

SPECIAL ISSUE IN INTERNATIONALISATION

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PREFACE

In today's interconnected world, internationalisation in higher education is not just a trend but a necessity. As the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and talent transcends borders, institutions must strategically navigate the complexities of global education with innovation and foresight.

This Special Issue on Internationalisation presents a diverse range of articles exploring key aspects of international education. From innovative student recruitment strategies to fostering global partnerships, these contributions examine how institutions can expand their global reach and impact.

Ethics and sustainability are fundamental to shaping responsible international marketing practices. Discussions on Blended Intensive Programs highlight the potential of hybrid learning environments to bridge geographical divides, while insights into the role of an International Talent Coach underscore the importance of personalized guidance in nurturing global competencies.

This issue also showcases the transformative power of Erasmus exchanges and other international programs, which enrich the educational experience by fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. As the global academic community converges at international conferences, the sharing of ideas and best practices drives innovation and progress in education.

We hope the perspectives shared in this issue inspire you to reflect critically on the role of internationalisation at your institution and embrace the opportunities it presents. Together, we can push the boundaries of education and prepare our students to thrive in a globalized world.

1. INTERNATIONALISATION STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

SIRPA RUTANEN

TOWARDS ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE STUDENT RECRUITMENT

Imagine you are an ambitious international student eager to embark on a life-changing educational journey through studying in Finland. In many countries, prospective students and their parents rely on educational agents to guide them in choosing the right institution. How can we as an institution of higher education help the agents to perform ethically?

Finland is striving to boost the enrolment of international students in higher education by 2027, with the aim of fostering a proficient workforce. (okm.fi) Meeting this target demands collaborative endeavors to cultivate effective, sustainable practices and systems for recruiting international students professionally. The aim is to furnish students with accurate insights into Finnish higher education, its prerequisites, and facilitate their seamless integration into Finnish society and the workforce thereafter.

On a national level, in HERENET network (the national network for UASs international student recruitment), ethics as well as best practices have been a hot topic in the field of international student recruitment. In this article, I explore how ethics and sustainable student recruitment are reshaping the landscape of our student recruitment, and why it matters more than ever.

The Importance of Having a National Agent Code of Conduct

Ethical marketing is an approach that emphasizes integrity, transparency, and social responsibility in the promotion of educational opportunities. Agents, as intermediaries between students and institutions, play a crucial role in upholding these principles. We can all contribute by choosing partners that comply with these norms, and we also have to engage ourselves in developing the partnerships.

Finnish higher education institutions have collectively developed an Agent Code of Conduct, an ethical guideline, aiming to establish standards for education agents and other partners involved in international student recruitment. The purpose of this ethical guideline is to ensure responsible and professional conduct in all interactions with potential students, their parents, education providers, and other stakeholders. This Agent Code of Conduct has been approved by both Arene, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, and Unifi, the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities. (Arene, 2024a).

The Agent Code of Conduct regarding student recruitment outlines guidelines and criteria for education agents and affiliated partners to cooperate with Finnish higher education institutions. These encompass upholding principles of honesty and transparency, placing the client's interests at the forefront, and observing ethical standards in marketing. Furthermore, the ethical framework underscores the obligation of education agents and partners during conflicts, along with ensuring fair treatment of all students and exhibiting responsible conduct towards all stakeholders.(Arene, 2024b)

In addition to the Agent Code of Conduct, higher education institutions commit to adopting best practices in implementing education export. In this work, Education Finland's Guide to Ethical Practices in Education Export for Professionals will be utilized. The common principles of operation are:

- customer orientation
- openness and transparency of operations
- research and knowledge-based
- sustainable and ethical business
- trust-based ecosystem/collaboration network (internal dimension).

(Education Finland, 2023).

VAMK's Recruitment Strategy Highlights Ethics and Quality Over Quantity

At VAMK, we have incorporated our own Code of Ethics into the collaboration contracts with our partner agents, promoting open dialogue and ethical collaboration. Our agreement terms require our educational agents to market us ethically and represent us according to proper conduct. We proactively train our partners, continuously monitor our partnerships, and respond effectively to any feedback received. (VAMK, n.d.-a).

The values of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences—sympathy, openness, bold pioneering, and customer orientation—form the foundation of our ethical and responsible operations. VAMK's Ethical Code of Conduct guides our daily work, ensuring we operate and communicate openly and transparently about our activities.

Consequently, we at VAMK expect our collaboration partners to adhere to and respect our values and ethics, engaging in an ethical student recruitment process. For VAMK, responsibility extends to four key areas: Honesty and Transparency, Respect for Consumer Rights, Social Responsibility, and Privacy and Non-Intrusion. A list of all our official partners is available on our website. (VAMK, n.d.-b).

How VAMK Helps Agents to Market Ethically

At VAMK, our aim is to support and guide our partners to conduct ethical and sustainable student recruitment. For us, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are more than just a declaration. We have pinpointed the eight most critical goals for our 2030 strategy and crafted our roadmap around them. Notably, our efforts in international student recruitment also champion the goals of fostering collaboration and partnerships, reducing inequality, and providing quality education. (VAMK, n.d.-c).

Below, I have listed some points that I also presented as HERENET's Chair at the network's national meetings both in May 2023 and May 2024.

In order to monitor and foster your student recruitment partnerships:

1. Give clear guidelines for partners on what they are allowed to communicate.
 - Messaging that aligns with your brand values and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
 - Obtaining approval for certain marketing materials or campaigns before they are launched.
 - Clear contracts incl. marketing guidelines and ethical code of conduct. Agent needs to be open about the use of subagents.
2. Establish a strong relationship with your partners and ensure that they understand the importance of ethical marketing practices. Keep up a continuous dialogue with your partners.
3. Provide training or resources to your partners to help them comply with your marketing guidelines. Be there for your partners!
4. Monitor both agent experience and student satisfaction with agents.
 - Some examples for monitoring are i.e. systematic agent trainings, online reputation monitoring, performance metrics (KPIs), regular communication and contractual agreements.

In summary, at VAMK, we are committed to upholding ethical guidelines and best practices to ensure ethically sustainable student recruitment. Our goal is to provide current and future students with accurate and realistic information about Finnish higher education and its requirements, while also supporting their smooth integration into Finnish society and the future workforce.

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THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME: PROMOTING INTERNATIONALIZATION

International competence is an important skill for graduating students. There is an increasing demand for professionals who can operate in multicultural environments and work with people from diverse backgrounds in working life. International companies may have operations and teams distributed across the world and the customers come from all over the world. Finland is also becoming more international. When residents of municipalities and clients of social, health, and educational services come from diverse cultures, service providers must have international skills to assist and serve them to the best of their abilities.

Internationalization plays a significant role in university strategies, including at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. The Erasmus+ programme, funded by the European Union, has enabled mobility periods for thousands of university students in Finland over its 30-year history. Without this programme and its financial support, the number of mobility opportunities would have been significantly lower.

Student Mobility

Erasmus+ programme has supported long-term mobility periods throughout its history and VAMK has send around thousand students abroad for one study semester. The new blended short-term mobilities with virtual part enable mobility periods also for those who have difficulties to stay abroad longer. Erasmus+ programme also tries to lower thresholds and be as inclusive as possible by providing additional funding for students with special needs and fewer opportunities.

In Finland, those groups are:

- parents with minors
- family caregivers
- students with EU disability card
- disabled and mobility-impaired individuals
- students suffering from severe and/or chronic health problems
- students with international protection status

Participating students have surely benefitted from their mobility period. According to impact studies of the Erasmus programme from European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture (2018), participating students have enhanced their technical, interpersonal, and intercultural skills and competences, along with their self-confidence, goal achievement abilities, and social and cultural

openness. Moreover, participation in the mobility programme has improved their prospects for employment after graduation.

Internationalization at Home

Erasmus+ programme has already played a significant role in promoting internationalization on our campus by hosting incoming exchange students who have studied one or two semesters with us. Thus, our degree students have had the opportunity to study together with exchange students and gain understanding of diverse cultures. VAMK has also arranged and will arrange more blended intensive programmes at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. These all are excellent forms of Internationalisation at home.

Teacher and Staff Mobility

Additionally, the programme has enabled teacher and staff mobilities between partner institutions, allowing our staff to improve, for example, their teaching methods, gain new ideas and innovations, and establish cooperation in areas such as virtual and blended intensive courses. VAMK staff members have tied long-lasting partnerships and co-operations with international partners which have also benefitted students from both institutions. These have been for example joint courses and modules, intensive weeks, yearly workshops. Non-teaching staff have had possibility to share best practises and get new ideas to improve their own work. The staff mobilities have increased professional skills and thus influenced the internationalization and development of our institution. A list of our partner universities is available on our website. (VAMK, n.d.)

According to Kirdulytė et al. (2023) it is also good to highlight that staff member with past mobility experience can contribute to encouraging both students and other staff members to take part in mobility activities and offering support and counselling. They can also share their knowledge about the host institution. We realized at VAMK that both academic staff and outgoing students are great ambassadors for enhancing mobilities.

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BENCHMARKING TRIP TO SCUOLA SUPERIORE SANT'ANNA IN PISA

Performing better in the job, gaining better results and serving the customer base better is in the core of all the activities in the Communications and Marketing team in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. For this purpose, VAMK's Communications and Marketing Manager together with Communications and Marketing Specialist went to a benchmarking trip to Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa, Italy.

Introduction

The purpose of the trip was to familiarise oneself with the communication functions of a university of excellence and to find best practices that can streamline the operations of one's own organisation. This was done by carefully individuating the key functions and persons for one-to-one meetings beforehand. The presentations and thorough discussions during the visit shed light to various aspects of communication, marketing and PR activities and gave new ideas to be taken home.

The benchmarking trip was funded by the Erasmus+ Programme which offers higher education staff the opportunity to participate in an exchange abroad. The training period can range from 2 days until 2 months. Before the training both the sending institution and the receiving institution will sign a Mobility Agreement which details the learning goals for the training. (European commission, n.d.)

A Brand-New Rectorate

The Sant'Anna School obtained a new location in the historic heart of Pisa during spring 2024. Palazzo Pilo Boyl became home to the new Rectorate, classrooms, and labs, enhancing the training and research activities in the Social Sciences.

This move was also an opportunity to deepen the institution's connection with the city. On the last Friday of every month, Palazzo Pilo Boyl opens its doors to the public, inviting citizens to explore the new spaces and see the exquisite work firsthand. (Sant' Anna Magazine, 2024a)

During our stay we had the opportunity to visit the new premises. The renovation of this historical building was outstandingly performed. It reinforced our perception that creating visually striking and functional spaces can significantly strengthen brand identity and boost overall appeal. Additionally, it is evident that such impressive facilities offer diverse opportunities for engaging with stakeholders.

Enhancing Public Engagement and Awareness in Research

One of the challenges a higher education institution sometimes faces is how to improve public engagement and understanding in relation to research and innovation activities. Universities are involved in various research projects, but the general public often remains unaware of the results of those research projects. Sant'Anna has introduced an interesting approach to engage the public in research activities and disseminating results as well as to attract young talents and expand the general awareness.

Science Café

The main point of Sant'Anna Science Café is to create a vibrant platform where science meets entertainment and sensory experiences. Each event combines informative workshops led by various experts. (Sant' Anna Magazine, 2024b)

These workshops are complemented by cultural elements such as live music performances, which foster a relaxed and engaging atmosphere. The sensory experience is further enriched e.g. with signature chocolate tastings, offering attendees a multi-dimensional learning and enjoyment experience. (Sant' Anna Magazine, 2024b)

Overall, Sant'Anna Science Café aims to promote scientific culture through interactive and enjoyable events that encourage learning and community engagement. In our opinion Science Café is an excellent low threshold way to promote science and engage the general public in research. In research communication the big challenge is to democratise science and foster greater public awareness of its importance in society. Science Café, as an example, is an interesting approach to make science accessible to all and to integrate it more deeply into people's lives.

Orientation School

The Orientation School is a great concept in preparing young talents for higher education and fostering their personal and intellectual development. The University Orientation School aims to provide a first contact with university life for high school students from across Italy. It serves as an opportunity for these students to explore the academic environment, understand collegiate life, and make informed decisions about their future university studies. (Sant' Anna Magazine, 2024c)

The program emphasises intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and personal growth through a series of lectures, seminars, and workshops led by faculty and researchers both from Sant'Anna School and Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. Topics covered include scientific research, artificial intelligence, robotics, climate change, and civil rights advocacy. The school consists of two residential courses held consecutively in Pisa. Both courses are entirely free of charge and provide participants with a comprehensive experience of university education and community. (Sant' Anna Magazine, 2024c)

The Orientation School is somewhat comparable to our campus day at VAMK that is jointly organised with University of Vaasa. However, Orientation School engages young minds more profoundly by offering lectures that provide a richer perspective both on the reality of university education and community compared to a brief campus tour.

The Benefits of Seasonal Schools

Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna's seasonal schools offer several benefits, particularly for those interested in advanced studies and research in specialised fields.

Below we listed some key advantages:

Specialised Knowledge and Expert Faculty: These programs provide in-depth knowledge and hands-on experience in specific areas, allowing participants to deepen their understanding and expertise in their chosen fields.

Participants have the opportunity to learn from renowned professors and researchers from Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, benefiting from their extensive experience and academic excellence.

Cultural Experience and Networking Opportunities: Located in Italy, the programs offer a rich cultural experience, allowing participants to immerse themselves in the local culture and history, which can be both personally and academically enriching.

The seasonal schools attract participants from various backgrounds and regions, creating a diverse and vibrant learning environment. This fosters networking and collaboration among peers and with faculty members.

Flexible Learning Options: The seasonal schools often offer various formats, including online, in-person, and hybrid models, providing flexibility to accommodate different learning preferences and schedules.

Research and Innovation: Emphasis on cutting-edge research and innovative practices enables participants to engage with the latest advancements and methodologies, enhancing their academic and professional skills.

Interdisciplinary Approach: Many of the seasonal schools adopt an interdisciplinary approach, encouraging participants to explore connections between different fields and apply a holistic perspective to problem-solving.

Career Enhancement: The specialised training and knowledge gained from these programs can significantly boost participants' resumes, making them more competitive in the job market and better prepared for advanced career opportunities.

In summary, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna's seasonal schools seem like an excellent opportunity for students and professionals seeking to advance their knowledge, skills, and careers through high-quality, specialized education.

EELISA – Power of European Universities Network

Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna is a member of the EELISA, European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance. The alliance, led by Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, brings together nine universities of Europe with the same goal to transform European Tech Higher Education. (EELISA, 2020)

Its primary targets include:

1. **Harmonising Engineering Education:** Establishing a common European engineering degree that incorporates diverse and innovative learning pathways.
2. **Fostering Innovation and Research:** Enhancing collaboration between universities, research institutions, and industries to drive innovation and research in engineering and technology.
3. **Promoting Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Approaches:** Encouraging the integration of different disciplines to address complex societal challenges through comprehensive and collaborative problem-solving.
4. **Enhancing Student Mobility and Employability:** Facilitating student and staff mobility across member institutions and improving employability by aligning education with industry needs and trends.
5. **Sustainability and Social Responsibility:** Embedding sustainability and social responsibility into engineering curricula to prepare graduates to contribute positively to society and the environment.
6. **Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Community:** Building a diverse, inclusive, and supportive educational environment that respects and values different perspectives and backgrounds. (EELISA)

We recognise the importance in taking part in a European Universities Network. It offers students and staff opportunities for international mobility and interaction, enhancing the quality of degrees and research. In our opinion EELISA's target has, in addition, valuable social impact since it aims to establish a collaborative and innovative model meeting societal needs and preparing graduates for the evolving job market in Europe.

Conclusion

Our visit to Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna was an incredibly enriching experience. We not only gathered valuable insights for enhancing our research, development, and innovation communication but also picked up new inspiring ideas on event management. Benchmarking the best practices in processes helps to improve the practice of one's own processes and organisation.

The networking opportunities afforded by this Erasmus exchange were exceptional. We connected with numerous colleagues, forging invaluable contacts that will benefit our institution. We are enthusiastic about continuing our dialogue in the future.

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TO SUCCEED OR NOT TO SUCCEED IN AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

This article observes elements that contribute in delivering a successful international and inter-organisational collaboration project. A successfully delivered project creates a return of investment to the organisations delivering it that goes beyond the project. This may include, for example, creating new openings and opportunities for strengthening international networks, comparing activities, learning, increasing skills and competences of the staff, and for promoting the organisation. Therefore, a successful delivery of a project is fundamental. The case programme for the projects observed in this article is European Union's educational programme Erasmus+.

Project Work

Project work means working on a common larger task with a defined goal, subtasks, timeline, team, costs and resources. It can be carried out internally by an organisation, or in collaboration with one or more external organisations. Projects are funded internally, for instance, when creating new products, or fully or in part by an external organisation, for example by a customer or by public funding. In both cases, there is a "customer" to whom the results are delivered. If the project is carried out in collaboration with other organisations, each organisation joins the project as its own legal entity, with its own budget and responsibilities.

International EU-funded Project Work

The European Union (later EU) finances different types of national, regional or international projects that answer to the EU's development policies. The projects address issues such as education, culture, sport, research and science, SMEs, justice and climate issues, and regional and maritime development through a variety of funding programmes. (European Commission, n.d.). In these projects a group of legal entities from different European countries work together to develop, change or improve something or gain new information according to a common work plan. The project idea responds to a call and topic defined by the EU, for which different solutions are expected. The EU selects the most promising project proposals for funding. It also evaluates the results, impact, implementation and financial use of the projects. Projects must have a positive national, regional and European impact and be financially efficient. If the project does not deliver its results, or does not deliver results of good quality, part or all of the funding must be returned to the EU. (For instance: European Commission, 2023).

EU-funded projects are usually divided into different work packages, tasks, roles and responsibilities, consisting of administration and management, dissemination and communication, quality management, and content creation. Each organisation has specific roles, tasks and responsibilities. The coordinator oversees the whole project and the activity lead partners are responsible for coordinating the activities assigned to them. The larger and more international the project is, the more complex it is to manage.

International EU projects are usually multisectoral. Each organisation and country brings its own knowledge, culture, experiences and habits to the project and to the working situations. Although being multinational and multisectoral is a great advantage when addressing European development themes, it may also pose challenges to projects due to, for instance, different cultural perspectives and habits, concepts of time, legal issues, working and holiday times, different administrative practices, time zones, and the multi-site nature of the work. These elements, which often have a strong human dimension, add a level of difficulty to the work, that may lead to missed deadlines, poor quality, organic working times, and create gaps between the requirements of international project work and organisational practices. Various tools, such as partner agreements, management guides, work area descriptions, risk management process, and meetings are used to reduce risks.

Success Measurement Areas of Projects

A project is successful when it delivers its results as planned on time, with the allocated resources and time, and high quality, usable and accessible results that meet the project's objectives and the needs of the target group. From the work of Bannerman (2008), Copper Team (2016), and Meredith and Zwikael (2019) the following common areas for project's success can be identified:

1. **Project management and technical delivery** including such activities as project, task and time management, administration, budget and financial management, risk and quality management.
2. **Achieving the project goals and meeting its objectives.** Everything what has been planned for the project should be delivered with a high quality, unless there is a justified need for a deviation.
3. **A successful, high quality and target group-oriented product or products** that are based on the needs of target groups, easy to access and use, are legally compliant and create value. Depending on the project these may be, for example, tangible products, services, business plans, strategies, processes or management.
4. **The return of investment in the project.** This is often internal to the organisation(s) delivering the project, creating internal impacts, such as improved business, strategic value, learning or and new networks. For external parties, it may be such as the time invested in the project.
5. **Project ownership success.** The performance of the project team.

Success Measurement Areas of EU-Funded Projects

International EU-funded projects follow the same areas of success measurement as projects in general. However, there are some differences especially when compared to projects seeking for commercial value. EU-funded projects have a monetary non-profit principle, the requirement for societal impact, and the strong human dimension and cultural diversity of the people working in the projects. Inside the project consortium there might also be different concepts of productivity and productisation of the work.

PROJECT PROPOSAL	PROJECT FINAL EVALUATION
Relevance An innovative proposal based on real needs and with relevance to the objectives and priorities of the Action, adding value at the EU level, and respecting and promoting shared EU values.	Relevance of the project/strategy For instance: Which EU focus areas and themes the project was linked to, and how the project answered to these and the identified needs? What was innovative in the project?
Quality of the project design and implementation Clearly defined and realistic project objectives answering to the needs of the target groups. A clear, balanced, feasible and cost-effective project work plan that also includes elements of quality evaluation and control, and green and digital practices.	Quality of the project design and implementation A description of the results, achievements and outcomes, products, promotional events, training, and potential challenges factors. Were the aims and objectives of the project reached and to what extent? What was changed and why? Was something additional created?
Quality of the partnership and the cooperation arrangements A well-balanced and mixed consortium capable to deliver the project, and task and budget division between them. Appropriate consortium and project coordination and communication.	Quality of the project team and the cooperation arrangements A description of project management, activity, time and budget monitoring and management, quality and risk management, evaluation, and challenges, solutions and tools for these. Also a description of project meetings, partner collaboration, implementation of the project, delays, changes, challenges, and what was learnt.
Impact Impact of the project to the target groups and stakeholders during and after the end of the project. Informing about the project, its activities and results, and making them freely available and usable to the partner organisations, target groups, other organisations and the public at local, regional, national, EU and international levels.	Impact and dissemination A description of the target groups, stakeholders, other parties and participants with fewer opportunities, and the benefit of the project and its outcomes to them. Short and long-term impact to them at local, regional, national, EU and international levels, and sustainability of the project results and outcomes. A description of communication of the project and its outcomes (when, what, whom to, how many) and project promotional events.

The project reports on all the activities, outcomes and results, and provides evidences for these. EU uses the same performance measurement areas for project proposals and completed projects. In the final evaluation, the project proposal/plan is evaluated against the work delivered and reported. The difference between what was planned and the project's achievements, as well as the administrative elements including the use of the budget and quality assessment, show the success of the project. For the Erasmus+ programme, strategic partnerships-cooperation, these are presented in the table above (European Commission, 2023, 243-245; Opetushallitus, 2019). Other programmes, such as Creative Europe Programme, which focuses developing the creative sectors, has similar success measurement areas: Relevance, Quality of content and activities, Project management, and Dissemination of the project (EACEA, 2022, 20-21).

Project Staff's Viewpoints on The Success Factors of Projects

The project success measurement areas do not explain alone the success or lack of success of projects. To gain more insight into these, five people involved in EU-funded projects were asked their viewpoints of success factors of projects:

1. **The quality of the outcomes and results** should be high, meet the objectives of the project, be useful and beneficial to the target groups, meet the needs of the society and the priorities of the EU. Their internal post-project use should be planned.
2. **A clear work plan, work process, and idea of goals and objectives** that are presented, discussed and communicated clearly.
3. **Quality standards** should be understood, equal for all, respected and applied by all.
4. **Project team and collaboration.** A good, reliable and motivated project team with complementary skills and strengths, effective collaboration and decision-making, solving team conflicts, meeting deadlines and good internal communication and dynamics are important. Lack of or late communication is a major cause of project failure. Inexperienced staff should be prepared and lack of staff avoided.
5. **Strong project management and leadership** by the coordinator including good management practices, communication, conflict resolution, comprehensive planning and resource management.
6. **Instructions, making sure that the activities are clear, and proactive communication and actions to ensure sufficient time,** for instance for reporting.
7. **Continuous monitoring.**
8. **Functional project administration,** adequate resources, and adapting to potential amendments.
9. **Communication of results, outcomes and the project towards the target groups, stakeholders, general public, and internally.**
10. **Transferring learning continuously to own work and for future projects.**

Elements of Success from the Final Evaluation of Projects

Elements of a successful projects are collided in the following table from the final evaluation of three successful and award-winning EU's Erasmus' projects: ServiceDigiCulture (2020-1-FI01-KA227-ADU-092663), Reboot – Rebooting, Re-rooting and Re-skilling Unemployed and Underemployed Higher Education Graduates for Work 4.0 (2018-1-FI01-KA204-047188), and Kaleidoscope (2017-1-FI01-KA204-034732).

RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT/ STRATEGY	IMPACT AND DISSEMINATION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A highly relevant project topic to the target groups, the EU and the programme. 2. Problem areas of the target groups and sector addressed and thus positive impact created. 3. The projects were innovative. 4. The objectives, outputs and results were produced as promised in all the language versions. 5. The outcomes and methods can be relevant to other educational sectors. 6. A positive contribution to the existing knowledge, know-how and practices of the project organisations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The project produced the planned outcomes. The materials are of high quality, relevant to and usable by the target groups and stakeholders. Positive impact and change were created to the target groups at local, national and European levels. 2. Well-documented impact on the target groups and the participating organisations. 3. The project results were evaluated and documented professionally. 4. Information of the project and its outcomes were communicated and exploitation and sustainability activities were implemented. 5. Synergies were created between actors.
QUALITY OF THE PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION	QUALITY OF THE PROJECT TEAM AND THE COOPERATION ARRANGEMENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The project's aims were reached, in some cases also exceeded, and high quality of results and outputs were provided in different languages. 2. Involvement of the target groups in development and listened to them. 3. Effective and highly relevant working methods and activities were used. 4. The instructions, objectives, work programme, actions were clear and high quality. 5. Internal evaluation of own activities. 6. Good cooperation and the division of the work between the partners based on their skills and expertise. 7. Expertise of the coordinator and well executed management. 8. A meticulously implemented project and reporting. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A good quality project team with an appropriate mix of profiles, experiences and expertise, resulting as a good distribution of responsibilities and tasks, and with an access to target groups. 2. Effective coordination and internal communication. 3. Involvement of the target groups in piloting and creating positive impact to them through piloting. 4. Internal evaluation of the own work. 5. Knowledge transferred between the partners.

Elements of Success

A number of elements can be identified that may contribute to the success of an international collaboration project. These include the following.

The starting point is to deliver what was planned, as agreed and in high quality, with the assigned resources, and respecting the guidelines of the programme and the financier. The work should also be reported in a clear and descriptive manner to help understand and evaluate the results of the project. In addition, the project and its outcomes should have a positive impact on the target groups, stakeholders, others, and the own organisation at local, regional and EU levels, and contribute to the EU's development policies and themes. Listening to and involving the target groups, for example in testing, is essential.

These elements help in achieving project goals, avoiding delays, and ensuring a positive impact.

At the beginning of the project, team building and face-to-face meetings are vital to bring the team together. This helps to avoid many misunderstandings and cultural issues, and it helps with working remotely. It is also important to make sure that the newcomers get into the project and its working style. Secondly, going carefully through the project plan, tasks, roles, schedule, aims, objectives, rules of the funding programme, quality issues, and project tools and methods at the beginning of the project and regularly at meetings helps the team to understand the project and what is expected of them.

The role of the coordinator and a good project team that is appropriate to the theme of the project are important. The coordinator should be experienced, and the project should be supported by strong but people-oriented leadership.

Clear and proactive communication, and continuous monitoring of task, aims, progress and reach, regular project status updates and virtual meetings, internal evaluation and internal flexibility in subtasks help to understand the state and delivery of the project, and to achieve its results while avoiding delays. Concrete work in face-to-face meetings saves time, and national timings should be taken into account during the work process.

A successful project is further supported by the use of effective project tools for finance, monitoring, risk management, a shared workspace, and partner agreements, as well as early and proactive provision of information, instructions and templates. Internal reporting checkpoints help project management and prepare for reporting.

Finally, the support from one's own organisation is also fundamental. This includes understanding the different nature and requirements of these projects including the cultural aspects and concepts of time.

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2. IMPACT OF CULTURAL EXCHANGE ON ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

BIP—A TOOL FOR PROMOTING INTERNATIONALIZATION IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) should prepare their students to work on tasks that may not have been created yet, use technologies that have not yet been invented, and solve so-called wicked problems that have not been anticipated and cannot be solved by a single individual alone. To navigate such uncertainty, students need curiosity, creativity, resilience, courage to move forward, and the ability to appreciate and understand other people and cultures. Social skills and communication abilities are becoming increasingly important. In the future, the ability to tolerate challenges and uncertainty will also be crucial. Responsibility will play an even greater role.

Being responsible means being able to handle new situations, change, diversity, and uncertainty together with others. Developing these competencies requires innovative ways of learning in universities of applied sciences. One such approach is through international Blended Intensive Programs (BIP). The general structure of BIPs is presented in chapter 2. The first BIP course in the engineering department which was designed in 2023 for the mechanical engineering program and implemented in December 2023 in the Netherlands is presented in chapter 3. After that benefits of the BIPs will be explained in chapter 4 and finally, the conclusion would be discussed in the last chapter.

Structure of the BIP

Blended Mobility combines online learning with teachers and students from different educational institutions in Europe, with a period of travel to work together in person. The key goal of blended mobility is to integrate activities such as online lectures (virtual mobility), online intercultural collaboration (virtual exchange) with periods of short-term physical mobility (O'Dowd & Werner, 2024). Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) is a form of blended mobility supported and funded by European Commission. BIPs have the following key characteristics:

- i. BIPs should include at least 3 higher education institutions coming from at least 3 EU Member States and third countries associated to the Programme.
- ii. The duration of a BIP must last between 5 and 30 days and this phase can take place at the receiving institution or at any other location in that institution's country. At least 3 ECTS credits for students must be obtained in the BIP study.
- iii. The travelling students receive financial support for travel and subsistence from their home universities' Erasmus + funds in order to take part in the physical mobility phase, while the host institution also receives a certain amount of funding to cover organisational costs during this phase.

The BIPs are expected to expose students to different views, knowledge, teaching and research methods as well as work practices in their study field in the European and international context, develop their transversal skills such as communication skills, language skills, critical thinking, problem solving, inter-cultural skills and research skills, develop their forward looking skills, such as digital and green skills, that will enable them to tackle the challenges of today and tomorrow, facilitate personal development such as the ability to adapt to new situations and self-confidence. From the staff perspective share their expertise, experience new teaching environments, acquire new innovative pedagogical and curriculum design skills as well as digital skills, connect with their peers abroad to develop common activities to achieve the programme's objectives, exchange good practices and enhance cooperation between higher education institutions, better prepare students for the world of work. (European Commission, 2021, p. 44).

Description of VAMK's BIP Development: Sustainable Business

The authors have a long history in developing and participating in intensive courses with students, mainly from mechanical or energy engineering. Since 2008 the authors have planned, organized, and joined in 20 international intensive courses which have been funded either by EU, VAMK or First Plus Program. The courses have been organized in The Netherlands, France, Greece, Germany, Denmark, Finland and Russia and the themes of the courses have varied from different energy related issues to techno-economics analysis (Agbejule et al., 2022). After the last intensive course in autumn 2021 which was a hybrid there was a short break due to the overall decrease in international activities caused by the COVID epidemic. Then in December 2022 there was an inquiry from The Netherlands if VAMK is interested in developing a BIP together with our old partner Hanze UAS in Groningen and a new partner from Spain, EUSS in Barcelona. EU had changed the rules and funding principles of the intensive courses, so this new co-operation was started. After some emails during the Xmas holidays the first online meeting to start the development work in January 2023.

VAMK has a long history of organizing and participating in international intensive courses, mainly for mechanical or energy engineering students.

As the first BIP was coordinated by the Dutch they were the meeting organizers and our team of 6 teachers (2 from each country) had the pleasure to work under Maryvonne Nieboers good leadership and project management. First, there was an introductory meeting, and this happened very smoothly and easily even the authors had not met any of the partners ever face to face. One of the first issues to be decided was the timing of the course and online-sessions and the overall theme of the BIP. The schedule for the coming 3 years and the coordination responsibilities and exact schedule for the first BIP was planned. It was also quite easy to find the common theme for the BIP as all teachers were working with relatively similar teaching fields. Some of us had quite much experience with the intensive courses so it was easy to start the planning work.

Design thinking approach was selected as an overall approach for the program and the Spanish partners took the responsibility to teach the students this framework. The Dutch partners had the responsibility to organize the 3 online sessions before the intensive week. They were organized in Hanze's Teams system and also files were shared there. All practical matters including the local program, accommodation, lunches,

dinner, lecture rooms, excursions, transport etc. during the intensive week (10.12.2023- 17.12.2023) were also organized by the Dutch partner. The Finnish partners had the responsibility to develop the on-line teaming activities and to give some lectures related to Sustainability and business as our topic for the first BIP was Sustainable Business. The Dutch partners also found the case companies for the students' projects (Philips, AVEBE, Friesland Campina, M&G Group). It seemed to be quite easy to get companies involved as the Dutch companies were used and interested to give students project work. 5 teachers were given one student team each (consisting of 6 students) to coach during the online sessions and during the main week itself. Totally the teachers had some 6 meetings during the spring 2023 and then some 5 meetings during the autumn for planning and organizing.

Benefits of the BIP

Blending virtual collaboration with physical mobility is suggested to enhance the learning outcomes and impact of physical mobility. The virtual teamwork and collaboration can develop students' ability to work in intercultural environment and to promote working relationships with their partners before travelling to meet and work with them (Buiskool & Hudepohl, 2020; O'Dowd & Werner, 2024). Additionally, researchers (e.g., Gögele & Kletzenbauer, 2023; O'Dowd & Werner, 2024) mentioned benefits of BIPs include various aspects related to the intercultural character of the programme, the opportunity it offered to gain first-hand experience working in international teams, the opportunity to develop networks and make international contacts for the future and being exposed to alternative cultural perspectives and engaging in intercultural collaboration. The BIP does not only encourage local and international participants to deal with cultural diversity actively and consciously, but also helps to adopt an international perspective. Promoting exchange and cooperation may foster synergy effects in terms of teaching quality and student collaboration (Gögele & Kletzenbauer, 2023, p. 3).

Conclusions

In summary, interdisciplinary learning (what happens e.g. in BIPs) in engineering education aims to equip students with the skills to collaborate across disciplines, tackle complex problems, and contribute to a sustainable future. That is why it is important to develop these new learning methods, especially related to different types of projects (Kolmos et al., 2023) for engineering students also at VAMK.

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INSIGHTS FROM THE EUPRIO CONFERENCE IN TURIN, ITALY

The European Association of communication professionals in Higher Education promotes professional excellence and collaboration in higher education communications by sharing best practices and new ideas globally. EUPRIO has over 700 members from 21 countries including eight higher education units and research entities from Finland. Among them, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences stands out as the only Finnish university of applied sciences. (EUPRIO, n.d.-a)

The association aims to enhance members' skills through the exchange of ideas, techniques, and experiences. As a platform for networking and exchanging ideas a conference is held annually. This year the annual EUPRIO (European Universities Public Relations and Information Officers) conference was held in June in Turin, Italy and it centred on a compelling theme "Shaping the Future: The Strategic Role of Communication in European Universities". (EUPRIO, n.d.-a)

Vaasa University of Applied Sciences' Communications attended the conference for the first time with two participants. The 3-day gathering brought together leading experts and professionals in university communication from across Europe to explore the evolving landscape of higher education communication and its strategic impact. The article is presented as follows. The first section presents the keynote address of the conference, and the second section discusses the key parallel sessions attended by VAMK participants. The third section presents the conclusion.

What is University Communication for?

The keynote address by Professor Sarah Davies from the University of Vienna set the stage for an engaging and insightful event. (EUPRIO, n.d.-b). Professor Davies delivered a thought-provoking keynote on the multifaceted role of university communication. Titled "What is University Communication For? Branding, Democracy, and 'Auto-Communication,'" her speech delved into how universities balance their brand image with the democratic dissemination of information.

Davies emphasised the importance of universities not just as educational institutions but as active participants in societal discourse. She highlighted the need for strategic communication to shape the future, stressing that universities must be efficient and effective in mastering communication tools and utilising all available channels.

Another viewpoint to the role of university communication was presented in EUPRIO Awards. In the Awards, EUPRIO members have an opportunity to showcase impactful projects that underscore the importance of effective communication with all key audiences. Each year, the best projects are awarded. This year's winner was Vrije Universiteit in Brussels with their project "Students' Speaker Corner". The project updated an old academic ritual with innovative public speaking training to meet the challenges of fake news, hate speech and discrimination in public discourse. (EUPRIO, n.d.-c)

Parallel Sessions Overview

The conference featured several parallel sessions, each addressing critical aspects of university communication. There was scarcity of abundance in sessions to follow since there were several interesting sessions and only time to participate in four. Below are the highlights from the sessions attended:

1. Change Communication in Higher Education

Per M. Eriksson, a communication strategist from Malmö University, Sweden, presented on the intricacies of change communication within higher education. His presentation, part of the EUPRIO Mobility Programme, offered a pan-European perspective on how institutions can effectively manage and communicate change. Eriksson highlighted best practices and strategies that have proven successful across various European universities.

To succeed in change communication there are four steps that need to be followed. Firstly, it is important to prepare the audience, e.g. your colleagues for a possible change. This is done by providing background information. Then it is recommended to communicate how the change will be implemented. During the entire change process, it is vital to regularly inform the stakeholders on progress, as well as possible problems and solutions to problems. Finally, once the change process is ended one should not forget to clearly communicate the ending.

One thing to keep in mind during the change process is that the management is often several steps ahead in the change process. This means that if the employees are only in the initial phase of shock or denial in the Kuebler-Ross Change Curve, the management might already be in the phase of experiment.

2. Attracting Suitable Students

Morten Moesgaard Sørensen and Rikke Bøyesen from the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University in Denmark shared their insights on student recruitment strategies. Their session, titled “How to Attract the Most Suitable Students | How to Attract Any Students at All,” provided valuable perspectives on the challenges and successes in attracting both domestic and international students. They discussed innovative approaches tailored to the Danish context, which could be adapted by other institutions.

In the presentation, Bøyesen pointed out that changes in the taximeter system have influenced student recruitment strategies. Previously, Danish universities received funding when students began their studies. However, after changes in the law, universities now only receive funding after students complete 60 ECTS points, with an additional bonus given upon graduation. This shift has made it essential for universities to recruit students who have realistic expectations about their education and are less likely to drop out.

3. Successful International Student Recruitment

The second day began with a session by Ebba Thorolvsen from University West, Sweden. Her presentation, “How a Small Swedish University Tripled its Number of International Students Through Successful Communication,” showcased the impressive results achieved through targeted and effective communica-

tion strategies. Thorolvsen shared practical tips and case studies demonstrating how even smaller institutions can significantly enhance their international student enrolment.

Thorolvsen highlighted the role of educational agents in the student recruitment. However, during the open discussion it was notable that the Swedish institutions, unlike their Finnish counterparts, do not have any national agent code of conduct to follow in their international student recruitment. In Spring 2024, the Finnish higher education institutions collectively developed an Agent Code of Conduct, an ethical guideline, to establish standards for education agents and other partners involved in international student recruitment. The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure responsible and professional conduct in all interactions with potential students, their parents, education providers, and other stakeholders. (Arene, 2024)

Cultural and Networking Activities

The conference program was enriched with cultural and networking events designed to foster connections and provide a deeper appreciation of Turin's heritage. During the first afternoon several guided city tours were organised from which participants could choose the one to their liking. "Turin the Royal City" tour offered attendees an opportunity to explore the rich cultural and historical tapestry of Turin. The tour highlighted the city's regal past, showcasing its stunning architecture, royal palaces, and cultural landmarks. (EUPRIO, n.d.-d)

Thursday's program concluded with a Gala Dinner at the Museo del Risorgimento in the historic Palazzo Carignano. This elegant evening provided attendees with an opportunity to network and discuss the day's sessions in a more informal setting, fostering connections across the European higher education community.

Conclusion

The EUPRIO conference in Turin was a resounding success, offering a wealth of knowledge and practical strategies for improving university communication across Europe. The sessions highlighted the importance of adaptability, innovative thinking, and the critical role of communication in navigating the challenges faced by higher education institutions today. The event not only provided a platform for sharing best practices but also fostered a sense of community and collaboration among university communication professionals.

Effective and strategic communication is crucial for the future of universities. To excel, we must efficiently and adeptly harness all available tools and channels. Our researchers and experts, students, and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence are instrumental in achieving this goal.

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EMPOWERING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS ON THE ERASMUS BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) Social Services program has long traditions on short term Erasmus Programs starting from 2012. Previously the Programs were called Intensive Programs (IP) which lasted 2 weeks. Nowadays, the term is Blended Intensive Program (BIP), which means online learning and short-time exchange combined.

In April 2024 Erasmus Blended Intensive Program (BIP) took place at VAMK. The theme for the BIP was Vulnerable children, youth and families. The main idea of the BIP was to give students a comparative perspective as future social workers in a European context. Comparative perspective is fruitful since the countries represented in the program represent at least two different welfare regimes with national characteristics (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hemerijck, 2013). During the week students were examining and comparing social laws and service systems in different countries, sharing national approaches, concepts and best practices. The program included even presentations from regional and local organizations working with the target group and field visits.

In addition to VAMK (FIN) with 7 students and 2 teachers participating universities were Thomas More (BE) with 6 students and 2 teachers, University of Vechta (GER) with 7 students and 1 teacher and University of Stavanger (NOR) with 7 students and 2 teachers. BIP-cooperation on this topic with these four universities started in spring 2021 and has been successfully implemented yearly ever since as rotational model. The first year 2021 BIP was implemented in Vechta (GER), 2022 in Antwerpen (BEL) and 2024 in Vaasa (FIN). Next year the BIP will be reorganized in Stavanger (NOR). New social work students have been recruited every year, but the teacher team has been the same over the years. Cooperation between the teachers has been very proficient and has led to friendships and plans to extend the cooperation to mutual publications and BIP's on other topics.

Thematic Perspective of the BIP

Didactical methodology of the BIP was "active learning". Participation and input from all students were appreciated in different group discussions, group assignments and among informal learning outside the program. The week's learning process was downloaded to a digital learning platform called HowSpace.

As pre-assignments, the students were asked to:

1. Write individually a short visual introduction

2. As a national group to create a short video of your university and an idea what it is like to study social work at your institution
3. As a national group study what do you understand by vulnerable children and youth in your own countries? What have you learned about these client groups so far? How is vulnerability defined? What challenges have you noticed in this field? Is there a provisional answer to those challenges?

In addition to assignments two Online Sessions were held. The idea of the first session was to introduce the content of the week and the learning platform HowSpace to the students. There was also an ice-breaking activity in mixed groups, where the students were asked to find common things for all. The ice-breaking activity was followed by a short lecture on intercultural communication. In the second session the topic was the Global Definition of Social Work and Comparative Social Work. Each session was held on Teams and lasted for 1,5 hours.

The week in Vaasa started on Sunday with a short meeting at the students' hostel, where we briefly went over the week's program and how to get to the VAMK's campus where Monday was spent. In the first study day students were working with the "Tree of Life" -method, which deepened the process of getting to know each other that had already begun in the online session. The method used is a psychosocial tool based on narrative practices in an empowering way. Students were instructed to draw their own Tree of life based on the stories of their lives. After that they presented their trees to each other in a small group. Unlike in previous years, more time was set aside for this, which paid off. Working and sharing in groups intensified and deepened the sense of community and group bonding. The classroom walls were filled with great art productions from each student.

After getting to know each other the studies continued by working in the same small groups supervised by the participating teachers, with the task of discussing the preliminary work on vulnerable children and young people and finally reporting to the whole group on what had been learnt. During the BIP week, expert presentations were delivered by professionals from the Ostrobothnia Wellbeing Services County and Vaasa's outreach youth work. The program included field visits to [Mielle Association](#), which focuses on mental health support, where a presentation about Green Care in Finland was heard. Another memorable visit was made to Vaasa prison, where we heard about prison work from a social work perspective.

At the end of the week every international small group presented their reflection on their social work learning with Pecha Kucha method. The presentations were filled with joy, interesting learning experiences and unforgettable memories. After the BIP week every student accomplished the project by writing an individual assignment for the home university.

Enriching Non-Formal Learning Experiences

Throughout the BIP week, non-formal learning took place through various activities, including the intercultural evening, hiking, sauna and ice swimming experiences. The intercultural evening provided a platform for participants to present their own culture and to engage in different cultures. Through well-prepared presentations of the students, open discussions, and national foods and drinks, participants gained insights into the customs, traditions, and cuisines of each country represented.

All the participants took an excursion to the Kvarken Archipelago UNESCO World Heritage Site on Wednesday. The excursion was supervised by a World Heritage Guide and included a hike with lunch at the open fire. At the end of the day participants were offered the opportunity to experience Finnish sauna with hot tubs and swimming at the icy sea. The experience was unforgettable for both students and teachers.

Overall, these non-formal learning activities enriched the BIP week experience, offering participants opportunities to learn, connect, and grow in informal settings outside of traditional classroom environments. These experiences also encouraged social interaction and camaraderie among participants, contributing to a sense of community and shared unique experiences.

Students Experiences of the Week

According to the students' feedback, the BIP week was not only a week to remember but also a significant experience from the perspective of their professional growth. The week increased students' courage to step outside their comfort zone and discover new aspects of themselves by using a foreign language and learning in European peer groups. Throughout the week, many commonalities were discovered as a social work student and future professional, such as European values, different professional perspectives and shared goals.

"European identity is a topic or perhaps even a part of my identity to which I rarely devote time or thought. I am Finnish, European too, of course, but in that order. But even though I don't often think of myself as very European, there is indeed much that we share. Common understandings of humanity, compassion, and justice, even though the implementation and details may differ between countries." (Finnish student)

Students discovered common European values and professional perspectives, which fostered a sense of community and improved their language skills.

Participating students bonded quickly and during the week community spirit became evident. With this, courage to use the foreign language improved significantly. Students spent a lot of time together as a group, even outside of the official program, strengthening their bonds. It was noteworthy how both teachers and students collaborated throughout the week, creating a shared learning experience all together.

The BIP week was an enriching learning experience, providing new information and lessons that participants can utilize in the future. It enhanced their language skills, boosted their confidence, provided wonderful experiences, and fostered new friendships and networks. The empowerment moments were essential, which were discussed in theory and then experienced in practice. Intercultural communication and understanding of cultural differences were key areas of learning.

The week gave the participating students a common understanding that all children and young people are vulnerable and need different types of support. One of the most important learning experiences for the students was the realization that they might not be able to change the entire world, but they can impact an individual's life through their work. The "Tree of Life" method stood out as a valuable method.

Conclusion

Some of the students describe the week as “one of the best weeks of their lives”. The BIP underscored the significance of empowering people and the deep impact such programs can have on personal and professional growth. International learning experiences provide significant educational and personal development benefits for students. New challenges, such as language barriers and social integration, can be overcome with inclusive teaching practices and interdisciplinary approaches. It is important to have a low threshold for participating as a student in international exchanges at the studies.

Ultimately, the BIP week created unforgettable memories and reinforced the importance of empowering people through dedicated social work. Participants left with a renewed sense of purpose and the skills to make a meaningful difference in their future careers.

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3. DIVERSITY, SUPPORT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

PROVIDING BETTER SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS—BEST PRACTICES

The article focuses on both best practices and challenges in creating and providing quality support services for international students. At first glance, general perspectives are dealt with, later narrowing the topic into a case study at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences.

Recruiting increasing numbers of international students into English-taught degree programs at Finnish higher education institutions (HEI) is in the spotlight of every strategy handbook. However, the increasing numbers of international students bring a need for quality support services to ensure a good student experience and timely graduation, not forgetting the importance of social connections already during studies. (Vipunen, 2024)

Higher tuition fees naturally may also set a demand for better services from the student's perspective. In the article, aspects of how to improve support services with small efforts will be emphasized. The article suggests that improving support services can be done by having transparent dialogue and collaboration between each party involved. This includes both the academic staff and support services staff.

By providing a good student experience, HEIs can also increase their reputation as an attractive and distinguishing study destination in a highly competitive student recruitment market.

Taxi

Commencing studies in a foreign country can be a tremendous change for international students. Adapting to many new practicalities such as regulations, teaching methods, and learning environments can be exhausting, not forgetting the many cultural norms that differ from the country of embarkation.

Without HEI's support, there is a high probability for students to fall behind in their studies from the very beginning. Things usually get more complicated if the residence permit is delayed and a student commences studies in the middle of the academic year. In both aforementioned cases, students' possibilities to get scholarships based on academic performance are also declined causing financial stress.

The first point of contact for international applicants at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) is the Admission Services of the Higher Education institution. Admission Services provide guidance on applying, requirements, and also first-hand information on how to apply for a residence permit for studies in Finland and pay tuition fees for the first academic year.

With the current resources that VAMK has, the support of Admission Services is very efficient - to the extent that it sometimes becomes a challenge. An applicant, a prospective student, usually tends to have a “customer relationship” with the service point that replies to their inquiries. Often, this relationship continues throughout their studies and in multiple occasions.

Therefore, first step towards more efficient support services, is to identify the roles of each party involved after studies have already commenced, and the applicant becomes a student. These roles for each particular case must be communicated to students from the start during orientation. Also, informing them about practicalities and administrative matters well in advance plays a key role in their success.

Takeoff

Prior to students' arrival, UAS must provide accurate and up-to-date information on what should be noted. Information on Studyinfo.fi and VAMK's website must naturally be transparent and clearly depict the structure and the scope of the degree, fees charged, and scholarship criteria that apply to the intake group. With a hint of marketing, of course, but accurate and realistic.

VAMK has also introduced a newsletter in spring 2024 for prospective international students. These newsletters are sent in connection with acceptance letters to ensure that students become more engaged in confirming their study place, but also to provide information on the processes that must be tackled first. For example, student housing in Vaasa is problematic at the beginning of semesters when lots of students, both domestic and foreign, commence studies at the same time. Therefore, booking an apartment is very important, something that cannot be done upon arrival and must hence be informed already when accepting a study place.

The housing situation in Vaasa is expected to become increasingly critical in the coming years due to the steady growth in the number of foreign students. Currently, VAMK hosts nearly 400 foreign students, and this number is projected to rise by a few hundred more by the 2030s. As the student population grows, the demand for suitable accommodation will intensify, necessitating proactive measures to ensure adequate housing facilities are available to meet the needs of this expanding demographic. (Vipunen, 2024)

Landing

The comprehensive orientation plays a key role for successful study path. It is advisable to arrange orientations as hybrids, due to the fact that international study groups rarely commence studies at the same time on scheduled dates. At VAMK hybrid start is offered by default in most of the English taught bachelor's and master's degree programmes, and this possibility is informed to applicants in the acceptance letter.

Facts about student life and Finnish culture are important, yet we must not forget the administrative part of the orientations: how to familiarize with new platforms, Moodle, and Peppi. In aforementioned, group tutors and Student Services have a key role.

The same regulations and guidelines apply to each VAMK student regardless of their country of origin. Therefore, these aspects must also be brought into awareness at the beginning to avoid later challenges.

The most important guidelines to be acquainted with are VAMK Degree Regulation, Scholarship Criteria, and the process for handling misconducts and academic dishonesty such as cheating in exams and plagiarism. This information can transparently be found on VAMK website but still needs to be underlined in tutoring and orientations on a regular basis.

At VAMK, student-related matters are handled by many facets and on many occasions during a student's journey from start to graduation. As with many other higher education institutions, Student Services are not specifically aimed at foreign students but at all VAMK students. As an exception to the aforementioned, VAMK provides the Talent Coach service specifically for international students. This includes CV and career counselling, as well as a wide range of social events, networking, and alumni work. This has been seen one of the services that have been lacking before national Talent Boost programme. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023)

In addition to the Talent Coach, Study Counsellors, Group Tutors, and Heads of Degree Programs give guidance to students. Administrative matters such as proving guidance in systems and teaching platforms, handling tuition fees and presenting and drafting scholarships for the scholarship committee are handled by Student Services personnel.

Being said, there are many services available for students; however, for small Higher Education Institutions as VAMK, resources are limited in terms of man-hours and revenues have not been allocated to foreign students as a rule. Therefore, we must ensure that the availability of these services is emphasized at all points when interacting with international student groups. These can include small follow-ups to identify students who are about to drop out from the expected study phase and having regular meetings between study counselors and group tutors to share updates on student development and obstacles to be tackled.

Development discussions between group tutors and students are done by default, and the information gathered must be monitored regularly. Based on the aforementioned, there is a lot of data available, and we must use it efficiently. For example, the Focus service and Agreement Bank of the Peppi system are both tools aimed at counseling.

Optimizing Tuition Fee Revenues for Better Support Services

Charging tuition fees became mandatory in Finland starting on August 1, 2017. According to a mid-term report (2022) by the Finnish Government, foreign students were satisfied with their services for the most part, although satisfaction had declined since the previous examination period. Integration into Finnish working life and networking were seen as important development suggestions (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2022).

The report states that most higher education institutions provide the same support services for both domestic and foreign students. Therefore, the situation at VAMK is not exceptional compared to the national trend. The same study also highlights that the revenues from tuition fees were not aimed at support services specifically. One explanation is that although higher education institutions in Finland had collected 42 million euros in tuition fees, only 14 million euros were received in revenue after the subtraction of scholarships and administrative costs.

Currently, the aforementioned situation is subject to change as the Finnish Government has proposed that non-EU/EEA students cover the full tuition cost (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2022). If the full tuition cost is implemented as planned starting from January 1, 2026, one could conclude that more revenue could be allocated to support services, instead of scholarships that will be declining.

Assuming that the stream of fee-paying students remains steady or grows according to VAMK's roadmap, this will, of course, require more detailed budgeting as well. These services could include, for example, welcome office-type structures to tackle challenges upon students' arrival in Finland, study counseling, and social platforms aimed especially at foreign students in international degree programs. For the latter, VAMK is currently making efforts so that foreign students have better networking possibilities.

Summary of Key Points to Provide Better Services

Accurate and Realistic Information: Provide detailed information on the structure of studies, fees, and administrative practicalities prior to arrival in Finland and at VAMK.

Comprehensive Orientation Process: Implement comprehensive orientation processes. Hybrid orientations are advisable as international study groups often start at different times.

Default Hybrid Starts: Ensure hybrid starts by default in most English-taught bachelor's and master's programs, with information provided in the acceptance letter.

Collaborative Efforts: Foster collaborative efforts across unit boundaries with regular follow-ups between services to share practices.

Foresighted Discussion on Optimizing Tuition Fee Revenues for Better Support Services: Engage in strategic discussions to optimize the use of tuition fee revenues for enhancing support services.

By addressing these key points, VAMK can better meet the needs of its international students and improve overall satisfaction and integration.

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GOING GLOBAL IN HIGHER EDUCATION SETTINGS

The year 2024 was appointed as an international theme year for Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. This year provides an excellent opportunity to look at different aspects of internationalization. This article ponders global citizenship and the development of students' global competence in universities of applied sciences. How do we ensure that our students will be equipped with all relevant skills needed today for the international job market in the rapidly and continuously changing world?

Introduction

According to the report conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Huusko & Nurkka, 2024), less than half (43 %) of the students from the universities of applied sciences felt that they gained good international skills as part of their studies. In addition, thirty-seven percent of students in the universities of applied sciences thought their studies did not include international networking. Results like these are necessary for higher education institutions to pay attention to when the aim is to ensure that students acquire the needed skills for the international job market and take an active role as global citizens.

Alongside internationalization, the concept of global citizenship has emerged which is often proposed as a way of preparing graduates to handle the rapid change and uncertainty characterizing globalization (Kraska, Bourn & Blum, 2018). Global citizenship education (GCE) has gained a strong policy focus in international agendas, notably in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). Sageidet and Heggen (2021, p.299) note that “global citizenship is a multiple perspective concept, related to the growing interdependency and interconnectedness between societies in economic, cultural, and social areas, through factors like increased international trade, migration, and communication”. Global citizenship education empowers learners to engage and undertake active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and to contribute to a world that is more fair, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable (UNESCO, 2014).

OECD (2018) suggests that the multi-dimensional concept of global competence involves a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Boix Mansilla and Jackson (2023, p.5) note that “globally competent individuals are aware, curious, and interested in learning about the world and how it works”. They can analyze local, global, and intercultural issues, understand and value different points of view and worldviews, communicate successfully and respectfully with others, and act for sustainability and collective well-being (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, globally competent individuals recognize how their own worldviews and cultural tradition shape their choices and interactions in daily life (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2023).

Versatile Ways of Fostering Learning

Recently, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences has been developing its internationalization program. Global citizenship is an important element in the program. Furthermore, it is important to integrate the development of global citizenship not just in the curriculum but also beyond the curriculum activities. Holistic approaches to global citizenship education require both formal and informal approaches, curricular and extracurricular interventions as well as conventional and unconventional pathways to participation (UNESCO, 2014).

Traditional teaching and studying are not able to provide enough practical experience for the development of global skills. Therefore, it is vital that students gain new intercultural learning and experiences outside of the typical, traditional classroom. There are many ways of developing global skills, such as participating in study exchange programs abroad, exploring different learning activities, and promoting new and different opportunities for students' international experiences, networking, and cooperation. Student mobility has generally been viewed as a traditional way of fostering students' internationalization. However, the number of students who are interested in going for a student exchange abroad has decreased in Finland (see Huusko & Nurkka, 2024). There is indeed a clear need for higher education institutions to provide new ideas and different ways of enhancing students' opportunities for developing their global competence during their studies. As universities of applied sciences are practical and working life oriented, close cooperation with the working life and students' international working experiences during studies, both locally and abroad, can pose great circumstances for learning and practicing global skills.

For global citizenship education, online learning opportunities are significant, and innovative approaches incorporate a blended learning environment with online and offline activities, allowing opportunities for collaborative learning and experiential practice (UNESCO, 2014). Blended intensive programs (BIPs) provide flexible forms of mobility combining online learning with a physical short-term mobility (see the Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024), and they have been gaining popularity lately. Vaasa University of Applied Sciences has gained valuable experience in blended intensive programs in recent years. Participation in these programs provides a great alternative for students to gain international experiences with short international student mobility and network with students from partner universities.

Yet another central concept is internationalization at home, an important aspect to provide opportunities for learning and to make the development of global competence attainable for all students. Beelen and Jones (2015) propose the definition of internationalization at home as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (p. 69). Internationalization at home is increasingly important on campus, so fostering participation in different events and activities dedicated to the topic is essential. There are continuous efforts at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences to come up with new ideas and experiments on fostering these learning opportunities for the students.

Final Remarks

Versatility is central to providing different learning opportunities for the development of students' global competence. Moreover, it is essential from the viewpoint of inclusion: ensuring equal opportunity, access, and participation in different activities that higher education institutions provide to develop one's global

competence. This requires deliberate efforts from higher education institutions to allocate the dedicated resources and funding available to support these activities.

Learning environments of higher education institutions play an important role in supporting the growth of students' competence and preparing them to act as global citizens. Furthermore, the important quest for higher education institutions is to provide diverse learning opportunities and environments where students can all enhance important skills so that they can become globally competent professionals.

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DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES MASTER'S STUDIES

The article focuses on international collaboration between higher educational institutions addressing concerns among students about the low level of internationalization. According to the national yearly survey, VAMK Master's students assessed the level of internationalization as low in the social- and healthcare fields. Based on this observation, an initiative was launched to develop cooperation between higher education institutions, in this case between Finland and the Czech Republic. This is highly important, since one of the shared competencies the graduating Master's students should have, is the ability to develop and manage multicultural and international operating environments and networks.

The aim was to plan a joint online workshop for students from the two countries. Before the meeting, the students were given a pre-assignment to prepare themselves, and the day's schedule was carefully planned. The purpose of the workshop was to promote intercultural experiences and understanding, knowledge exchange, and networking. The article will explain how we proceeded before the workshop and during it and what were the main learning outcomes for the participating students and the teachers.

The article also emphasizes the importance of student feedback. As noted, collaboration started because of feedback. Feedback was also systematically collected from students to evaluate the impact of the session and improve future international collaboration projects. Students' participation, experiences, and views provide a valuable basis for developing further cooperation between higher education institutions.

Introduction

The Master's degree in Health Care and Social Services provides students with the skills to develop social and health care in a people-centered way in cooperation with other actors (Gallagher-Ford & Connor, 2020). Collaboration in different forms helps to meet the challenges of social and health care, which are caused by the constant changes in working life and society (Lehtoaro et al., 2019). Collaboration has also been identified as an important area of competence for social and healthcare professionals (WHO, 2022). Competences are generally defined as knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Cowan et al., 2007). In their study,

Pramila-Savukoski et al. (2024) highlight generic competencies, which include collaboration as a component, but also the ability to work in international networks.

For students to be able to work in international networks in the future, this cooperation is needed already during their studies. These shared competence goals are also included in the national recommendation for Master's students by, which is The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences, as following: "The graduating student is able to develop and manage multicultural and international operating environments and networks." In practice this is further defined in three ways; 1) student knows or can develop methods on how to consider and utilize multiculturalism in their workplace, 2) student can anticipate the impact and take advantage of the opportunities of global solutions and phenomena, 3) student can engage in international interactions and activity development within their field. (Auvinen et al., 2022)

Students in the Master's Programs at VAMK in Social and Healthcare have been rating internationalization rather low in surveys they are answering at graduation (AVOP), however, the lack of international viewpoints and studying in other languages is a nationwide issue according to the yearly survey. Master's students in this case, are mostly adult part-time students who are combining work, studies, and family; therefore, a longer exchange abroad is not usually possible. Even a weeklong intensive visit is not preferable, since it would require even more resources than these students are already investing. At the beginning of 2023, after the newest results of 2022, we decided to start looking for opportunities to increase multicultural competencies in our Master degree studies. What we already had of course, was the use of international research papers, which require and develop the competences in variety of ways in addition to the language skills.

VAMK had visiting teachers from the University of Pardubice on spring term 2024 and after the visit, we were in contact with Professor Jana Hola who is responsible for their Master's program Organization and Management in Health Care. Riku Niemistö and Piia Uusi-Kakkuri together with Czech colleagues started planning cooperation on teacher exchange and organizing mutual learning sessions online. Professor Hola with three Master's students visited VAMK in October when we continued planning the mutual session for Czech and Finnish Master's Students. This partner for cooperation was chosen because their study program and the setup for the studies were similar to ours, as well as the motivation to cooperation.

The article consists of a theoretical and empirical part. The theoretical part includes the concept of planning and implementation. The empirical part contains analysing the feedback from the students.

Planning and Implementation

When the collaboration was launched, a bold step was taken with a spirit of experimentation. This meant that no similar collaboration had been done before, and instead of fearing failure, we decided to seize the opportunity as a learning experience. Teachers from both institutions met with each other to plan this online learning session together. In this collaboration, the teachers worked together to think about preliminary questions, instructions, scheduling, and online platform. Once the preliminary questions were completed, we started to think about a common schedule, which was well agreed upon. On this basis, it was good to start giving instructions to the students.

As a first step, we provided five questions in advance, related to promoting and supporting community and population well-being. These questions allowed students to familiarize themselves with the topic and

prepare for the discussion beforehand. Instructions were a bit different, in VAMK students were not asked to prepare presentation but had a freedom to choose how to prepare, while in University of Pardubice students prepared a presentation in pairs. An essential part of our agreed goal was also the relaxed and conversational atmosphere that was to be created between teachers and students by setting an example during workshop. A bit of a challenge was quite an imbalance of group sizes, which lead to the fact that in each break-out room, there were more Finns.

The day's program started with the teachers introducing themselves on Teams, and discussing with ease, while the students shared their introductions via chat, creating an immediate and open atmosphere. To start the conversation, the Finnish students introduced Vaasa, Vaasa University of Applied Sciences and the Master's program, while the Czech students had shared videos to watch beforehand.

The students then moved into small groups and discussed the questions from the preliminary questionnaire online. The Padlet platform was used to record the groups' observations and reflections, which helped to summarise the main points of the discussion. After the break-out groups we took a short break. Once all participants were back online, each group had a turn to share the most interesting or surprising facts and discussion they had had. Usually, one to three students commented by opening their cameras and microphones, while others commented through chat. Each group had about 10 minutes, which was efficient. The topics then were commented by participants teachers and students from other groups. In planning the schedule, particular attention was paid to ensuring a balance between the different phases and to keeping the overall process under control allowing sufficient time for each part. The online session lasted three hours and included time for presentations, small group discussions, summarizing the results and collecting final feedback. This approach allowed for an interesting and rewarding learning experience for the participants with no rushing.

Student Feedback of the Workshop

Our feedback questions regarding the workshop experience, learning and improvement suggestions were shared in chat and we provided the students plenty of time to answer the following questions:

How Was This International Workshop Experience? What Did You Learn from Working Like This?

According to the feedback, students found the international workshop experience to be very interesting, educational, and valuable. They appreciated the opportunity to learn from each other and we were happy to see that we succeeded in our goal of making this a nice experience with relaxed atmosphere.

This was nice experience. Time was going really fast.

In my opinion this was a great way to learn from each other and get knowledge about how things are in a different country.

This was extremely interesting and could have continued longer. Thanks for the amazing conversation.

looked forward this lecture. Special the discussion in breakout rooms were so interesting that I could have continued it much longer

The meeting took much more pleasant atmosphere than expected. liked the fact that we received the questions in advance so that we could prepare for them. And It was not long. I would also like to thank you for the opportunity to introduce here in chat.

How to Improve This Workshop Session in the Future?

Many students suggested allocating more time for discussions, especially within smaller groups. Also, Finnish students hoped for clearer instructions or preparation materials beforehand to enhance group discussions and engagement, as well as instructions for the break-out room and how to operate the Padlet and what to write there. Some students recommended smaller group sizes to facilitate more effective communication and collaboration. Finally few students mentioned the need for better coordination and scheduling to ensure all topics are adequately covered.

Groups should be smaller and more time for chatting.

Our group also noticed e big difference in the preparation of the topic. The Czechs had made great PowerPoint presentation, while we Finns had been told to "think about the questions ourselves beforehand"

It was interesting to compare differences between two European countries. For next time maybe would be good to read articles of the countries before the workshop, so we would have time to go deeper in the discussions.

There could be a little more time, working in English requires time to get up to speed.

Name One Learning Outcome for Yourself from the Discussion You Had With Your Group

Students expressed learning various aspects related to healthcare systems, including the importance of mentoring, differences between countries, and the need for health awareness initiatives. They also highlighted the value of active listening, open-mindedness, and cultural understanding gained from the workshop discussions.

It was interesting to learn how the health and social care system works in Finland.

It was a surprise to me that patients in Finland pay extra for treatment in public services, because in the Czech Republic health care is fully covered by public health insurance.

Mentoring was surprising and very important which we also in Finland should do

Experience was exciting at first, but very educational about other ways to organize healthcare systems.

What We Learned

The collaboration aimed to test cooperation between the two universities for the first time through a joint workshop for students. During the workshop, students had the opportunity to reflect together on questions given in advance. Through this cooperation, they were able to learn from each other and gain insights into the differences between Finland and the Czech Republic.

Us teachers learned that planning even a short session requires time and effort. From now on, it will be easier to continue the cooperation and improve the session. The pre-assignment given should be more detailed and should contain less questions for the students. Also, the instructions for the break-out room should be revised so that all students understand on how to begin and proceed while they are in on their own, perhaps a chairperson could be appointed to lead the discussion to make it more comfortable and effective. With clearer structure, less questions and more time given they should be able to go more into detail and deeper in the topic. To improve the experience, students could also read an article, for example about the importance and competences of international collaboration in the field to even further support the motivation for this workshop.

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4. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS INFLUENCING FOREIGN STUDENTS' CHOICE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The global business environment and growth of multinational companies have created the demand of global education. Most universities, including Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK), have included internationalization as a part of their strategies, thus contributing to the development of international study programs in English, and the participation in other activities aimed at recruiting foreign students and lectures. In addition, researchers (e.g. Jenny et al., 2017) propose that studying abroad can have a positive effect on students' understanding of global cultures, their ability to communicate and collaborate across cultures, increases self-confidence, and enables creative and divergent thinking.

Despite the increasing number of international students in VAMK, there is lack of information indicating the key reasons why students chose to study in VAMK and the key challenges they face during their study. The aim of the research is to determine the motivation influencing foreign students' choice of a Higher Education Institution (HEI), such as VAMK, and evaluate the challenges and barriers in order enhance marketing strategies to attract students and provide quality services. Based on the above objectives, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the motivations for studying abroad?
2. Which factors influence students' selection of VAMK?
3. What are the key challenges in studying at VAMK?

The paper is structured as follows: chapter 2 presents the literature review. Research methodology is discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 summarizes the assessment of reliability and validity; results and analysis and conclusion are presented chapter 5 and 6 respectively.

Literature Review

Previous research has suggested that the following criteria for choice of HEIs: marketing and support, access and approachableness, academic reputation, student focused, variety and reach, location and logistics, accommodation, scholarship, sports facilities, safety and security (de Jager & Gbadamosi, 2010; Aydin and Bayir, 2016). Research on motivating factors for student desire to study abroad include having new experiences, learn about new cultures, broaden their personal experiences, improve foreign language skills, expand educational experiences, and potentially improve future employment prospects (Jenny et al.,

2017). The challenges in studying abroad include weather, meeting new people and adjusting to unfamiliar customs, studying languages, food comfort, and financial stress (Schnickel et al., 2010).

Research Methodology

The study is an exploratory research and conducted at VAMK. A survey was sent to 240 international students at VAMK living in Finland. It consists of Likert-scale questions, with additional specific open-ended questions. A total of 52 students responded. 56% of students were male, and 44% were female. 65% were married and 35% single. Additionally, 15% of the students are between the ages of 19-24, 53% between the ages of 25-35, and 31% above 36 years.

Assessment of Reliability and Validity

Content validity was conducted by using measurements obtained from the literature and face validity was tested and ensured during the pretesting phase (Hair et al., 2010). The measures of motivation to study abroad, factors of influencing the choice of VAMK, and the challenges in study at was adopted and modified. A principal component analysis using varimax rotation method is used determine convergent validity, and composite scores were calculated for a factor analysis variables of the study. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is above the suggested value of 0.6, showing that the sample data is adequate. The reliability of each variable is above minimum acceptable cut-off point of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010).

Results and Analysis

Descriptive statistics and factor analysis are used to analyse the frequency of open-ended questions for the measures for both motivators and challenges in studying at VAMK.

RQ1: What is the motivation for studying abroad?

The results indicate that opportunities for international work post-graduation, improving job prospects, improving job prospects and personal development are the key motivations for studying abroad (see Table 1). The results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 2. Factor one relates to personal development. The second factor indicates future perspective. The result of the factor analysis is consistent with the literature (Jenny & Jenny, 2016). The mean for personal development is ($M = 4.25$; $S.D = 0.82$) is higher than future perspective is ($M = 3.88$; $S.D = 0.95$).

TABLE 1. Motivation for studying abroad

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	RANK
Opportunities for international work post-graduation	4.37	0.88	1
Improving job prospects	4.37	0.92	2
Personal development	4.35	1.02	3
Enhancing overall life experience	4.29	1.02	4
Building a global network	4.15	1.05	5
The value of international experience on your resume	4.15	1.14	6
The opportunity to live in a different country or culture	4.13	0.99	7
Advice from academic advisors on studying abroad	3.63	1.44	8
Learning a new language	3.23	1.28	9

TABLE 2. Factor analysis for motivation in studying abroad

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1 PERSONAL DE- VELOPMENT	FACTOR 2 FUTURE PER- SPECTIVE
Enhancing overall life experience	0.862	
The value of international experience on your resume	0.852	
Personal development	0.795	
Improving job prospects	0.682	
Building a global network	0.668	
The opportunity to live a different country	0.659	
Learning a new language		0.813
Advice from academic advisors on studying abroad		0.803
Opportunities for international work post-graduation		0.642

RQ2: Which factors influence students' selection of VAMK?

The descriptive statistics indicate that the quality of educational facilities, quality of academic programs, scholarship availability, safety and security at the VAMK, and academic reputation ranked among top key factors influencing students selection of VAMK (see Table 3). The results of the factor analysis show three dimensions categorised as (i) educational related activities; (ii) market related activities, and (iii) Extracurricular activities (see Table 4). The descriptive statistics show that market related activities (M =3.71; S.D = 1.07) has the highest mean followed by educational related activities (M = 3.63; S.D = 0.94), and extra-curricular activities (M=2.90; S.D 1.13).

TABLE 3. Factors influencing selection of VAMK (N=52)

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	RANK
Quality of educational facilities and infrastructure	4.06	1.26	1
Quality of academic programs	4.02	1.16	2
Scholarship availability	3.98	1.20	3
Safety and security at the institution and surrounding city	3.94	1.26	4
Academic reputation	3.92	1.27	5
Location and logistics of the institution	3.80	1.13	6
Presence of international students and staff	3.80	1.28	7
Admission and recruitment process	3.72	1.24	8
Job prospects and local employment opportunities	3.66	1.45	9
Availability of accommodation near the institution	3.63	1.32	10
Recruitment services and career fairs	3.62	1,33	11
Tuition fees	3.60	1.34	12
Campus facilities, recreation areas, and parking	3.44	1.36	13
Institution's presence on social media and communication	3.28	1.23	14
Recommendations from family, friends, and relatives	3.24	1.35	15
Local weather	3.08	1.50	16
Social activities	3.00	1.19	17
Sports reputation and opportunities	2.80	1.21	18

TABLE 4. Factor analysis of criteria for selecting VAMK

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1 INSTITUTION- AL CHARAC- TERISTICS	FACTOR 2 MARKETING RELATED AC- TIVITIES	FACTOR 3 EXTRACUR- RICULAR ACTIVITIES
Quality of educational facilities and infrastruc- ture	0.850		
Academic reputation	0.847		
Institution's presence on social media and com- munication	0.816		
Quality of academic programs	0.778		
Location and logistics of the institution	0.768		
Presence of international students and staff	0.749		
Safety and security at the institution and sur- rounding city	0.727		
Availability of accommodation near the institu- tion	0.706		
Campus facilities, recreational areas, aesthetics, and parking	0.679		
Recommendations from family, friends, relatives	0.658		
Local weather conditions	0.630		
Admission and recruitment process	0.431		
Job prospects, local employment opportunities		0.734	
Tuition fees		0.677	
Scholarship availability		0.591	
Recruitment services and career fairs		0.567	
Social activities			0.711
Sports reputation and opportunities			0.689

RQ3: What are the key challenges in studying at VAMK?

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that adapting to the new learning styles and academic expectations, balancing academics and leisure, encountering challenges, managing class schedules, and adjusting to new lifestyle are the key challenges in studying at VAMK. The factor analysis provided two dimensions (i) cultural related challenges, and (ii) study related challenges (see Table 6). The descriptive statistics indicate that cultural related challenges (M = 3.25; S.D = 0.81) has higher mean than study related activities (M = 3.02; S.D = 1.24).

TABLE 5. Challenges studying at VAMK and rank

VARIABLE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	RANK
Adapting to learning styles and academic expectations	3.55	1.10	1
Balancing academics and leisure	3.50	1.10	2
Encountering financial challenges	3.50	1.29	3
Managing class schedules	3.45	1.20	4
Adjusting to a new lifestyle	3.41	1.15	5
Missing comfort foods	3.35	1.32	6
Finding suitable accommodation	3.31	1.34	7
Limited social connections	3.25	1.29	8
Overcoming language barriers	3.23	1.35	9
Lack of information related to study support services	3.17	1.30	10
Navigating cultural misunderstandings	3.08	1.15	11
Lack of study related guidance	3.06	1.36	12
Experiencing cultural shock	2.96	1.34	13
Support for accompanying spouse	2.94	1.43	14
Feeling homesick	2.88	1.33	15
Availability of part-time jobs	2.83	1.68	16

Table 6. Challenges in study at VAMK

VARIABLES	FACTOR 1 CULTURAL RELAT- ED FACTORS	FACTOR 2 STUDY RELATED FACTORS
Navigating cultural misunderstandings	0.732	
Experiencing culture shock	0.729	
Adjusting to a new lifestyle	0.726	
Balancing academics and leisure	0.688	
Feeling homesick	0.682	
Managing class schedules	0.613	
Missing comfort food	0.599	
Adapting to learning styles and academic expectations	0.585	
Limited social connections	0.577	
Support for accompanying spouse	0.521	
Finding suitable accommodation	0.490	
Overcoming language barriers	0.444	
Lack of study related guidance		0.901
Lack of information related to study support services		0.890
Availability of part-time jobs		0.737

Conclusion

The results of the study reveal that the key motivation for studying abroad are opportunities for international work post-graduation, improving job prospects and personal development. The study also indicated that drivers for selecting to study at VAMK are quality of educational facilities, quality of academic programs, scholarship availability, safety and security at the VAMK, and academic reputation. This study also examined the perceived challenges in studying at VAMK. Findings indicated that adapting to the new learning styles and academic expectations, balancing academics and leisure, encountering challenges, managing class schedules, and adjusting to new lifestyle are the key challenges. Cultural related issues are also key barriers in studying abroad.

The results of the study suggest that there is to develop orientation strategies to ensure that incoming students are well prepared for studies in VAMK by providing adequate information on both Finnish culture and learning environment. In addition, adequate training for both staff and students in cultural intelligence is needed to develop to develop their cultural competences to create a favourable climate in the classroom and school environment.

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FRANCIS OYEYIOLA

OPTIMISING HUMAN POTENTIAL: THE ROLE OF TALENT COACH IN DEVELOPING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CAREER

With the ever-changing dynamic and competitive professional career landscape, the role of talent coaching has never been important as now. Hence, the emergence of this role can help to unlock the full potential of individuals and encourage professional success. Particularly for international students, who try to develop their potential in a new country. Furthermore, talent coach's role is to serve as a mechanism in the enforcement of guiding individuals through personalised growth and development targeting the enhancement of their skills, capabilities, performance and future in a new environment.

This article will explore the multifaceted role of talent coaching plays in skills assessments and development, development planning, SMART goal setting, performance monitoring, confidence building and motivation, career development, continual improvement and conflict resolution. Achieving this requires a combination of assessments, tailored individual interventions, feedback systems and good listening skills. Additionally, as a talent coach working in an educational institution with people of diverse backgrounds, personal observations coupled with scientific publication will help drive home the importance of this role through ongoing support and guidance, cultivating an environment of trust, respect and continuous learning, helping individuals in their fulfilment in organisational excellence.

This article underscores the critical importance of talent coaching in today's transformed and changing workplace, emphasising its instrumental role in nurturing talents and fostering sustainable growth.

Introduction

Maximising individual potential in today's dynamic world is crucial for both personal and professional life. Furthermore, organisations are continuously looking to cultivate their human capital to support a competitive edge. This requires the need for a dedicated person to help the onboarding of new and old talents. The term "organisation" in the article stands for the educational institutions with particular attention to Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, VAMK.

VAMK as an educational institution continues to grow its international degree programs. Hence, requiring more international students to attend led to the creation of the position of a Talent Coach (TC). This article delves into exploring the responsibilities and the scientific underpinning of the effectiveness of a TC at VAMK.

The Role of a Talent Coach

According to VAMK, the role of a Talent Coach (TC) is to develop and provide career and recruitment services for their international students as well as offer career counselling services. This also includes the development of integrated services that foster cooperation among local, national, and international networks leading to cooperation with working life. Therefore, a TC can be described as a professional who specialises in identifying, nurturing, and enhancing the skills and abilities of international students at VAMK.

At VAMK, TC focusses on personalised development with a comprehensive approach to growth of international students. With these definitions, a TC at VAMK is seen as a mentor, advisor and a facilitator who empower individual international students to reach their full potential. A TC within various settings also works with corporate environment, sports institutions, artistic organisations, NGOs and other educational institutions.

Combining Coaching Principles and Scientific Understanding

A Talent Coach is a skilled guide who empowers international students at VAMK, helps to unlock their full capabilities and helps them to achieve their career aspiration. The core tenant of a TC role lies in the facilitation of development and growth. As a facilitator, TC helps individuals find their strengths and weaknesses through self-assessment models such as the Tri Assessment Factor Pyramid (TAFP) proposed by Oyeyiola (2023) with a constant feedback mechanism designed to promote self-reflections. This process aligns with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which emphasises the importance of self-efficacy – the belief in one's ability to achieve goals. By fostering a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses, a TC empower international students at VAMK to set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound (SMART) goals.

Furthermore, a TC guides in acquiring and refining necessary skills. With reference to Ericsson's Deliberate Practice Framework (1996), TC at VAMK helps to design personalised strategies that emphasise focused repetition, feedback, and continuous improvement. This structured approach aligns with scientific evidence demonstrating the crucial role of deliberate practice in skill acquisition (Ericsson, 1996).

In acquiring and refining skills, TC also enhances the performance of international students at VAMK. This is done by addressing the challenges faced through equipping them with strategies to overcome road-blocks and navigating difficult situations. In such cases, scientific principles grounded in the concept of mindset (Dweck, 2006) come into play. Dweck (2006) emphasised that through coaching interventions, individuals can cultivate a growth mindset, leading to resilience and perseverance in the face of setbacks. This empowers the cultivation of positive attitude and willingness to take on challenges, leading to improved performance not just at VAMK but also in personal life.

Supporting Career Development

With reference to career development, TC helps by coaching students at VAMK on how to write a good CV or Cover letter, prepares them for interviews and organises various seminars to boost the cooperation between students and the corporate environment. Additionally, career events such as CareerRekry (Career Recruitment) fairs offer a platform for both the local companies and students to meet.

During these meetings, companies can share their needs and skills necessary to excel when applying for a job. This offers the students an opportunity to understand what needs to be done to secure a job at their dream company.

Cultivating Motivation and Well-Being

The cultivation of a growth mindset coupled with the practice of gratitude, have shown to enhance motivation and overall well-being (Wood et al., 2008). Oyeyiola (2023) model also emphasises the need for continuous show of gratitude especially during difficult periods. This allows to foster a sense of hope for the future.

According to Wood et al. (2008), by encouraging to reflect on what one is grateful for, they can shift their focus from perceived lack or shortcomings to what they have already accomplished. This reframing leads to positive emotions that can increase motivation and a more optimistic outlook, propelling towards goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Talent Coach is more than just a motivator, rather, an architect of potential at VAMK. In wielding a combination of coaching principles, scientific understanding, and personalised strategies, a TC empowers students to unlock their strengths, build resilience, and help them achieve their full potential. In an ever-evolving world and as VAMK continues to offer a top-class education for their students, the role of the TC will undoubtedly continue to evolve. Thus, offering invaluable opportunities and support to those navigating the complexities of career development and personal growth at VAMK.

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DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH DIVERSITY: VAMK'S STUDENT RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

This article explores the various ways of marketing activities VAMK uses to diversify the current student body and augment the revenue streams. By leveraging effective recruitment strategies such as Hi-Tea events, high school visits, student ambassadors, and personal contacts, VAMK aims to establish meaningful connections with prospective students and their families, fostering trust and credibility throughout the enrollment process.

Moreover, international student recruitment enhances campus diversity, creates strong alumni connections, and presents opportunities for long-term partnerships, including research collaborations and exchange programs. Education fairs serve as platforms for VAMK to boost visibility, engage with a broad audience, and forge lasting relationships within the target market's educational landscape.

Benefits of International Student Recruitment

International student recruitment can provide numerous benefits for VAMK far beyond just increasing the number of student enrolments and monetary income for the institution. Currently, VAMK has students coming from 45 different countries, which makes VAMK an international campus environment. (VAMK, n.d.-a)

By having an international campus environment, there are several benefits:

Diversified and enriched learning environment: International students bring diverse perspectives, knowledge, and experiences to the classroom to not only among the students themselves, but also to the lecturers. This creates an enhanced learning environment for all students, encouraging critical thinking, innovation, and intercultural understanding by learning from one culture to another. Moreover, intercultural understanding is not only limited to students themselves but also to the lecturers themselves. This is also an important aspect that VAMK personnel would like to improve under the theme year of internationalization at VAMK. (VAMK, 2024)

Enhanced brand reputation and global connections: With an existing brand image of VAMK being one of the educational institutions in the Nordic energy hub, VAMK gives a strong reason for international students to choose VAMK. Combined with that, a strong international student presence can elevate VAMK's

reputation as a globally minded institution. This can attract more talented students and faculty worldwide, leading to more valuable research partnerships and cultural exchange opportunities.

Thriving community spirit: VAMK will introduce GOIN app in June 2024 to all its student community to increase both student conversion as well as community building. Goin is designed specifically for student socialization and community building, focusing on events and activities on and around campus. It allows students to discover events, join clubs, and connect with peers who share similar interests. Through its emphasis on community building, Goin helps institutions create a vibrant campus culture, which can positively impact student recruitment and retention efforts. (Goin, 2022)

Effective Recruitment Strategy through Engagement and Personal Contacts

VAMK collaborates in its target markets with educational agents and other marketing partners specialized in international student recruitment to Finland. The agents not only recruit but contribute actively in different marketing activities. (VAMK, n.d.-b)

To effectively recruit international students in target markets, institutions can use a variety of strategies. VAMK emphasizes alongside effective digital marketing, effective engagement through events and personal contacts, including:

Hi-Tea events: Hi-Tea events provide an opportunity for institutions to meet with potential students and their families in a relaxed and informal setting. This can help build personal relationships and trust and provide an opportunity to answer questions and address concerns about studying abroad.

High school visits: Visiting high schools in India helps institutions connect with students at an early stage in their academic careers and build awareness of their degree programs and services. Furthermore, this can provide an opportunity to engage with guidance counsellors and other key influencers in the student's decision-making process.

Personal contacts: Personal contacts with study counsellors, students, and parents can help build trust and credibility, and provide an opportunity to answer questions and provide guidance throughout the application and enrollment process.

Education fairs: Fairs provide an opportunity for universities and institutions to connect with a large number of prospective students and their families. The benefits in short include increased visibility, access to a large audience, face-to-face interaction with prospective students, competition benchmarking, and lead generation opportunities. By participating in education fairs, institutions can establish a strong presence in the target country's market and build relationships with potential students and their families. Some of the fairs that VAMK has participated in educational fairs during the year 2023 were in India, Vietnam and Dubai. In 2024, VAMK has already visited India, Dubai and Morocco.

Webinars and podcasts: Webinars and podcasts also offer a valuable perspective for engagement. VAMK usually would participate in webinars that are hosted by its educational agents, e.g. in India, or even host its own. Webinars usually provide target information sessions on admission procedures; available programs

and the student lives. Webinar is a good way to find out what degrees interest's the visitors most since there are differences between countries.

As for podcasts, with their conversational format, they allow international students to hear insights directly from current students and faculty staff members. This also creates a better connection and credibility between VAMK and prospective students. The recent podcast aimed for international students "VAMK Academic Adventures", that was launched in April, are available on YouTube and Spotify.

Leveraging Existing International Student Network as Part of the Recruitment Strategy

To recruit international students to VAMK's English-taught programs more effectively, it is also important to use the existing network of the international students which include both the current students and alumni who have graduated from VAMK.

Student Ambassadors: From the current student network, VAMK recruits international student ambassadors to represent the international students and their study programs. Student ambassadors are the face of the institution and they allow the prospective students to see what a student life in an institution is like through their lens. (Unibuddy, n.d.) For instance, Study in Finland has also recently established Study in Finland Student Ambassador program to enhance Finland's visibility as a study destination through the student ambassadors' lives from social media platforms. This shows how student ambassadors can be an effective marketing strategy for various institutions. These contents that come from the student ambassadors are, in a way, user-generated contents. (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2024) According to The State of Community Powered Marketing in 2022, 72% of consumers user-generated contents are more credible than the marketing posts by the companies themselves. (PR Newswire, 2022)

VAMK has international student ambassadors coming from different nationalities, such as India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Lebanon and Brazil. The student ambassadors mainly share their stories through our social media platform Instagram and answer questions. Student ambassadors have also participated in webinars that VAMK hosts together with the agents. They are encouraged to share about themselves in an authentic way regarding the student life in VAMK. In this way, prospective students can easily see what life in VAMK as an international student is like. As student ambassadors require additional work of creating content, they are compensated with a small amount of money and VAMK merchandise. In the future, VAMK can further investigate how student ambassadors can connect more with prospective students than beyond their stories on social media platforms.

Alumni: VAMK has established an alumni network for those who have studied or worked at VAMK. This network can be an important asset for prospective international students and recruitment purposes. Alumni can serve as mentors and advisors to the students, inspiring them that all the alumni with success stories were once students just like themselves. VAMK also creates student articles and social media content about alumni by letting them share their experiences post-graduation. (VAMK, n.d.-c)

In summary, international student recruitment can provide significant benefits for universities and institutions, including access to a large and growing market, diversification of the student body, and potential for long-term partnerships. Hi-Tea events, high school visits, and personal contacts with study counsellors,

students, and parents can be effective strategies for engaging with potential students and building relationships that can lead to successful recruitment outcomes. The leverage of existing international student network also helps in representing VAMK as a sympathetic international community. Overall, by capitalizing on the target countries' vibrant educational ecosystem and employing targeted recruitment tactics, VAMK can unlock opportunities for sustainable growth and global engagement.

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5. GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

IT IS ALWAYS WORTH COLLABORATING—SMALL-SCALE COLLABORATION ACROSS CULTURES AND DISCIPLINES

In this article, small-scale student collaboration is reviewed in the context of multilingual and multicultural collaboration. We demonstrate that a positive outcome can also be achieved on a small scale by presenting a teaching collaboration case involving Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) students from the Finnish for Foreigners course in Information Technology (N=5) and students from the Client Service Competency and Cultural Diversity course in Finnish Public Health Nursing education (N=19). The collaboration took place in the spring of 2024, spanning four weeks and including three meetings. Students perceived group work positively, noting its effectiveness in enhancing cultural awareness and language skills and fostering a sense of camaraderie among peers. Collaboration was also fruitful for the teachers and brought not only the students together but also two teachers from different fields of expertise.

Introduction

The rise of global migration, along with the internationalization of corporations and higher education institutions, has resulted in more multicultural teams. Multicultural collaboration is significant as it fosters global tolerance by raising awareness and facilitating cultural interaction and coexistence (see, for example, Concioiu, 2021, p. 111).

Student collaboration and peer learning in higher education are widely researched topics (see for example, Arcidiacono & Baucal, 2023, p. v-vi; Liebech-Lien & Sjølie, 2021), also from the points of view of interdisciplinarity and language learning (see for example, Frey et al., 2019). At Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) there is a tradition of student collaboration across disciplines. Experience has also been gained in recent years, for example, during the academic year 2021-2022 as a pilot distance learning study between social and healthcare students and information technology students, and on a larger scale as a face-to-face project during the academic year 2022-2023, involving up to 80 students (Weber & Jäntti, 2023). In these collaborations, the information technology students were Finnish language learners.

Since we both had previous positive experiences of multicultural student collaboration (see, for example, Auranen & Weber, 2023; Weber & Jäntti, 2023; Maylath et al., 2013), it was a natural step for us to start thinking of ways to collaborate. We came up with the idea of pedagogical cooperation through joint discussions and shared interests as teachers. In this article, we present a student collaboration case involving Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) students from the Finnish for Foreigners course in Information Technology (N=5) and students from the Client Service Competency and Cultural Diversity course in Finnish Public Health Nursing education (N=19). The collaboration took place in the spring 2024, spanning four weeks and including three meetings.

Next, we will describe the collaboration and then move on to future perspectives. The last chapter concludes with recommendations for practice.

Small-Scale Collaboration

Multicultural student collaboration projects, small or large, have been used in higher education programs for a long time. In this article, we use the concept of small-scale collaboration to describe the collaboration we engaged in during the spring of 2024. The collaboration was small-scale because, firstly, it involved 24 students from two different courses (the Client Service Competency and Cultural Diversity course and the Finnish for Foreigners course), with only five students from the second group. Secondly, the collaboration lasted only four weeks and included three joint meetings. The students represented different fields of study: Finnish Public Health Nursing education (students from the Client Service Competency and Cultural Diversity course) and Information technology (students from the Finnish for Foreigners course). The students in the first-mentioned course were Finnish-speaking, studying in a Finnish-speaking nursing program, whereas in the second-mentioned course, the students were international students studying in English.

Before the collaboration, we underscore the significance of preparatory tasks, which are essential for the students to understand the context. The public nursing program students were invited to reflect on their cultural identities and become aware of “who am I and where am I coming from”. The IT students were introduced to the Finnish healthcare system, and they studied healthcare terminology in Finnish. They also learned how to introduce themselves and talk about their studies and hobbies in Finnish.

The collaboration had three meetings, the first two lasted two hours each, and the last three. The first meeting was reserved for introductions. The IT students were encouraged to use the Finnish language. Students were divided into five groups, and they got to know each other. In the following week, the students were given an assignment for group work, which was a presentation about the sense of community across cultures. Students were given a list of seven questions to assist them with the group work. Questions were such as “What are the traditional celebrations or events in each country where people come together with family and friends, and how do these events foster community?” Students were given two weeks for group work, and they were encouraged to meet each other even outside the classroom.

The last meeting was devoted to presentations and discussions. Each group had prepared a PowerPoint presentation which they presented to other students. Both in their PowerPoints and in their talks, they used both Finnish and English. Also, the discussion after each presentation was both in Finnish and English.

During the collaboration with the students, oral feedback was collected, and immediately after the final meeting, students were asked to write their thoughts about the collaboration on the classroom whiteboard. Naturally, course feedback was collected at the end of each course, in which students also provided feedback on the collaboration. Despite the collaboration being short, both students and teachers found it very fruitful. The collaboration provided students with an understanding of cultural differences. Especially the Finnish students reported becoming aware of their cultural values and beliefs as well as those of the students from the other country, as in the following quote from a written reflection one student wrote on the classroom whiteboard: “Avartava!”, in English “Expanding!”. Above all, the students felt that their language skills improved during the collaboration.

At first, the unequal size of groups was thought to be a challenge, but to our surprise, it wasn’t such a big challenge after all. The five IT students proved to be active and approachable. After the collaboration, students gave feedback indicating that they would have liked to have more time for getting to know each other. They also said they would like more of this type of collaboration in their studies.

Future Perspectives

The pedagogical skills and visions of the teacher define the way to implement multidisciplinary collaboration. The teacher needs to have good skills in leading the group. At the beginning, attention needs to be directed to group dynamics. The beginning of collaboration should give all the students plenty of motivation for the shared lectures and agenda ahead. For example, it could be motivating for everyone to see where all the participants are from. A big world map could be suitable for the first meeting. Everyone on the course could mark their place of origin on the map. That could nicely visualize the global aspect of the group for all the participants.

For some groups, a learning café as a pedagogical method could work well. Different themes for group discussions would be given to the students, and they could have small group discussions in the classroom supervised by the teachers. On the other hand, teachers could provide broad guidelines for assignments, such as “What has this collaboration shown or given to my professional development?” It could be fruitful if students independently agreed on common meetings where their interactions would be natural in the environments and at the times they have chosen. This could encourage shared meetings even after the learning process on the course.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

To sum up, we presented a small-scale collaboration case involving students from Information Technology and Public Health Nursing programs. The students represented not only different fields but also different cultural backgrounds. The collaboration isn’t about knowing how to do it but rather being open to such actions and possibilities. We would like to encourage the teachers to engage in fearless experimentation, where there is little risk of making mistakes. However, it is important to consider the main goal of the collaboration: what do you want to promote? You only need the right mindset that opens doors to new territories where students are not bound by fear or failure but are instead fueled by the excitement of experimentation.

Among the feedback of the VAMK's students, there is a clear need for multisectoral collaboration between different fields of education and between students from diverse backgrounds. It is important to take the students' feedback into account; in the future, it could be meaningful to arrange a wider range of collaboration, including a larger number of international students and immigrants in Finland. The ever-increasing diversity of society should be considered consistently in various learning contexts.

This type of multicultural, multidisciplinary, and multilingual collaboration should be formalized within the curriculum to ensure it does not rely solely on individual teachers. In this context, collaboration would become an integral part of the degree programs' curricula.

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MIIA LAMMI, ESTER VAL JAUREGI, IKER LEGARDA GABIRIA AND NAROA CHAVES FERNANDEZ

BUILDING VALUABLE INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

According to the research, effective practices for viable partnerships are based on respect, trust and open communication. Initial discussions between potential collaboration partners can lead to a mature partnership if it receives support broadly from organizations and financial resources for cooperation. Successful long-term cooperation needs to face changes with flexibility while maintaining high standards. (Peel et al., 2002)

International partnerships are critical for university RDI cooperation (Trencher et al., 2014). However, co-operation typically withers quickly if long term benefits are not realized (Peel et al., 2002). This article describes building of the international partnership between Vaasa University of Applied Sciences Design Centre MUOVA and Mondragon University. It tells a story from three perspectives: two university managers and a young trainee, who entered the unknown country far north in its darkest and coldest time –and survived and thrived.

In the beginning, a conference created a stage for introduction. Researchers from both universities had similar interests and attitudes. The first collaborative project was planned in the corridors of the conference. The project facilitated mutual learning and created respect and trust. In the following stages, ER-ASMUS+ funded internships created continuity for the partnership. Now we are entering a new era and open student and teacher exchange between the western coast of Finland and the Basque country in Spain.

Conference Connected to Mondragon University

The collaboration between Design Centre Muova and Mondragon University started years ago, when Muova's research team joined an international conference EAD European Academy of Design in Rome in 2017. A multidisciplinary team of researchers in the fields of design, marketing and communication had written three conference papers related to industrial service design and servitization.

The topic was new in design, so Mondragon University papers sparked interest. Presentations underlined similar interests and approaches of two universities. Both focused on industrial aspects and user-centered design, collaborated with companies, and studied the topic from a multidisciplinary point of view. An informal mini meeting after presentations of researchers (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011) took place and common ground was found. Collaboration was ideated already in the conference corridors.

A Conference Facilitated Project Planning

Next year, managers met again in the Design Conference 2018 and meeting reminded about the importance of mutual interests and open discussion (Peel et al., 2002). The year after, EAD 2019 brought researchers together again and this time the ideation of projects reached a practical level. Collaboration was included in each other's project plans as a moderate role to create a smooth start.

Due to changes in the project implementation, the parallel projects overlapped only partly but underlined similar interests, attitudes and practices of the organizations. Due to project-based nature of Muova, the practical collaboration was possible only during the project. We planned new EU projects, but did not find suitable calls because projects typically integrate complementary competences.

Student Exchange Continued Collaboration

Internship provided continuation for the practical collaboration. A Master's student at Mondragon University participated in the Muova's project for nine months and did his final thesis related to the project. The student exchange run so smoothly it became an annual collaboration. The trainees studied under guidance of the sending university and worked with the project team at the receiving university. It proved to be efficient and well-functioning collaboration model even for a project-based unit. The students' high level of competence cemented the collaboration. Research has highlighted the importance of motivation, practical implementation and collaboration between parties in creating successful internship (Franco et al., 2019).

The next step in collaboration was taken again at the conference. The research teams met at a Design Research Conference in Bilbao 2022, which enabled a visit to Arrasate in the Basque country. Muova benchmarked Mondragon's study programs and design labs to plan a new design education. Now, four years later, Muova starts a Master program in Innovation management.

Mondragon's Perspective to Collaboration

From the beginning, a remarkable connection formed between Design Centre MUOVA and the Design Innovation Centre at Mondragon University. This bond was rooted in our mutual interests in service design and servitization with a special focus on industrial companies. The critical industry in Basque is the capital goods sector with the turnkey development of major industrial and infrastructure projects in the international market. It includes the iron and steel industry, electricity, chemical and petrochemical plants, telecommunications, transport systems, water treatment and supply, waste treatment, environmental impact and civil engineering. Small and medium-sized companies support and complement a dynamic industrial setting. In this industrial context, research activity in the Design Innovation Centre at Mondragon University has focused on providing companies added value through design by adapting the philosophy and design tools to this type of industry.

Mondragon's team quickly realized the extensive commonalities between our institutions. Despite the geographical distance, both Ostrobothnia and the Basque Country share significant industrial legacies and coastal locations. These regions have shaped our character, fostering a commitment to developing com-

petences that benefit local businesses and promote regional prosperity. In such similar settings, common interests naturally emerged between both parties.

Students As Ambassadors

Mondragon provide students with international experiences as a core part of their education. Immersing oneself in a new environment—with a different language and cultural traits, meeting new people, and experiencing new customs—contributes significantly to students' personal and professional growth. Currently, over 30 percent of Mondragon's industrial design bachelor students gain international experience through the ERASMUS+ program, and this opportunity is extended to our strategic design master's students as well.

Internships proved once again, that students are the best ambassadors. When students go abroad and are freed from day-to-day supervision, they demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge in new contexts and continue learning independently. Moreover, they broaden University's perspective with the new knowledge and insights they bring back.

MUOVA has proven to be an exceptional destination for our students to complete their training. Typically, Finland is not one of the preferred destinations. Concerns about language barriers and socialization, and a preference for warmer geographies often take precedence. Yet, upon arrival, students consistently commend the warm welcome and collaborative atmosphere they find in MUOVA. Moreover, they find the chance to engage in diverse projects and to explore new areas of knowledge. This helps them develop into the inquisitive and collaborative designers Mondragon University aspires to cultivate.

The Story of Naroa – A Student Perspective

Internships can be one of the most unforgettable but also complicated experiences there is. I; Naroa Chaves Fernandez was just a young design student about to start my fourth year at Mondragon when this adventure began. I accepted the internship position without any knowledge about design work. I arrived in Vaasa two months later than other students not knowing what was going to be my new home hoping that everything would be easier than it seemed. And so, it was.

I wanted to do the internship abroad to live with local people, learn cultural differences, and experience working life abroad. Arriving later made it somewhat difficult for me to find accommodation, and challenged integration into the group of students who were already halfway through their experience. Since I am a very sociable person, communication come easily and naturally, and I joined as many plans as possible. Everyone was willing to meet new people, so they made us feel comfortable, helped, and integrated.

I felt very privileged to work at MUOVA, as not all Finnish companies enable international students to work with them. I started in a project to create solutions for integrating international students to working life. The project included collaboration with a company and their customers meaning I had to adapt to others. I entered a service design world, that I had no previous experience. This made the project a little more complicated than expected, but with help, patience, and effort we made it work.

Internship gave me the opportunity to improve my English, communication and designer skills, and learn the importance of a good working environment, where you share, listen, and learn. Obviously, it is not as simple as it seems, because it's about learning, traveling, and laughing, but also crying. It's a mountain of emotions, and you always need to find people to keep your feet on the ground. I have learned to enjoy myself, to fend for myself and value my own work. Besides, I leave knowing what I want to do in the future.

Reflections and Future Steps

International collaboration is investment to professional and personal growth and achieve results not possible otherwise, as Naroa's story describes. Internships were integrated to actual responsibilities without extra costs in a collaborative spirit as Peel et al. (2002) explained. Smooth collaboration provide value to all parties highlighting motivation and practicalities. They exchange knowledge and resources in business collaboration, increase innovation potential and employability. (See Franco et al., 2019)

The universities are highly interested in pursuing deeper research collaboration. Despite the profound synergies between our teams, finding the right time to undertake projects simultaneously often proves elusive due to scheduling conflicts or bureaucratic hurdles. However, we are convinced that our shared determination will ultimately lead us to find ways to embark on significant projects together.

Today, it can be proudly said that the excellent rapport and enthusiasm for cooperation between Design Innovation Centre MUOVA and Mondragon University has spread to our institutions. The recent agreement between VAMK University and Mondragon University will facilitate student and staff exchanges and open doors to new projects. This is just the beginning of our journey, and we are excited to see how far we can go together.

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NORDIC CO-OPERATION - INTRODUCING NORDHELSE NETWORK

Being part of a network and doing co-operation is beneficial in many ways. Sharing thoughts with others and understanding different views are great ways to develop oneself. Doing it in an international group takes it to another level. In this paper the nordic higher education co-operation, Nordhelse network, and the benefits for the participants are introduced.

Nordhelse Network

Nordplus is a mobility and network programme in the Nordic and Baltic countries, including the autonomous regions of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The programme is aimed at education, and more specifically in funding mobility, projects and networks. Today the programme consists of five sub-programmes, one of them being Nordplus Higher Education. (Nordplus, 2020).

In Nordplus Higher Education the aim is to support the collaboration of higher education institutions and other organizations. Exchanges, sharing good practices and getting innovative results are important outcomes. The minimum requirement for creating a network is having three higher education institutions from three different Nordic or Baltic countries. (Nordplus, 2020).

Vaasa University of Applied Sciences has been an active participant in the Nordhelse network, in which the collaboration has begun already 30 years ago. Like the name indicates ("helse" is Norwegian meaning health), the co-operation is done specifically in the field of Health Sciences. Today Nordhelse network consists of partners from Sweden; Högskolan i Gävle and Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Norway; Nord Universitet and Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, Denmark; VIA University College and Finland; Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. The main focus has for a long time been on the student and teacher mobilities, but in the recent years also in development projects, which take into consideration the digital learning methods alongside the physical mobility.

Benefits of the Network

Being part of the Nordhelse network has had many positive impacts on both the students and staff at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, and the other participating higher education institutions. Students have had the opportunity to get to know the health care system of another Nordic country by doing a short term clinical placement in a foreign hospital. Typically the length of the mobility has been between 2-8 weeks, but sometimes also longer.

For the students the opportunity for going on a shorter mobility is convenient, as taking part in the longer mobilities (for 2 months and more) might be more difficult to arrange, or even impossible for some. Also finding clinical placements from a foreign hospital in general is fairly difficult without an existing network or other type of previous co-operation. For Finns doing the clinical placement in Swedish is beneficial also because Swedish, along Finnish, is an official language in Finland, and used in the hospitals especially in the western parts of Finland where Vaasa is located. Even if not using a foreign language, working in a foreign hospital is beneficial for the students as the societies in the Nordic countries are becoming more and more multicultural.

Therefore having understanding of different cultures is a huge asset for their future. The same goes for the staff of the higher education institutions. They have had the chance to meet staff and colleagues from different countries, and share knowledge and practices. This is an easy way to get new ideas to one's own work, to educate oneself and to become enthusiastic about developing one's working methods.

Conclusions

In the future, the Nordhelse network plans to concentrate more on different kinds of projects, including workshops and intensive courses. The intention is to bring the teachers and students from each of the participating higher education institutions together, giving them a chance to learn from each other. They might have online lessons and meetings, field studies and short visits to other higher education institutions. Digital learning accompanied with shorter mobilities.

The Nordhelse network is a good example of how having a field specific co-operation, in this regard a network, helps to develop the students' and staff members' international competences and cultural understanding by enabling different modes of learning.

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MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This article reflects on our ongoing collaborative efforts between the School of Business at Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) and the School of Economie en Bedrijf at Avans Hogeschool (Avans), focusing on how to maintain our inter-institutional relationships. We draw from practical experiences and established principles to offer insights into sustaining fruitful partnerships in higher education. By examining strategies such as offering equitable value, regular communication, goal alignment, authenticity, feedback mechanisms, expressions of gratitude, and acknowledgment of achievements, we highlight the importance of both interpersonal connections and institutional support in fostering enduring collaborations.

In an earlier article Sabel (2022) described the initial steps in developing a co-produced minor between the School of Business in Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK) and School of Economie en Bedrijf in Avans Hogeschool (Avans). The article mainly reflected on what factors we perceived as important when forming the relationship, the main conclusion being that interpersonal chemistry being an important factor for successful forming of relationships, even out beating the strategic benefits for the represented organizations. Having had a successful start of the relationship, we now need to learn more about maintaining business relationships since both parties has a strong intention of continuing the co-operation.

At the moment, the joint minor has been implemented continuously twice a year since the start in spring 2021. In the spring 2024, we are working on the seventh implementation. All in all, the co-operation can be considered a success in many perspectives. There has been benefits for both students and teachers as well as for the organizations involved. However, in this article we will not discuss the benefits and outcomes, instead the article will focus on maintaining relationships between organizations. This will in other words build on the earlier article that dealt with creating relationships.

Literature Review

In this section, the authors will examine the maintenance of organizational relationships. In order to understand how relationships are maintained, we first need to understand the fundamentals. Traditionally the fundamentals of relationships have been described as the following dimensions; trust, commitment, information sharing, bonds and distance. (Woodside A., 2010, p. 330)

Biggeman and Buttle (2007) have concluded that relationships are socially constructed and context dependent. Their research shows that the traditionally used dimensions of a relationship construct; do not fully provide an explanation to the dynamics in organizational relationships. In addition, the organizations need to acknowledge that all dimensions do not have an equal impact on the relationship in all situations and at all time. The importance of interaction in form of acts and episodes is furthermore stressed by the

fact that both the importance and quality of the dimensions are subject to change through interaction. (Woodside A., 2010, p. 330 - 340)

Since relationships are shaped by at least two parties, we can conclude that, if the position in interaction and communication is on an equal level, it's an indication of a good situation. (Freytag P. and Ritter T., 2007, p. 206) According to Lendrum (2011, p. 186), the development curve of relationships can be described through through five basic stages; instability, crisis, trust, innovation and no turning back.

A quick analysis of the relationship between VAMK and Avans would indicate that we are at the stage of innovation. Basic problems have been taken care of, we have an existing format for the collaboration that works relatively well. On the other hand, we also know that we need to develop continuously in order to maintain commitment. Based upon the above summary of basic elements and dimensions in organizational relationships, we can now examine the strategies implemented in the case relationship.

Strategies for Maintaining Relationships

In the following, we'll have a look at a few measures that you can take in order to nurture the business relationships that you have built up. We will also have a look at how these measures have been considered in nurturing the VAMK / Avans relationship. Jamie Birth (2022) suggests seven steps for maintaining business relationships.

1. Offer value to others

Every party involved in a relationship want to get some value out of it, just make sure that there is no inequality in the amount of value given and received. The relationship can continue over time only if all parties involved have an equal benefit. This requirement is supported by the earlier mentioned Freytag and Ritter (2007) that stresses equality in the relationship. Also the fact, pointed out by Biggemann and Buttle (2007), about constant change is to be considered here.

In the co-operation, one of the first things we paid attention to, was the distribution of responsibilities between the people involved. Roughly described, VAMK became responsible for the learning environments and platforms while Avans undertook the structures and schedules. The amount of credit points were evenly distributed between the universities.

2. Regularly check in

It's important to both formally and informally stay up to date with your partners. In the beginning the professional part is naturally the biggest concern, once you get to know each other better, the personal part becomes more and more important. By having regular contact, you're able to prove that you genuinely care about the relationship.

What is then a suitable "regular check in? The answer to this question is that it depends on various factors, including the nature of the partnership, industry standards, and specific business goals. Since the VAMK

/ Avans cooperation can be identified as a partnership where innovation and co-creation, Chesbrough & Appleyard (2007), suggest regular collaborative meetings.

Since, over the years, the people involved have become friends, this is a very natural part of our daily routines. Our meetings are concentrated to the planning, execution and evaluation periods of the minor. Outside this, we mostly communicate when there is some issue, but also then we exchange personal news and other informalities.

3. Learn and share about goals

Every project starts by setting goals and making sure that the counterpart understands the specific goals that your organization has. In our case, the goals were quite different, but the structure and pathway that we agreed upon led to both organizations reaching their goals. In the case of VAMK, we needed a partner for regular short-time exchange and in the case of Avans there was a need for initiating international co-operation in general. The personal goals of the people involved may be even more important than the purely organizational goals. The fact that all participants are committed to maintain the co-operation, have an international twist on their job, also helps to overcome possible organizational obstacles.

4. Be yourself

In interorganizational collaborations there will always be people with different types of personalities involved. According to Willcock (2013, p. 11-13), the individuals, and the relationship, will, regardless of personality, go through three different stages; inclusion, control and openness. The relationship between VAMK and Avans has, over the years evolved into the stage of openness. In this stage it's important that everyone involved have a feeling of being "significant, capable and likeable". (Willcock, 2013, p. 13). This has been solved by e.g. forming the content of the minor according to the competencies represented in the team, giving everyone an equal chance to feel significant and capable.

The key here, for us, has been to stay authentic, thus proving trustworthiness. This hasn't been an issue in this case since, luckily, the Finnish and Dutch business cultures are much alike. According to Hofstede's country comparison (2024) there are no big differences. This has certainly been helpful in developing and maintaining the relationship, both the Finnish and the Dutch colleagues have been able to "feel at home" in the collaboration.

5. Ask for feedback

Willcock (2013, p.148) recommends that feedback should be held on a team level rather than focusing on individual team members. Although in a more mature stage of the relationship also individual feedback can be an alternative. Both forms of feedback are implemented in the collaboration, with a clear emphasis on team wise feedback.

Getting feedback is one of the keys for growing both as an individual and a team. In the case of VAMK / Avans, we get regular feedback from the participating students. The feedback is analyzed in sessions after each implementation, also more informal feedback is given when attending each other's lectures.

By attending lectures of other teachers, you will have an opportunity to learn new things both regarding teaching methods, approach to a topic as well as substance.

6. Express your gratitude

In the scope of the co-operation we express gratitude both formally and informally. It has become a custom that the hosting university arranges both lunch and at least one dinner during the one-week sessions. This is the formal part. The more informal expressions of gratitude are in form of maybe buying you colleague a beer or just by simply say a "thank you!" and genuinely mean it.

7. Give praise and encouragement

Let them know and feel your appreciation, even small steps forward are worth encouraging. Also prove that your praise and encouragement are authentic by committing to it publicly as well. Commenting and sharing both their and your mutual achievements on social media and other platforms is a good way of showing your genuine appreciation.

The above-mentioned examples are merely scratching the surface of the base for the business relationship between VAMK and Avans. As a conclusion, this discussion enforces the findings of the earlier article. In both articles the above all message is that, although the organizational goals and benefits are important, the co-operation would not prosper without firm individual relationships.

Although, in both articles, the interpersonal relationships are emphasized, there would be no co-operation without support from the management in each organization. As Willcock implies (2013, p. 157), organizations that want to nurture internal and external partnerships need to be "open, adaptable and flexible". This means that, if you want to efficiently take care of relationships, organizational complexity and bureaucracy cannot form obstacles.

In both Universities, we are lucky to have a management that is strongly committed to the goals and to international co-operation in general. Our skilled and strong International Offices have also contributed to a smooth process regarding the administration of practical matters.

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