO Coordinator, Director of Admissions Office and Head of International Affairs – meetings approximately three times a year • Project team (including unit representatives with marketing experience and skills, Communications Services) draft a marketing plan – meetings approximately once a month

NK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person responsible Study Services Coordinator, Coordinator of Centre of Design and International Business responsible for communication • Strategic decisions and overall guideline agreed by Recruitment Project Team including representatives from each centre, DP development directors, discussed in a Board meeting, approved by Vice Rector
OUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person responsible International Relations Officer, in addition Head of Student Affairs and Directors of Oulu UAS' schools (student recruitment) • Strategic decisions, approving detailed plan, setting a budget agreed by Meetings of the Directors of Oulu UAS' schools • Degree Recruitment team including International Relations Officers, Admissions Office, Degree Programme Representatives, Study Affairs Heads, Communications Services – prepares the admissions criteria, recruitment plan and marketing plan, meetings approximately six times a year, the team is also assessing the whole recruitment process • Execution by Communications Services
LUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons responsible Director for International Affairs (international degree programme marketing – operative action, managing international affairs, active participation), Account Manager (planning and execution of international degree programme marketing), Communications Director (overall communication and marketing) • Strategic decision and overall guideline agreed by the top management of the university – targets set for the Communications Manager • Bigger marketing initiatives from International Affairs, approved by Communications and the Rector

Forms of Cooperation Identified by the Interviewees. (Hokkanen, Luikko, Mustonen, Nevalainen, Pääskylä & Tuononen 2011)

KyUAS & MUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kymenlaakso UAS and Mikkeli UAS - strategic partnership • Saimaa UAS - marketing cooperation especially to Russia • CIMO - marketing department, Study in Finland – website and database • PINNET-network – participated in exhibitions, when there was funding.
H-H UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIMO • External networks
HAMK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences alliance with Lahti UAS and Laurea UAS - long term strategic partnership, initiatives concerning mutual marketing actions • PINNET-network – student exchange and international cooperation • CIMO – participation in the student recruitment team • Metropolia UAS coordinated TV-commercial – taking part • Degree Programme in International Business – cooperation with other International Business DPs
NKUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savonia University of Applied Sciences - strategic partnership • CIMO – communications • FINNIPS-network – entrance examinations abroad • Media
OUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Oulu - joined marketing efforts and visibility for both Finnish and English degree programmes • City of Oulu - including activities concerning immigrants and their integration and an expat-initiative • PINNET-network - mutual materials, such as general UAS brochure • FINNIPS-network - arranging entrance exams abroad, network participates in international exhibitions • Finnish National Board of Education – application procedures
LUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Admissions Finland – application portal • CIMO – Study in Finland – website, participating in the international exhibitions under CIMO

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Master's Studies - portal
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Issues or Challenges Related to Marketing Identified by the Interviewees. (Hokkanen, Luikko, Mustonen, Nevalainen, Pääskylä & Tuononen 2011)

KyUAS & MUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal budget - especially for KyUAS marketing, a slightly better situation at MUAS • Marketing of the degree programmes in Finland - Communication Services has the responsibility of domestic marketing • Recruiting international students is challenging for two small universities of applied sciences located in Finland • FINNIPS network - decisions of where the entrance examinations are held, affecting who will be admitted as students, transparency • Determining if the right decisions have been made – difficult to know beforehand
H-H UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jungle of different requests – finding a mutual solution to satisfy the interests of all degree programmes, different ideas and goals expressed by the degree programme heads • Lack of awareness of some degree programmes – not receiving enough applications for a couple of the programmes • Cooperation – finding a good conversational connection
HAMK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low number of Finnish applicants in the international degree programmes • Attracting students from Finnish vocational schools – good students • Managing the marketing to get the best results - global market is enormous • Knowledge and expertise in the market – how, when, where the decisions should be made, which factors have influence? • Vast number of different catalogues, portals and databases • Mapping actions and channels is hard work - base for an important decision
NK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough resources – both money and workforce needed in the special field • Enormous world – marketing in the web is interesting, but visibility is tricky • Finding good partners – not having enough knowledge on who is reliable
OUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting the marketing effort – admission is open to everyone, what is the best way to reach the potential applicants in the selected target areas? • Differentiating - other HEIs are focusing in web advertising, too • Issues with income – students from Asia and Africa are struggling to get student visas and arrive in Finland

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where to use the small budget available to get the best result
LUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of awareness of Finland , City of Lappeenranta and Lappeenranta University of Technology as a higher education provider• Predicting is difficult in the changing world• Communicating the message - mixed information distorting it especially concerning the tuition fees in the future• Vast market - where to invest to get the best possible students and benefit?• Importance of international degree programmes within the university - field is still new and young• Insufficient resources – already 26 % of the students are foreigners

Best Practises Identified by the Interviewees. (Hokkanen, Luikko, Mustonen, Nevalainen, Pääskylä & Tuononen 2011)

KyUAS & MUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mikkelin UAS:n vahva kansainvälinen yhteistyö kumppaneiden kanssa – enemmän kansainvälisiä hakijoita, EFIST kesäkausi on toiminnut kokeiluina • Promotiiviset tapahtumat Venäjällä sekä prospectiveille hakijoille että heidän vanhempiensa kanssa • Oma opiskelijaverkoston hyödyntäminen markkinointitoimissa - suuhun suuhun • Mass mailing -toiminta keino erottua – vaikutuksen mittaaminen on haastavaa
H-H UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual positive signal - good conversational connection • Top management taking part actively - overall strategy is reflected in the marketing strategies and plans
HAMK UAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal contact – student or staff visits communicating the message • Website of the institution is important • Existing degree students and their recommendations to their friends and acquaintances
NKUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student recruitment process – delay in results, but works as planned • Cooperation with Admissions Office – works well, staff is utilized at educational exhibitions • Cooperation with education providers
OUAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree Recruitment team - ability to cooperate and take the needs of the degree programmes and the whole UAS into consideration • Good cooperation is essential – teamwork needed • Publishing OUAS ezine Extra – linked to application guide • Utilizing degree students in the marketing efforts
LUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing the partner institution network in the international marketing, especially in Russia – sends good students to LUT • Good cooperation - mutual trust in everyone knowing what they are doing