

FORUM

MEMBER
MAGAZINE

Discussing international education

INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

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TARGETING ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Internationalisation, in order to be successfully implemented, should be an institution-wide project. Attaining support from administrative staff can present a challenge. Sending university staff on mobility programmes is one way to get them involved, but a more sustainable solution is in-house training.

For some time now, European universities and the European Commission have been investing in student mobility in order to train global citizens. The Erasmus programme has already been in existence for 28 years and it has benefitted millions of students. Universities have focused on internationalising students and developing their international profile as one of their major employability assets. Investments have also been made in the internationalisation of lecturers, in an attempt to promote international research and publications, more internationalised courses, more international programmes, etc. But what about the administrative staff? The European Commission believes that a systemic change can be made through staff mobility. This is why the new Erasmus+ programme invests heavily in staff mobility. But is mobility the only way? Or even the *best* way?

CHALLENGES ABOUND

Administrative staff members that are willing to go abroad already have a predisposition to do so and a mind-set that is somewhat open to the 'international'. They have the motivation to go through the process. They must also have an acceptable level of English, which at least in Spain is an uncommon asset. Their family situation must allow for mobility and their boss must understand and support it. And even after all of this, how can we be sure that the experience will be positive? Does a week-long exchange give our staff the international mind-set we want them to have?

With the wrong attitude, the stay abroad will only serve to reinforce ethnocentric views of the world. But let's imagine that this is not the case. What happens after mobility? Once they are back in their old work place, will the new ideas be accepted or will they encounter resistance from their bosses and institutions? If mobility has indeed had a positive

impact and motivated this person, shown them new ways of doing things, a new culture and new possibilities, what will happen if the institution is not *willing* to change? Do we take into account all these different ways in which staff mobility can backfire? How is the possible frustration managed? Is it managed?

INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS

In 2011, Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) thought that a good method to target *all* staff – made up of those willing to travel, and those who cannot or would not travel – was to create a training course on internationalisation. A training programme that is delivered to administrative staff in their own language and in their home institution, that transmits the message that internationalisation is important, that the institution is doing a lot in this sense, and that everyone has a role to play in the process. In short, it was an informative and empowering message.

By offering this course at our own institution, we solved some of the challenges posed before: staff no longer needed to have a high level of English and could follow the course regardless of their family situation. Their superiors were more open to this course than to having a staff member leave the office for a full week. And, finally, administrative staff that had not yet opened their minds to internationalisation could be targeted.

POSITIVE RESULTS

The results were encouraging. On the first day, participation from attendees showed that a great deal of stereotypes were still very much alive. On the last day, these same attendees were convinced of the importance of internationalisation and had become advocates of it. With these inspiring changes, we decided to make this course an annual offer in our continuing education courses for staff. We believe that, in time, this will change the institutional attitude about internationalisation from within. Moreover, this course can be given as an alternative, or in parallel to, international staff mobility. We have even opened it to interested professors.

BEST PRACTICES EMERGE

The positive results of this course have also led the university to export this 'best practice' to other institutions, both in Spain and abroad. The practice has also been extended to the institutions that make up the SGroup European Universities' Network, of which URV is a member. Under the name SUCTI (Systemic Universities Change Towards Internationalisation), several SGroup members participated in a 'Train The Trainers' week, which took place at URV in Tarragona in March 2015. Twelve trainers from different European universities – from Portugal, Greece, Germany, Poland, UK, Cyprus and Romania, among others – will offer this course at their own institutions.

The project also includes a survey system in order to analyse and track the possible effects of the course on participants' mind-sets. Before and after the course, an online survey measures whether the course has had the expected impact. The results can hopefully be used as scientific contributions to research on internationalisation for the benefit of the field of Internationalisation at Home, and of universities as a whole. The expected learning outcomes of participants of the SUCTI course are:

- To understand what internationalisation is and why their institution is working towards it;
- To feel that they are part of the internationalisation effort and able to contribute actively to it;
- To have a better understanding of intercultural communication and be better prepared to face the challenges derived from it;
- To have learned from fellow administrative staff members;
- To feel that they are important change agents within their own institution in the field of internationalisation.

Finally, we wanted SUCTI to adopt a powerful image, which can by itself transmit its goal: that we are all important actors of the internationalisation process. This is why SUCTI has adopted the image of *castells*, human towers typical to the Tarragona region. They are an excellent way to transmit the important meaning that each and every staff member of the institution is needed towards the goal of internationalisation. The success of the *castell* depends on the contribution of each and every person in it. Likewise, the contributions of each and every member of a university are essential to its internationalisation process.

—MARINA CASALS

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