IntlUni – The Challenges of the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space in the International University

Progress Report   Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

IntlUni addresses the challenges of the multilingual and multicultural learning space (MMLS) in the international university where students and lecturers alike have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds; in principle, its target audience is anyone involved in the internationalisation of higher education at institutional, national, regional or European levels.

The overarching aim is (i) to identify quality criteria that should characterise teaching and learning in the MMLS, and (ii) to develop recommendations for how HEIs may ensure the quality of teaching and learning in the MMLS. – To this end, the first year of the project has been devoted to identifying the linguistic and cultural challenges; the second year is concerned with collecting examples of good and successful practice; and the third year will focus on developing quality criteria for the MMLS as well as the said recommendations.

The target users of IntlUni outcomes are therefore HEI staff, in particular language teachers and lecturers responsible for teaching international programmes; at the leadership (management) level, the target users are top management, heads of department, programme directors and directors of language centres or international centres. The final recommendations will be directed at HEIs, national or regional governments responsible for higher education as well as European organisations and associations concerned with higher education and quality assurance.

The 38 partner HEIs are located in 27 countries and are thus a microcosm of European diversity. The partner representatives cover a wide range of relevant expertise: researchers within the internationalisation of higher education, teaching and learning, or language learning; language teachers; content teachers; educational developers; officers of international offices, etc., some of them in leadership positions. This allows IntlUni to address the various different aspects of the challenges encountered in the MMLS.

One representative per partner HEI is responsible for communication with the project management at all times and – in most cases – these representatives coordinate the IntlUni work within a working group at their own HEIs. The collection of data has taken the form of an electronic survey collecting basic information as well as results of focus group interviews across the partnership; a collection of narratives on the challenges encountered in partner HEI; and a collection of examples of good practice. Based on recent relevant literature and this very rich data set, the second half of the project will be devoted to developing quality criteria and recommendations. This will happen as a result of discussions prepared by the work package leaders and carried out at partner meetings, in consultation with external experts via electronic media, and a workshop at the end of the second year (November 2014).

In accordance with the work plan, work packages 2 & 3 have resulted in a set of documents that are available on the project website. In the second half of 2014, some examples of good practice will also be made available on the website in order for them to be shared with a wider audience of interested stakeholders. – The outcomes foreseen in the original grant application have been produced and, in addition to that, collaboration among project partners has no doubt been a learning experience; it has become clear to everyone involved how diverse the situation is regarding the internationalisation of higher education across Europe.

The second half of the project will also follow the original work plan. It is foreseen that the network will be continued in some form or other after the end of the project period.

All documents will be found on the website: www.IntlUni.eu. In the News section there is a link to the IntlUni electronic Newsletter, circulated to the partners and interested project-external stakeholders. On the homepage there are also links to Facebook and Twitter.

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1. Project Objectives

In the internationalisation of higher education and the development towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing challenges formerly unknown to them: Students and lecturers alike form much more heterogeneous groups than ever before, speaking a wide spectrum of languages and representing a wide spectrum of cultural backgrounds in what may be termed the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space (MMLS).

While this internationalisation process may be measured in quantitative terms such as, for instance, the number of incoming and outgoing students, IntlUni focuses on the qualitative aspects in the curriculum and the teaching and learning processes and practices. There are several reasons for this: First of all, the internationalisation of higher education encompasses much more than the mobility of students and staff; in Europe only 10-20 per cent of students actually study abroad, while 80-90 per cent of them stay in their home country (European Commission 2013). It is therefore important that there is an international and intercultural dimension in the design and content of curricula and in the teaching and learning processes and practices of higher education so that all students have the opportunity to acquire the international skills required in a globalised world irrespective of whether or not they themselves are internationally mobile.

The internationalisation of higher education may thus be said to concern all students and all lecturers and be characterised by a set of linguistic and cultural factors in the MMLS. **Multilingual** because students and lecturers – despite their similarities – have a range of first languages (mother tongues) even though the language of instruction is one shared language. **Multicultural** because the backgrounds of students and lecturers will be rooted in different ethnic cultures, which are brought together in the local culture of a given HEI; the HEI – in turn – will be characterised by an academic culture at the same time as there will be cultural similarities and differences among the academic disciplines represented in the HEI.

Recent years have seen an increased focus on the quality of higher education (e.g. European Commission 2014 and other literature, cf. list of key literature developed in the first year of the project). This focus on quality is also reflected in the IntlUni project, and the IntlUni aims are, within the development of the EHEA, **to identify quality criteria that should characterise teaching and learning in the MMLS, and to develop recommendations for how HEIs may implement and ensure the sustainability of quality teaching and learning in the MMLS**.

No other project has developed specific quality criteria for teaching and learning in international programmes, and IntlUni thus addresses important issues that – to the best of our knowledge – have not yet been dealt with elsewhere. Consequently, it can be foreseen that IntlUni will contribute substantially to the ongoing discussion of quality in the internationalisation of higher education.

The first year of the project (2012-13) was concerned with defining the context of IntlUni, with identifying various different settings for the internationalisation of higher education, and with identifying the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical/didactic challenges in the different settings.

The second year (2013-14) is devoted to identifying examples of successful practice and ways to meet the challenges identified, while the third year (2014-15) – based on the outcomes of the second year – will focus on developing quality criteria for teaching and learning in the MMLS and on developing a set of recommendations for how these quality criteria may be met.

The outcomes of the first 18 months are described in section 3 below.

For further information, please see these IntlUni documents: IntlUni in brief; The context of IntlUni; and Internationalisation at Home in Higher Education.

Different stakeholder groups may benefit from IntlUni.

IntlUni work in progress has already been shared and discussed with a wider audience of relevant stakeholders in the first 18 months of the project.

In the IntlUni Network, the partner HEIs are primarily represented by the lecturers working in the MMLS, but also by programme directors, educational developers, directors of language centres, etc. The Evaluation Board, on the other hand, comprises individuals at the top management level, and the Network therefore seems to be well suited to develop recommendations to different communities of users as part of its outcomes.

In addition to the work of the **Inner Circle** of partners and the **Evaluation Board**, IntlUni also comprises an Outer Circle of external stakeholders who are kept informed about the development of the project via electronic media (website, Facebook, newsletters) and who are invited to comment on draft versions of outcomes in a blog, thereby also providing valuable input to the final outcomes of the network project.

Finally, a panel of **project-external experts** will be invited to comment on draft results in a workshop at the end of the second year, just as colleagues in leadership positions at partner HEIs will be invited to join the discussions and influence the outcomes of that workshop.

These **dynamic interactions between HEI partner representatives in the project and colleagues in other communities of users** have been established in order to ensure high quality and relevance in the final outcomes of the project for the European community of HEIs engaged in the internationalisation of their programmes of study.

For more information on the IntlUni partners, please see the partner section of the website and the document Who are we?.

In addition to the above, in the second year of the project (2014), some of the examples of good practice that have been identified among partner HEIs, will be made available on the IntlUni website. The idea is here to facilitate **peer-to-peer inspiration and sharing of knowledge and experience** among lecturers teaching in the MMLS.

The quality criteria and the recommendations to be developed in the third year (2014-2015) will be directed at **different communities of users** – in the HEIs, lecturers and those responsible for developing and managing programmes as well as top management. Furthermore, it is also foreseen that some recommendations will be directed at regional or national authorities as well as the European level.

2.   Project Approach

The IntlUni project is organised in an **Inner Circle** of partner representatives, and an **Outer Circle** of interested stakeholders outside the project. In most partner institutions there is a working group cooperating with and supporting the work of the partner representative who participates in the two partner meetings per year. All communication and work between meetings takes place via electronic media.

Different **methodologies** have been and will be employed in IntlUni. In the first year of the project, in order to establish the state-of-affairs and the challenges faced at partner HEIs, an **online survey** was conducted among all partner institutions with a view to defining the challenges of the MMLS. Most of the responses in the survey were based on focus group interviews or other joint efforts of several people in the partner HEIs. In addition to that, **narratives** describing challenges and possible solutions were collected in the second half of the first year in order to complement the results of the survey and provide additional input to the outcomes of the first year (Work Packages 2 & 3).

In the second year, almost **100 examples of good (successful) practice** have been collected at partner HEIs. These examples are being processed by the Work Package Leaders at the time of writing (April 2014) and will be discussed at the 4th partner meeting (May 2014) in order to form the basis for the development of quality criteria (reference points) for the teaching and learning in the MMLS. A draft set of quality criteria will be presented and discussed with invited external stakeholders at a workshop linked to the 5th partner meeting in November 2014 (cf. section 1 above). In addition to that, preliminary outcomes will be presented in **a blog** in mid-2014, and external stakeholders will be invited to comment on them in order for the project to be able to take the views of these external communities into consideration before the final version of the quality criteria is defined and recommendations developed.

The Inner Circle of IntlUni comprises 38 partner HEIs in 27 countries. The approach described above has been employed in order to take into account the relevance and validity of the project outcomes in different contexts (settings) across Europe (cf. section 1 above), thereby benefitting the HEIs and individuals directly affiliated with IntlUni as well as external communities as much as at all possible.

Quality assurance and control is obviously the responsibility of all partners throughout the lifetime of the project; and it is especially the responsibility of the management committee and work package leaders to always keep the quality of the project processes and the outcomes in mind. However, in order to ensure the quality of the process as well as products, it is also important to have someone not directly involved in the project **evaluate** these processes and products. IntlUni therefore has an external Evaluation Board whose members participate in the partner meetings in the autumn (2012-2015), evaluate the process and outcomes in relation to the description of the work packages, and provide feedback to the project management as well as the partnership as a whole. – The feedback received to date has been very positive and has provided further incentive for the management and project partners to continue along the lines originally foreseen in the project description of the grant application.

IntlUni has considered **dissemination** an important issue from the very beginning, and reaching out to colleagues in partner HEIs as well as to project-external stakeholders is therefore a constant priority. This is done in a range of different ways:

A. Electronic media

The project website is constantly updated and all project outcomes are made available via the website in their final versions. In addition, some of the draft outcomes are also presented there in a blog with an invitation to external stakeholders to comment on these drafts for limited periods of time. On the website there is a closed section for project partners only (Intranet) with key documents, information about upcoming meetings, meeting minutes, etc.

An electronic newsletter is produced at least twice a year and circulated to all partner representatives as well as external stakeholders. The newsletter contains information about the progress of the project, invitations to comment on work in progress on the website and invitations to IntlUni events with external participants. Information about major dissemination activities (conferences) and the social and cultural aspects of partner meetings are also included in order to also add a lighter touch to some of the news stories. – Partners are expected to disseminate the newsletter further through their national, regional or international networks. Individuals who have signed up as members of the IntlUni Outer Circle automatically receive the newsletter.

The **newsletters** are circulated before the summer and the Christmas holiday season focusing on results achieved at the two large partner meetings held in May/June and October/November every year. Further, an IntlUni **Update** (PDF via e-mail) is circulated to all partner representatives and members of partner-internal working groups after the meeting of the management committee and work package leaders in February/March every year.

IntlUni also has a **Facebook** and a **Twitter** account; both of these are accessible from the website homepage and complement the information available there with shorter and more frequent updates from within IntlUni as well as relevant information about IntlUni-external literature, events, etc.

B. Conferences, workshops, etc.

Already in the first half of the project, IntlUni aims, objectives and (preliminary) results have been presented at **national, regional or international conferences in Europe and the United States** – both as a result of invitations and of abstracts successfully submitted to professional conferences. All partner representatives have been involved in partner-internal or external dissemination activities; however, a good part of the invitations have gone to the project coordinator who has accepted as many invitations as possible, or has suggested that other partner representatives present at events where she could not be present herself.

A printed **bookmark** with information about the IntlUni aims and website address has been disseminated to conference participants on these occasions and at other events whenever relevant and possible.

For the purpose of presenting IntlUni in poster sessions, an A0-size **poster** is being produced at the time of writing; a copy of the poster will be made available to all partner representatives before the summer 2014.

C. Other dissemination activities

A **PowerPoint presentation in English** with IntlUni aims, objectives and outcomes, etc. is regularly updated by the coordinator and manager, posted on the website as a pdf-file and made available as a PPTX for all partner representatives on the Intranet. If/when necessary, partners translate the presentation into other languages and make the translations available to colleagues on the Intranet.

For **partner-internal dissemination**, several partners have organised events or written about IntlUni on the websites of their organisational units, in internal media, etc.

While information about IntlUni and early results have been widely disseminated in the first half of the project, it is still too early to say anything about how these results have been exploited in partner HEIs and beyond. A **survey of exploitation efforts** in partner HEIs is foreseen for the 3rd year (2014-15).

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

In the first 18 months of the project period (1.10.2012-31.3.2014), the original work plan has been followed and the results foreseen have been achieved. In addition to this, more activities have been undertaken in order to substantiate the project process and outcomes further, and more dissemination events have taken place than originally foreseen for this early stage of the project.

Year One – Work Packages 2 & 3 (2012-2013)

In order to define the context of IntlUni, the following documents were produced and made available on the website:

The Context of IntlUni.

Internationalisation At Home in Higher Education (model).

Who are we?

In accordance with the work plan, Year One was devoted to identifying different settings of the international HEI (WP2) and to identifying the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical/didactic challenges of HEIs in these settings (WP3).

As a result of a survey, conducted among partner institutions during the first 6 months, and the discussion of it among partners, a synthesis report of WP2 was produced. Moreover, the diversity of language regimes in HEIs across Europe was captured in a spectrum of modalities. It is important to bear in mind that the spectrum should not be seen as a continuum towards an end goal of all English, but as different options that present themselves when HEIs – within their own contexts – define the language(s) of instruction in the programmes that they offer. There is no denying that most of the programmes are taught in English if they are not taught in the local, regional or national language(s) of a given HEI. However, there are also examples of other language choices among the partnership, cf. the documents listed above.

The original plan was to develop a typology of settings or scenarios for the international HEI. However, recent literature on the internationalisation of higher education as well as the online survey both indicated that the differences among HEIs and their local, regional or national contexts make it next to impossible to establish a typology based even on a limited number of parameters. Instead, the diversity among partner HEIs was seen as a reflection of the diversity that may be observed within European higher education.

In the process of identifying the challenges of the MMLS, it was considered advantageous to employ a model on culture in the internationalisation of higher education. It was therefore decided that the cultural challenges should be characterised in accordance with a model distinguishing between (lecturers' and students') ethnic culture, the local culture of a given HEI, the academic culture of the HEI and the culture of individual disciplines. The model is also presented on the IntlUni website.

As a result of the online survey and an additional collection of narratives further detailing the challenges of the MMLS, a catalogue of challenges was developed. The background for it is outlined in the synthesis report for WP3, and the catalogue itself is also presented on the website.

In addition to the documents already mentioned above, a list of recent key literature was also produced in the first year.

The two synthesis reports as well as the other documents and models developed in the first year and mentioned above (with links to the website) all contribute to answering the question 'What are the challenges of the Multilingual and Multicultural Learning Space in the International University?'. They are therefore also the background against which the work of the second year has been initiated.

Year Two – Work Package 4 (2013-2014)

In Year Two, IntlUni is engaged in identifying examples of good practice – teaching and learning processes and practices that have been employed at a given HEI in order to deal with challenges and issues that have occurred, or initiatives that contribute to making the internationalisation effort successful. The process is ongoing at the time of writing (April 2014); almost 100 examples have been collected, but it is still too early to say anything about the outcomes of this exercise.

In conclusion it may be said that, at one and the same time, the IntlUni project has both produced the outcomes foreseen in the original work plan as well as developed further documents that establish the basis for the development of the final outcomes foreseen in the original grant application, the quality criteria and recommendations. This has happened as a natural result of discussions in the first year, in which it became clear how diverse European higher education actually is, and in which it was necessary to agree on some models and a common language, so to speak, that allows project partners to describe the situation and move forward.

All links to documents above are to sections of the IntlUni website: www.IntlUni.eu.

4.   Partnerships

IntlUni comprises 38 partner HEIs in 27 countries. As already indicated in the previous sections of this report, the contexts, the internationalisation efforts and the language regimes employed in these HEIs are very diverse and may be said to reflect the **diversity of European higher education** in general. In addition to this, the Tunisian partner adds two crucial dimensions – (i) the virtual learning environment and (ii) teaching and learning through English in an Arabic and French speaking environment.

Because of this diversity, it has been important to spend part of the first year understanding how diverse the situation in fact is, and to develop an understanding for this diversity among partner representatives. In this process, the discussions have been rich, and it is only fair to say that it has been and still is a serious awareness raising exercise for many partner representatives and certainly a learning experience for all. So in addition to the concrete outcomes of the first 18 months of the project that may be seen, printed and touched, there is no doubt also a wealth of less tangible – but equally important – outcomes for all partner representatives involved. Everyone has learned something new about other institutions in their own or in other European countries and, more often than not, they have even learned something new about their own institution because they have been asked to investigate the situation there as part of their briefs within IntlUni. – Taken together, this process bodes well for the work of the second half of the project.

As part of the activities of the first year, partners have also become aware of **recently completed or ongoing projects relevant to IntlUni aims and objectives** and what IntlUni was established to achieve. The IntlUni management team is therefore in the process of establishing contact with the coordinators of other projects. At the partner meeting in May 2014, we have thus invited the coordinator of the MAGICC project in order to discuss how IntlUni may benefit from the results achieved within that project. And back to back with the IntlUni partner meeting at the end of the second year (November 2014), external stakeholders, including a couple of coordinators of other projects, will be invited to present their own projects and to comment on draft IntlUni results. The intention is **to enhance the exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas with IntlUni-external projects and individuals in the second half of the project period in order to strengthen the quality of the final IntlUni outcomes.**

5.   Plans for the Future

In the second half of the three-year project, IntlUni partners will develop the quality criteria and recommendations as well as the impact reports foreseen in the original description of the project (work packages 4, 5 and 8). The first 18 months have established the diversity of the current state-of-affairs which will be used as the platform upon which the final outcomes will be produced.

IntlUni partners will continue and increase cooperation with other projects as well as project-external experts, thereby sharing information and experience with other audiences, learn from their responses to IntlUni (draft) outcomes and consequently enrich and improve the quality of IntlUni final outcomes.

Within the project period, this interaction with outside stakeholders will take place via electronic media, at a workshop at the end of the second year (November 2014) and at the final IntlUni conference in September 2015. In addition, it will take place at national, regional or international conferences where IntlUni aims, objectives and outcomes are presented, and at other professional events if and when an opportunity to do so occurs.

It is foreseen that IntlUni will continue as a Network after the end of the project period in 2015.

6.   Contribution to EU policies

IntlUni contributes to **LLP Objectives** such as (i) the development of quality lifelong learning and (ii) the promotion of high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field. Moreover, it helps to improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States. Finally, it supports the achievement of the European Higher Education Area.

As far as the **LLP Operational Objectives** are concerned, IntlUni results will contribute to improving the quality and to increasing the volume of student and teaching staff mobility throughout Europe by indicating quality measures for such mobility; moreover, they will facilitate the development of innovative practices in education and training at tertiary level and their transfer across HEIs and geographical borders.

As regards the **Horizontal Policies**, IntlUni especially promotes an awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, as well as the need to combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia.

IntlUni demonstrates **Complementarity with the Education and Training 2020 Work Programme** and, within the **ET2020 Strategic Framework**, it is essential to all horizontal and vertical mobility, including Erasmus Mundus.

IntlUni links to other actions in the LLP such as the **transversal policies** of language learning / training; **exploiting ICT in learning** and the **dissemination and exploitation of results**. It primarily addresses the **sub-programme area of higher education**.